

Total MMA

ISSUE 18: 9 SEPTEMBER 2006: WWW.TOTAL-MMA.COM

BONNAR MUST FACE LENGTHY BAN

By Ross McTavish, Co-Editor

The news that Stephan Bonnar has tested positive for an anabolic steroid in the wake of his defeat to Forrest Griffin on August 26 is deeply concerning as Mixed Martial Arts becomes further embroiled in the scandal currently gripping the world of sport.

Drugs are once again at the top of the sporting agenda with the news that former triple Olympic champion Marion Jones has been cleared of doping allegations after a second sample proved negative. Initially the American sprinter had given a positive sample for the banned blood-boosting drug erythropoietin (EPO) in June, but despite the clearing of her name, the stigma of steroids being at the centre of athletic competition remains.

The problem mixed martial arts now faces is the same which plagues any sport where a number of competitors have tested positive for banned substances and that is some onlookers will think that if one person is on steroids then every competitor is. The perception is far more than a callous over-exaggeration to the point where it is blatantly wrong, but it is frightfully difficult to shake off, just as any tarnished reputation and tainted image is.

More worryingly, it is another string to the bow of the instrument those with a negative view of MMA play to create their broken record of looping ill-informed comment focussing on the apparent barbaric nature and poor regulation of the sport. Mixed martial arts may be home to a host of honest athletes, but frustratingly Bonnar has now joined a list of names including Josh Barnett, Tim Sylvia and Kimo Leopoldo who have been banned for failing drug tests.

And if those four have done it, what about everyone else?

We hope that no other fighters are involved in this malpractice, but if those in the industry cannot be sure then how can those who look on – especially if they are gazing through tinted glasses?

One person failing a drug test is an unfortunate blip, four athletes is a worrying trend and a serious issue as MMA continues to grow. The last thing the fledgling sport needs is to become listed alongside the likes of baseball, athletics and cycling as being infested with drugs because it will unquestionably harm media coverage and public interest in MMA. Thus, Bonnar's failed test is a massive blow for both himself and the sport he competes in, which means he must be dealt with accordingly.

According to the Nevada State Athletic Commission (NSAC), Bonnar tested positive for



The Needle Has Become The Biggest Problem In Sport As Athletes Inject Anabolic Steroids



Mixed martial arts on the other hand is faced with the ludicrous proposition of a man who failed a drug test in July forcing him to be pulled from the main event of a US pay-per-view being able to compete on a show in the UK in September.



Boldedone Metabolite, which is an anabolic steroid intended for use by veterinarians in the treatment of horses. It is a drug designed to improve the general physical condition of specimens indulging in it and which remains in the user's system for several months after injection, making it unpopular with athletes.

The punishment for Bonnar is likely to be a ban of three to twelve months if one assesses the track record of the NSAC when it comes to disciplining boxers and mixed martial artists who have failed drug tests. However, there is no time limit as to the length of period the runner-up in season one of the UFC reality television show 'The Ultimate Fighter' could be suspended for, while Bonnar could also be fined up to \$250,000. The 29-year-old has until September 26 to respond to the NSAC and should he do so, Bonnar would have to face a five man regulatory body who would decide his fate.

However, will the sentence they pass be enough?

As mixed martial arts is without a regulatory body and all organisations act independently of one another, then only when a promotion runs in a state whose governing athletic body enforces drug testing are athletes using steroids at risk of being caught. That means there are a plethora

ALSO: SIX PAGES OF PRIDE OPENWEIGHT GRAND GRIX PREVIEW INCLUDING PREDICTIONS FROM JOACHIM HANSEN

of mixed martial arts companies across the globe where fighters on drugs can compete. Then again, even if a combatant does test positive for banned substances, they are at the behest of an athletic commission who may impose a ban well short of the sporting standard.

For sports who subscribe to the World Anti-Doping Agency code, such as athletics, a first offender could face a maximum of a two year ban, which is the typical sentence handed out. If one is caught a second time, they may be banned for life. That may be seen as harsh by some, but the threat of not ever being able to compete again should be a sufficient enough a deterrent to ward athletes off drug use and even if it is not, the punishment is certainly worthy of fitting the crime. At the very least, to outsiders, it appears the sport is doing enough to combat the doping problem.

Mixed martial arts on the other hand is faced with the ludicrous proposition of a man who failed a drug test in July forcing him to be pulled from the main event of a US pay-per-view being able to compete on a show in the UK in September. The aforementioned Kimo tested positive for a banned substance under the jurisdiction of the California Athletic Commission ahead of a planned bout with Bas Rutten for the World Fighting Alliance on July 22. But Kimo will now fight for British promotion Cage Rage against Dave Legeno on September 30 and is free



to take steroids as MMA is not subjected to drug testing in the UK. Kimo should be facing a life ban having twice tested positive for anabolic steroids – the other previous occasion was in 2004 following his fight against Ken Shamrock in the UFC where Stanozolol was found in his system. Instead, Kimo can still seek gainful employment in another country, which is quite the paradox.

In the short term, something has to be done to ensure cheats are punished properly in MMA, but given the defragmented nature of the industry and the want of some promoters to make money at all costs leading to the employment of anyone who can help them do this – that appears unlikely.

Therefore, one has to appeal to the better nature of fighters like Bonnar who need to realise they are not just harming their bodies when they ingest steroids, but severely hurting the industry in which they compete. Perhaps a lengthy ban will help him see just that – hopefully he will have plenty of time to mull over his actions.

RETURN OF THE IFL

By Robin Jahdi

The International Fight League is back. Yet despite being centred around a team championship, it is Saturday's superfight between Matt Lindland and Jeremy Horn that has spiked interest in the show at Total MMA towers.

Granted, this is partly because I (as with the Total MMA editorial team) love Lindland, but also because it's a meeting of two veteran, tough fighters who are both well-skilled.

I extolled the numerous virtues of 'The Law' in the WFA preview piece a few issues back but, in short, he is one of the most dangerous middleweights on the planet. He has torn apart the lesser fighters who have been brave to step into the ring with him (Nino Schembri, Fabio Leopoldo), as well as having two very dominant performances in his last two UFC outings (both wins) against the very respectable Travis Lutter and exceedingly good Joe Doerkson.

With the two massive promotions not wanting to risk their top boys against the wrecking machine (well, that and Lindland being good friends with Dan Henderson), this ronin has stepped up to light-

heavyweight, where he made short work of fellow excellent MMA wrestler Mike van Arsdale. Most recently, as many will know, he took Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson to the limit in a barnstorming fight of the year contender. While Lindland lost the fight, he gained much kudos.

Not one to rest on laurels (and due to the fact that kudos won't buy your lunch), Lindland has now signed up to fight Jeremy Horn.

Horn, as if readers of this publication don't already know, has one of the most impressive records in all of MMA. He hasn't had as many fights as 'Iron Man' Travis Fulton. But still, he's had around a hundred professional contests, so he's not to be sneezed at.

I have to lean in favour of Lindland on this one though, as he has really augmented his sublime wrestling with effective knees and chokes. Also, he showed 'Rampage' that he can slam with the best of them. The thing with Horn is that he is so tough that I don't see Lindland choking him out. Horn's too adept at submissions for that. Therefore the smart money is on a takedown by Lindland, followed by some inevitable ground and pound for the win.

UK TV:

Here are the listings for MMA and boxing on UK TV next week:

Saturday 9th

Player: 9-10 PM: UFC 55 Highlights

Bravo: 10-11 PM: UFC 62 Highlights

TWC: 11-12 AM: Cage Warriors

Sunday 10th

Player: 9-10 PM: UFC 55 Highlights

Bravo: 10-11 AM: UFC 'The Ultimate Fighter 4 - The Comeback'

Monday 11th

All In Sport: 4-5 PM: IFC

All In Sport: 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC Uncut

Player: 9-10 PM: The Ultimate Fighter I

Tuesday 12th

Eurosport: 7.30-10.00 PM: Boxing

Five: 5.10-6.00 AM: Boxing Classics

All In Sport: 4-5 PM and 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC

Player: 9-10 PM: The Ultimate Fighter I

Bravo: 11-12 AM: UFC 'The Ultimate Fighter 4 - The Comeback'

Wednesday 13th

All In Sport: 4-5 PM and 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC

Player: 9-10 PM: The Ultimate Fighter I

Eurosport 2: 8.50-10 PM: Fight Club

Thursday 14th

All In Sport: 4-5 PM and 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC

Eurosport: 8-10 PM: Boxing

Player: 9-10 PM: The Ultimate Fighter I

Eurosport: 11-12.30 AM: Fight Club



REVIEW: THE ULTIMATE FIGHTER 4

By Michael Farrow

This review is bought to you by the people who made some film with that bloke from Lock, Stock... The clock is brought to you by some shaving gel.

So it's week three of 'The Comeback'. Boredom sets in and the haters feel the need to hate on 'Mr International' like it ain't no thang. Can a player not just snore a little and cover everything in spray paint and rhinestones? He's trying to distract himself while they just whine and bitch.

This week, I found myself thinking "Ah, this is what usually happens". The show was just so.... usual. One team's spirit is being broken. Team No Love have done poorly thus far and it's affecting them all. Just as usually happens.

Another frequent occurrence is that guys think they're being taken lightly by the opposition and that is happening, especially so in this series. "They take me lightly and they'll be proved wrong" is something like the usual comment. This week, it's Jeremy Jackson, who is lucky that he isn't English or he's instantly be nicknamed Jez or Jezza, such is the way of this great country of ours. Din Thomas is GAY for Jezza. He wants Jezza in the octagon and they spend time building up how out of shape Jackson is. Shock.

As per usual, they watch a UFC pay-per-view. In this case, it's UFC 60 and, as usually happens, one of the guys is coached or mentored by one of the fighters in the main event. So Matt Serra, one of the first Gracie jiu-jitsu black belts in the US, sees one of the legends in his chosen art get duffed up by Matt Hughes.

As per the first two series, Mark Laimon is the grappling coach. However, this time we have one angry Matt Serra and Mark Laimon's previously-unpublicised nasty side comes out. I was disappointed that Serra didn't give him a mouthful, but he does raise a decent point of conversation. We all talk smack about fighters. Well, when I say "we all", I probably just mean you.

Serra's attitude is that to be that disrespectful - in this case about Royce Gracie - without fighting yourself, is wrong. I can see his point. I don't think it's wrong, but to do it in front of fighters, let alone a guy who idolises the man being knocked out, is just plain rude.

I don't know you Mark Laimon but, naming your dojo Cobra Kai aside, you've hardly covered yourself in glory in the MMA stakes and seemingly you're chosen to be the grappling coach because you're local. See, you don't even need to read that, just watch Matt Serra tear him a new one with regards to the Pete Sell versus Phil Baroni fight.

Anyway, back to the humdrum, Rich Clementi and Jorge Rivera play an elaborate trick on Shonie by tracing a picture he'd drawn and then defacing the copy. Shonie goes mad, he's gonna move up in weight and arseholes are generally going to be torn. At least they put some effort in and didn't just hide a deaf guy's steak.



The Ultimate Fighter 4 - Sundays At 10 On Bravo (UK), Thursdays At 10 On Spike (US)

Back to Jezza. Randy sings his praises, he's definitely going to be fighting. I can feel it, I'm sure. We even get a focus on his time in UFC, which consisted of losing to Nick Diaz and then having personal problems which prevented him from fighting.

So, it's the fight announcement. Din Thomas vs. Jeremy Jackson. No, I'm wrong, we've been sold the proverbial dummy and I bought it like a second division full-back up against Cristiano Ronaldo. Instead, it's Chris Lytle vs. Pete Spratt.

Now, Chris Lytle's a likeable guy. He's shaved bald, he's from Hoosier country and he's a



Pete Spratt is also likable...Of all the guys, he's the one who genuinely missed the window to break the top tier. He went to college and is the oldest guy in the competition.



firefighter. What's not to like? Pete Spratt is also likeable. He knew his limitations, he didn't take a title shot when it was on offer because he wasn't ready and he paid for it. Of all the guys, he's the one who genuinely missed the window to break the top tier. He went to college late and is the oldest guy in the competition. If they didn't both just resemble wallpaper, I'd be more misty-eyed at the possibility of their elimination.

In a moment that brings to mind certain other pugilistic-based game shows, Chris Lytle wants to know if it's him or the training. Would full-time training bring better results or is he only as good as a part-time fighter?

We quickly find out as he takes Spratt apart, leaving him as easily the freshest semi-finalist. It felt like a 'TUF3' first round fight. It felt so routine.

I don't really want to talk smack about TV considering I've never made a TV show myself and I suppose this wasn't the worst 'TUF' ever.

However, it just seemed so.... usual.

OPINION:

By Stuart Millard

Shonie Carter: Three episodes in, and the 'King of Bling', Shonie Carter remains the undoubted star of the series. This week's highlight was an amazing musical montage of him pimping it up around the house, attacking a bush with a broom, and playing speed chess against himself. Then, like a jewel encrusted Bob Ross, everything not nailed down got turned into a piece of art. I'd like to see that dead bastard Picasso threaten to move up a weight class to smack around someone who defaced one of his paintings, earless little bitch.

The Gym: There seemed to be a lot of footage this week of that bizarre exercise where one fighter straps into a bungee cord backpack and tries to sprint away from another guy holding him back. Those fighters are resourceful guys, as those are actually the reigns Edwin Dewees' mother brought him to the show in, in case he toddled off and ran into the middle of a busy street.

Rich Clementi: For a loser who was graciously allowed to stay in the house, despite being a losing loser, Rich 'Loser' Clementi doesn't ask for much. All he wanted was for Shonie to "just stop doing stuff around the house", as though Shonie should put himself into cryogenic suspension, or hibernate in the airing cupboard like a bear, because all the movement and noise is too confusing for Rich's tiny little brain.

Zach Light: What the fuck was that thing in the video package? He looked like a ripped ninety year old with tiny little teabag pecs. Even Tra Telligman laughs at him in the showers and calls him 'Mr Funnychest'.

The Fight: Short and to the point. The point being Team No Wins really suck. The most interesting thing about this was Pete Spratt's absolute disgust at having given up six whole weeks of his life for the show. Team No Love's Pete Spratt, there, embracing life and savouring every second of it by idly lazing around on the floor with his team-mates, who roll their eyes at Shonie Carter for daring to do something as wildly outrageous as glueing jewels to a baseball cap. Choose life indeed.

MAYHEM CHOKES OUT LAWLER

By Sean Skiendiel

It was labelled 'the most anticipated fight in Icon Sport history' and with Jason 'Mayhem' Miller and 'Ruthless' Robbie Lawler finally locking horns, this contest certainly matched its billing.

The anticipation had built to a crescendo since 'Mayhem' got into legal trouble some months back, which delayed the fight, leaving Lawler to take on Hawaiian favourite Niko Vitale and knock him out – building even more notoriety for the American on the island. But finally, Lawler and Miller squared off this past weekend.

Miller entered first, coming out to a reggae song, waiting about 30 seconds to a minute before he actually appeared. When he did he came out it was with a yellow towel draped over himself, the removal of which saw the crowd erupt with delight at his outfit; his usual mask, a Rasta beanie with dreds attached, Bob Marley shirt, and a pair of red fight shorts. As he danced his way to the ring the already cramped walk way was flooded with even more people trying to get a picture of his outfit.

Lawler's entrance was simple. He came out to his song and was greeted with boos just as enthusiastic as 'Mayhem's' cheers. He wasted no time in getting to the ring looking like a man on a mission.

The fight itself was an example of a grappler versus a striker. However, Miller exhibited good low kicks and Lawler showed that he still hasn't learned how to check one of those strikes, as he ate them for the entire first round. The first round consisted entirely of 'Mayhem' throwing lowkicks with Lawler backing up and refusing to engage, throwing only one punch the entire round. The crowd grew restless of this and booed for the majority of the five minutes.

The second round started off a bit slow with 'Mayhem' still trying for the low kick and actually looking to trade with Lawler to set up the clinch and takedown. Eventually after some hesitant exchanges Miller got the clinch. From here Lawler managed to get an underhook, landed a couple punches to 'Mayhem's' body, and then followed-up with two good punches to the head. From here 'Mayhem' broke off a little and Lawler tagged him with a good punch putting Miller on the canvas. Miller tried to regain guard but was obviously hurt as Lawler followed-up with vicious ground and pound.

'Mayhem' knew that if he stayed in that position the fight would be stopped so rolled into turtle position with Lawler following and continuing to ground and pound. As 'Mayhem' scrambled to mount in the hope of slowing down Lawler and keeping the fight going, he rolled into Lawler giving him sidemount. Lawler in trying to finish the fight kept pounding away and eventually stopped and tried instead to secure position. Miller during this time had apparently recovered and shrimped out of sidemount in order to get the fight back standing with about 30 seconds left on the clock. As the round closed 'Mayhem' unleashed a flurry upon the gassed Lawler, seeming to hurt him with an uppercut as the bell rang.



Jason 'Mayhem' Miller Defeated Robbie Lawler In Hawaii (C) www.mayhemmiller.com

The third rounds started with Lawler looking hesitant to engage as it was obvious that he had gassed. 'Mayhem', still looking for the takedown, traded a bit with Lawler then rushed in with a good double leg against the ropes. Miller took the mount from the takedown and began to rain down with ground and pound. However he hit Lawler with an elbow forcing the ref to stop them and warn 'Mayhem' for the illegal blow. Miller, obviously not happy, made the hand motions and shoulder shrug of "I didn't know".

The fight however was allowed to continue in the same position after being moved to the middle of the ring. From here 'Mayhem' continued to rain down blows until Lawler offered up an arm, which Miller immediately took for an arm triangle. 'Mayhem' then sat off from mount into sidemount while Lawler tried to defend the choke. Ultimately however Lawler only prolonged the inevitable as the arm triangle was very deep and he tapped midway into the round.

In the end, the fight finished how it was predicted to finish: 'Mayhem' subbing Lawler. However, there is a valid question as to whether or not the fight should have been stopped in the second round. Miller was obviously hurt and continued to eat shots from Lawler, however his comeback can be used as an argument to justify the fact that it wasn't stopped. The fight itself might not mean much in actuality. Not much really changes as both men are still bound to their contract and it's doubtful that Icon Sport would let go of either of these men.

Hopefully Icon will bring in some world class talent to fight 'Mayhem' and we can see what he can do against opponents with good ground games. Lawler will have to fight his way back up, but it should not really be hard as I'm not sure that Hawaii can really offer many fighters on Lawler's level. Both of these men have fights in December and if both win, we could see a re-match. Hopefully, so as this was an extremely enjoyable fight.

PRIDE OWGP FINALS ROUNDTABLE

By Iain Liddle, Robin Jahdi, Chris Brown and Jordan Breen.

It is the climax of the biggest tournament of the year and anticipation is at fever pitch.

On Sunday, one man will be crowned the first ever Pride Open Weight Grand Prix champion. But who will it be? In traditional roundtable style, we give you our preview of the show, starting with the conclusion of the showpiece competition.

Open Weight Grand Prix Semi-Final Bout: Wanderlei Silva vs. Mirko 'Cro Cop' Filipovic

CB: And lo, another Grand Prix final is upon us. I'm very much of the belief that the GP format has been done to near death over the last couple of years, and yet I'm still giddy with anticipation. The reason? No matter how much of its sparkle the GP may have lost, it still delivers amazing fights that fans have been craving for years. Fights like Silva vs. Filipovic.

First of all, forget their first bout, it's not important. Filipovic was new to MMA and Silva wasn't nearly as well rounded as he is today. Let's disregard that and focus on what is important to this contest.

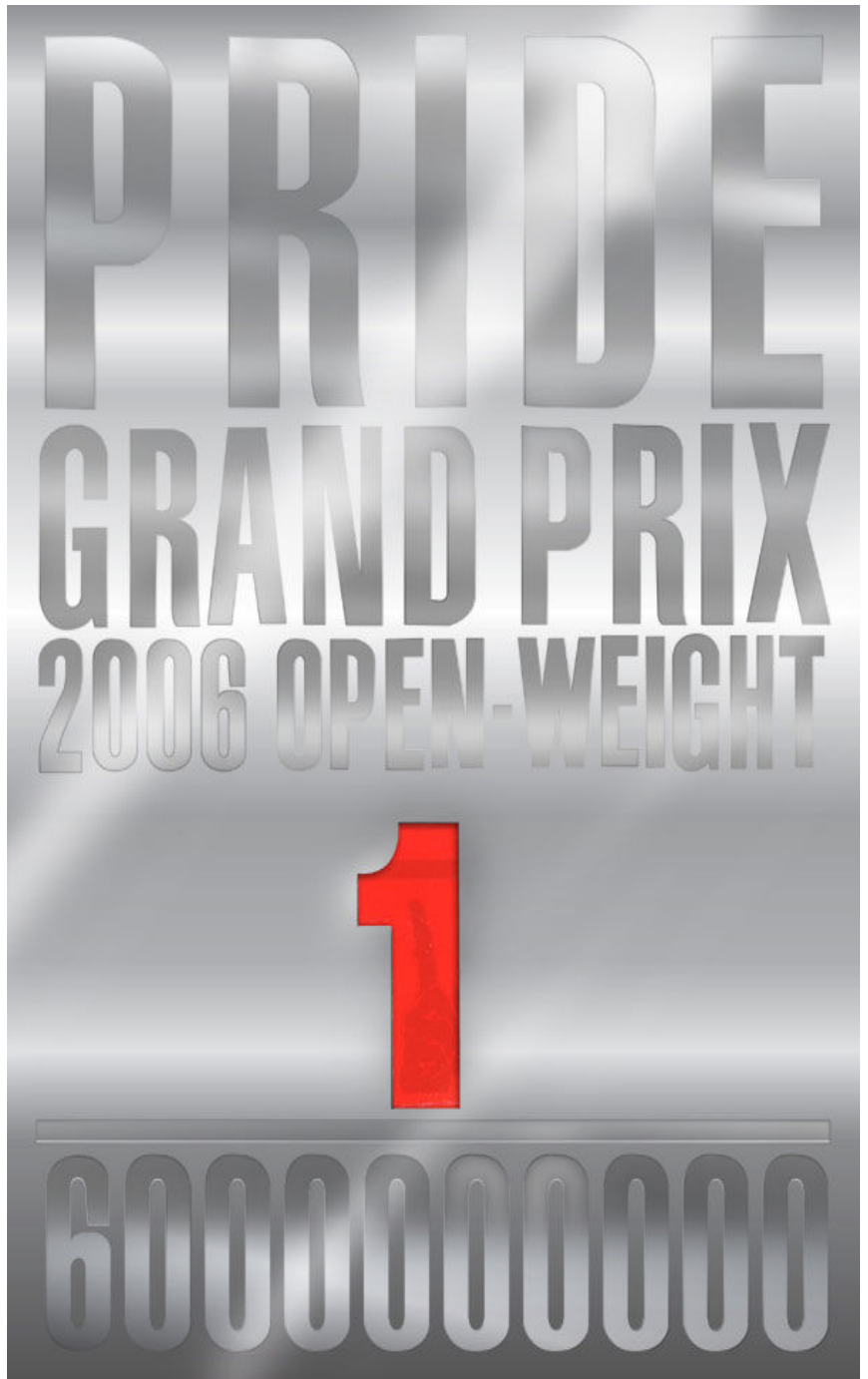
Firstly, will Silva tone down his aggressive style in accordance with Mirko's more patient, pick your shot carefully style of striking? Personally, I don't believe he should. Caution has cost him before against Ricardo Arona (and to an extent Mark Hunt), and as Fedor Emelianenko and Hunt have shown, the best way to defeat Mirko is to put him on the back foot and not be afraid to engage him in striking.

Secondly, who benefits most from there only being two rounds? 'Cro Cop' has had conditioning troubles in the past and the absence of a third stanza could be a blessing for him.

It's a tough fight to call. Obviously the advantage on the feet should be with 'Cro Cop' and vice versa on the ground, but Silva is no slouch himself standing and recovers very quickly if hurt. It also has to be noted that Silva has little experience fighting at this weight.

IL: This should be exciting, that's for sure. I don't think Wanderlei will be able to KO the Croatian so his best chance is to try and simply overwhelm him and hope for a takedown. Similarly, Silva just doesn't seem to be able to be KO'd. Mirko couldn't do it on their first meeting and fighters such as Mark Hunt haven't been able to do it since. I'm hoping for Silva to get to the final so I'll pick him for that reason. It's like tossing a coin in this one for me though.

RJ: Fascinating match, this one. I actually view it in a similar way as the now theoretical Silva-Liddell fight, in the sense that it's Wanderlei vs. a bigger, cagey striker, who



Only One In Six Billion Can Win The OWGP (C) Dream Stage Entertainment Inc.

waits for his moment to fire off one or two deadly blows.

As such, the result depends on how aggressive Silva is, and how well-structured that aggression will be. We all know Filipovic can be knocked out; Kevin Randleman showed the world how it's done. The question, rather amusingly, is whether the Chute Boxe kingpin can plan as well as the Hammer House random factor (as a side note, I wish Randleman was with another team. He'd be unstoppable).

The best case scenario for Mirko is if Silva steams towards him, flailing away, so the Croatian can step back from the potential

onslaught and deliver the killing blow. Something tells me Silva can't take a headshot as well as Hunt, so there's no real concern regarding Filipovic losing heart. Much like a Liddell punch, the Filipovic left high kick is the stuff of which legends are made.

Past opposition in this tournament is revealing. While Mirko has put away some giants (reaching the head of Aleksander Emelianenko, punching through Bob Sapp's eye socket), he has spent this tournament fighting skilled smaller men in Ikuhisa Minowa and Hidehiko Yoshida. Silva, meanwhile, did exactly what I predicted in my preview for the last show, and took it to Kaz Fujita. Utilising his

IN FOCUS: JAPAN - OWGP SIX PAGE SPECIAL

frenzied style of attack, he beat up the massive native and stopped the near-unstoppable. Of course, while that destruction of a bigger opponent bodes well for Silva, I direct you to my concern about over-eagerness and getting caught out.

As a result, one major worry is that, out of respect for the striking power of the other, each fighter will wait, wait, wait, for something – a big opening, or written invitation. Sadly, that might never come.

Could this be where one of the fighters unveils where all that Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu training went?

JB: Another pick 'em fight, and another one we've been waiting for, at least under real MMA rules, for a long while. Although either man winning would hardly shock or surprise, I anticipate Silva may do enough to win based on aggression, and Filipovic's completely disastrous inability to cope with any kind of diversity in the ring. If Silva can make it into the second and final round with some gas left in his tank, and can put sustainable pressure on Mirko, the Brazilian should slide into the finals.

Open Weight Grand Prix Semi-Final Bout: Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira vs. Josh Barnett

CB: This is a fight that fans have been waiting to see ever since Barnett left the UFC. Former champion vs. former champion.

I have to say, I'm surprised that so many people have been picking Barnett to win. Not that he isn't a very good fighter, but Nogueira is Nogueira. I think that Fedor's absolute dominance has caused people to forget just how good 'Minotauro' is.

Comparing the two, the only aspect that I can see Barnett as having the advantage is in the power stakes. His strikes are certainly stronger and he's more forceful with his takedowns, but I don't think that's enough to beat Nogueira. The Brazilian has the greater technique, not to mention a tolerance for punishment that would make Batman envious.

The only thing I can see Nogueira having a problem with is that the fight is only two rounds long. Nogueira is usually a slow starter and can take a while to get fully going. If Barnett can take advantage of this he has a chance of winning a decision, but I can't picture anything other than a Nogueira win. I can see the fight being somewhat similar to Nogueira vs. Kharitonov, so I'm going to say Nogueira by Decision.

IL: I like Barnett, but don't see how he is going to beat Nogueira. He may have the edge in terms of aggressiveness and taking the initiative, so if he can keep that going for fifteen minutes he might get a decision. He certainly won't be able to finish the Brazilian though, and you would have to think that Nogueira has the better conditioning. The BTT member is the tournament favourite for a reason and I expect him to show why in this semi-final.

RJ: This is another tough one to call. I'm leaning toward Nogueira, on account of his being the second best heavyweight mixed martial artist in the world. To summarise the fight though, it's probably best to look at ways in which each

man can win.

Barnett can try knocking Rodrigo out, but that's going to be hard. Fedor didn't manage it in two and a half matches of ground and pound. 'Cro Cop' nearly punched him out, but didn't manage it, so I'm guessing a knock out is not the way.

Similarly, Rodrigo is just too excellent a submission expert to be caught in an armbar or choke. Perhaps Barnett might tire Nogueira and then overpower him (sort of similarly to the Aleks fight) but, again, Nogueira is Mr. Cardio at the weight. A decision, due to excellent takedowns and control from the top? His best bet.

On the other side of the ring, it's a similar story. As good as Nogueira's boxing skills are, he doesn't seem to hit as hard as the younger Emelianenko, who didn't manage to put the would-be Kenshiro away. Similarly, while Nogueira has put more big opponents away by submission than anyone else, Josh knows enough to avoid getting tapped.

So again, paths converge to the decision. Can Rodrigo do enough to get the judges on his side? He could always make like he did against Werdum and methodically out-box his opponent. Ground-wise might be a bit different. While I have no doubt he can stay very busy from the bottom, he will be contending with punches and sub attempts from the top.

As is usually the case, I am relying on Nogueira being Nogueira. He got dumped on his head and beaten on by Bob Sapp (when Sapp was a scary, scary man. Remember 2002?), he weathered a Croatian storm and won both matches. In over an hour of fighting, he has not been stopped by Fedor. As wide a range of skills as Barnett has, I just don't see Nogueira losing this.

JB: Good matchmaking; we've been waiting over four years for this fight. It doesn't have the lustre it once did, but styles make fights and so it is still a highly compelling affair. A fight like this is way too difficult to forecast in terms of what may, and what will happen, so covering all the bases is perhaps best.

Barnett is a good striker for MMA purposes, but lacks movement, which should make him a target for Nogueira's pitter-patter long jab. That's points for Nogueira. On the ground, Barnett would either have to replicate Fedor's smashing tactics, or hope to hump to a decision. Both are unlikely: Barnett isn't Fedor, and the stalling will get him nowhere as Nogueira can aimlessly fling his legs all over the place and feign like he's attempting submissions. That's points for Nogueira. The one big boon for Barnett, whose physical condition has been shaky in the past, is that it's a semi-final bout, and is only fifteen minutes. If Barnett is to win, playing the clock properly will be crucial for him.

The Final?

RJ: While I am willing the smaller Silva to win the first bout, the favourite has to be Filipovic. He's rested, has taken the fight to the very best heavyweights in the past, and that one shot could end it. At the end of the day, while both are great MMA strikers and apparently very adequate grapplers, Filipovic is that big bigger and, I'd guess, that bit stronger. What makes

the scenario interesting (well, more so than it is already) is that Nogueira vs. Barnett prognosis of a decision. Whoever wins this one – Nogueira – will have had to do so against an elite heavyweight, probably through lots of wrestling and grappling, and most likely a fair few punches and low kicks.

This would bode well for the winner of Silva vs. Filipovic, which could conceivably end quickly. I know that after a gruelling fight with a top five heavyweight, I wouldn't want to face a potentially fresh KO machine. Granted, there could just as easily be a quick submission and a gruelling kickboxing fight, leaving Nogueira or Barnett to face a pumelled finalist.

That's why this show is so fascinating; anything can happen. Based on past evidence (and partly blind hero worship, I must confess), that 'anything' will be Nogueira winning, and facing Fedor, come Otoko Matsuri.

IL: If my predictions are correct then we will be left with another chapter in the Chute Box vs. Brazilian Top Team rivalry. However unlike last year's GP final in which Shogun overcame Ricardo Arona to be crowned champion, this time the BTT flag will be flying the highest come the end of the night. Nogueira is still a top five fighter in the world pound-for-pound rankings and a sure fire hall-of-famer of the future. As good as Wanderlei is, there's nobody in the world who isn't named Fedor that can beat him. I expect him to capitalise on Silva' gruelling semi-final and lock in a submission towards the end of the first round and move onto yet another match with the afore-mentioned Russian on New Year's Eve.

CB: Assuming that I'm right, and I'm probably going to look mighty stupid if I'm not, the final will see a rematch between Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira and Mirko 'Cro Cop' Filipovic. Their first encounter was an unforgettable fight that took place at the original Final Conflict show in 2003. After getting an early takedown Nogueira was battered on the feet for the remainder of the first round but came back to win by submission early in the second.

So what's changed since then? Nogueira is more comfortable on the feet, but still nowhere near the level of 'Cro Cop'. The Croatian has improved on the ground, but not enough to be anywhere close to Nogueira's submission prowess. So in actuality, not much has really changed. However, I think that Nogueira can survive on the feet with 'Cro Cop' but the opposite isn't true. Nogueira doesn't have great takedowns and 'Cro Cop' has great takedown defence, but I feel that Nogueira will get at least one takedown during the fight, and he's good enough to make it count.

JB: Silva is the least likely competitor to win the Grand Prix, as the odds of him beating either Barnett and Nogueira are less likely than Filipovic beating Barnett or Nogueira, and less likely than Barnett or Nogueira beating he, or 'Cro Cop'. Nogueira is probably the best choice, as should he get past Barnett, match-ups against Filipovic and Silva should both favour him. Also, everybody is clamoring for Fedor vs. Nogueira 4, after all.

Winner Of The 2006 Pride Openweight Grand Prix: Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira.

PREDICTIONS FROM THE PROS

By Stash Capar

When I first heard that PRIDE was having an Open Weight Grand Prix I was really worried. I found my mind wandering back to the early UFC days, with visions of Gerard Gordeau kicking Teila Tuli (square in the face), invading my mind.

The sport of mixed martial arts (yes, it's actually called mixed martial arts, not ultimate fighting) has come such a long way, and I for one didn't want to see Takanori Gomi vs. Alexander Emelianenko, or Dan Henderson vs. James Thompson. An Open Weight tournament would set MMA back to 1993, or so I feared.

Thank God everything worked out in the end. What we've been seeing so far has been without a doubt one of the best tournaments in the history of the sport, and nothing close to the spectacle I thought it would be.

We are currently left with four top level fighters, each one with an equally good shot at winning it all. So who will emerge victorious? Will 'Cro Cop' play a better technical game and outdo Wanderlei? Or will Silva just use his endless aggression and get the stoppage? Will 'Nog' submit Barnett? Or will 'The Babyfaced Assassin' manage to ground and pound 'Minotaur' a la Fedor?

Here's what various pro fighters think...

Gilbert Yvel

I had a quick interview with Gilbert Yvel when I dropped by the legendary Vos Gym in Amsterdam not too long ago.

Gilbert is not only a dedicated MMA fan, he's without a doubt one of the most pleasant and funniest fighters I've ever met.

Stash: 'Cro Cop' vs. Silva, who do you see coming out on top?

Yvel: Hmm...I think 'Croc Cop'. Wanderlei is really aggressive, but if they keep it standing I see 'Cro Cop' winning it.

Stash: Why?

Yvel: 'Cro Cop' is the better kickboxer! He is more technical. Wanderlei will come in swinging wildly and Mirko will be ready for him. Just like I will be when we have the re-match.

Stash: You still want that re-match?

Yvel: Yeah man, I need a re-match. Wanderlei kicked me in the balls remember?

Stash: What about Barnett and Nogueira?

Yvel: Man...I don't know, probably Barnett. He's been impressive, coming in much better shape than before.

Stash: So you think he can take 'Nog'?

Yvel: 'Nog' was invincible for a while, but I think people know how to beat him now. Also,

he doesn't have a lot of power standing. He won't be able to take Barnett, just like he couldn't take Fedor.

Stash: So who do you see winning the whole thing?

Yvel: (Evil grin) Me!

Stash: ???

Yvel: (Laughs)

Stash: There's talks that the winner might have to face Fedor.

Yvel: Man, Fedor is something else eh? Beating him would be really difficult; the guy has the whole package, it's like he's invincible.

Stash: So in your mind do any of the contenders have a shot at beating Fedor?

Yvel: I don't know, maybe Barnett. But it would be really, really difficult. Fedor is...he's like me, he's that good. But if I win the OWGP I have to fight him! So looks like I gotta beat Fedor! (Laughs)

Joachim Hansen

If there's one guy on this planet who eats, sleeps and breathes MMA, it's Joachim Hansen. He knows everything that's going on in the game.

We had a good discussion on the OWGP, here are his predictions...

Stash: Who do you think will win the OWGP?

Hansen: All four contenders have an equal shot. They are all the best at what they do. It will come down to who is better on the given day, who wants it more.

Stash: Silva vs. 'Cro Cop'?

Hansen: If I HAVE to make a prediction...Silva. He is a true mixed martial artist; 'Cro Cop' is still a hybrid kickboxer who relies too much on the powerful kicks (although I heard that his ground game is getting good).

Stash: Nogueira vs. Barnett?

Hansen: I don't know. Nogueira's biggest problem is that he lacks power standing. I think he can submit Barnett, but Barnett is more aggressive and complete.

Stash: Good points. Now who has the best shot at winning the whole thing?

Hansen: I will only say this: those who train for MMA will have the best shot.

There are so many fighters who still train everything separate. They train their stand-up, then their ground...that's not MMA. MMA isn't Thai Boxing, it isn't Jiu Jitsu, and it isn't wrestling.

When all the disciplines merge into one fighting system, that's when you have the full spectrum, and that's when you have MMA.

Peter Aerts

Although everyone's favourite three time K-1 World GP champion hasn't had the greatest success in MMA, he is an avid fan and follower of the sport who is keeping a close watch on the OWGP.

Stash: Alright, let's talk about the PRIDE OWGP...

Aerts: Silva, Mirko, Barnett or 'Nog'...a good list.

Stash: Any predictions?

Aerts: I like Silva's fighting style, he puts on a good show for the fans and you get the sense that he loves to fight - I don't always see that in Mirko. I'm going to say Silva.

Stash: 'Nog' and Barnett? You think this will be a ground war?

Aerts: I would actually like to see them stand, but yes, I believe it's going to be a ground fight. I think Barnett will take it.

Stash: Why is that?

Aerts: He has been very impressive; I think he has rededicated himself to the sport and is serious about winning now. But he has to be careful! Nogueira is so dangerous with his submissions...hmmm...maybe he should keep it standing.

Stash: Who will take home the title?

Aerts: I don't know, but they say the winner will have to fight Fedor! That's a scary thought.

James Thompson

James took part in the OWGP and did very well in my humble opinion, especially for someone who hasn't been fighting at a professional level for very long.

Here's what Britain's representative in the Open Weight Grand Prix thinks...

Stash: First off, that was a great fight with Kazuyuki Fujita.

Thompson: Thank you, we had a great game plan, I just got carried away. I wanted to keep him at a range where I could use my long punches, or close enough to use my knees. I knew he's dangerous when the distance is small enough for hooks and uppercuts...nonetheless, it was a good fight.

Stash: Any predictions for the GP?

Thompson: Definitely Barnett over 'Nog'...I think Barnett might be the only fighter who currently has a shot at beating Fedor...and he should be able to beat 'Nog'.

Stash: What about Silva and 'Cro Cop'?

Thompson: They say that 'Cro Cop's ground game has gotten very good, but it's a difficult call...hmm...yes, I'm going to have say 'Cro Cop'.

LIVE ROADS: OWGP NEWS REVIEW

By Jordan Breen

<http://completevaletudoaccess.blogspot.com>

Dream Stage Entertainment held a promotion event for September 10th's Openweight Grand Prix Finals in the busy Shibuya area in Tokyo on Friday.

On hand were the four Grand Prix semi-finalists: Wanderlei Silva, Antontio Rodrigo Nogueira, Mirko Filipovic and Josh Barnett.

The press conference was scheduled to be held outside of the trendy Shibuya 109, famous for many hip fashion stores. The area always attracts a wealth of people being called the 'Mecca of teenage fashion' in Tokyo. Accordingly, PRIDE's promotional venture attracted many people too; too many people for the police.

Having attracted a much larger audience than expected, with an estimated 3000 people showing up to watch the promotion, the sidewalks quickly became clogged and as panic started to spread due to the tightly packed crowd. The police was forced to step in and stop the event, just after three minutes before the event had commenced, and before any of the fighters had a chance to speak to the crowd.

On Thursday, Wanderlei Silva, Mauricio 'Shogun' Rua, and Evangelista 'Cyborg' Santos performed a public workout session in PRIDE's official dojo in Tokyo.

The trio began the day with separate trainers, showing off their striking skills in mitt hitting session simultaneously. The three came away from the workout drenched in sweat, a testament to the intensity of the Chute Boxe ethic. Taking a break, the fighters sat down at ringside as Silva declared a "complete victory" to follow on the night of September 10th for Chute Boxe Academy.

Silva last met his upcoming opponent, Mirko Filipovic, two years ago at PRIDE 20, where a draw was declared after exhausting the time limit in a special rules match. "I think that he won last time", Silva stated, recalling the bout, and added, "He's better now than he was before, but I'll prove I'm definitely the better fighter."

To achieve that, Silva has added muscular quantity and weight, looking to be about 99 kilograms at current, "My opponents are heavier than me so I had to improve my body with the right foods and supplements." Silva expects to be somewhere around 97 or 98 kilograms on the day of the bout.

Silva also acknowledged the prediction of Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira stated the day before, "I believe I'll meet him in the final round. Hitting Nogueira in the finals of the Grand Prix is an honour, and it's the fight everyone wants to see."

Mauricio Rua has been MIA since his dislocating injury sustained against Mark Coleman at PRIDE 31 but was also in attendance. Despite worries concerning the state of the injured arm, Rua



Chute Boxe's Wanderlei 'The Axe Murderer' Silva (C) Dream Stage Entertainment Inc.

assured all that the injury was healed 100%. A noticeable scar on Rua's right arm attracted attention, however, to which Rua explained, "I got this being scraped by another car."

'Cyborg' Santos concluded by saying, "My last fight with Nakamura, I wasn't able to show my best. This time, I'll please the fans and show them just what I have." Santos, a newly wed in August, postponed his honeymoon due to accepting the fight with Yosuke Nishijima. "I wasn't able to go on my honeymoon. So I'll win, then go on my honeymoon," he smiled.

Antonio Rodrigo 'Minotauro' Nogueira gave performed a practice session open to the media on Tuesday in DEEP Official Gym IMPACT in the Shinjuku sector of Tokyo.

Nogueira showed off his renowned jiu-jitsu expertise in sparring, making a point of demonstrating his kimura and anaconda choke techniques. Nogueira looked to be in top form, as he himself made a note of his extraordinary form saying, "I feel in good condition, Japan's climate is a lot like Brazil's."

But what occupied Nogueira's mind the most was his opponent, AMC Pankration's Josh Barnett. Nogueira spoke frankly about what he saw in his September 10th foe, "We're looking for Barnett to use some kind of throwing technique to take the fight to the ground. If he takes top, expect a stalemate. But Barnett's weakness is being on his back. We've already seen in his fight with Mirko that he has problems off of his back." Darrell Gholar, Brazilian Top Team's long-time wrestling coach, was bought in to advance Nogueira's wrestling ability for

the bout.

Nogueira also had his personal complaints about Barnett: "He's said jiu-jitsu is unnecessary to fight with a lot of confidence. But all of his techniques are from jiu-jitsu."

Finally, Nogueira predicted an all-Brazilian final: "Mirko has a lot of technique in his stand-up, but what Wanderlei has is that he always comes forward. I have a feeling I'll be facing Silva in the finals."

Dream Stage Entertainment has announced that South Korean Ssireum champion Lee Tae-Hyun will make his MMA debut at the Openweight GP final event taking place on the 10th of October, facing another giant in Ricardo 'The Mutant' Morais.

The three time ssireum champion Tae-Hyun announced on August 8th that he would sign with DSE, and compete in PRIDE. Tae-Hyun had announced on July 20th that he would be retiring from ssireum competition, stating he would "return to his private life", and may take up his longtime dream of teaching, before deciding to compete in PRIDE. The 198 centimeter, 138 kilogram Tae-Hyun will meet a towering foe in 205 centimeter, 121 kilogram Morais. Morais rose to prominence over a decade after winning the International Absolute Fighting Council's 32-man, one night tournament in Russia. Morais has lacked recent success however, fighting only three times in just under the last seven years, going 1-2, with losses to PRIDE veterans Tsuyoshi Kohsaka, and his highlight reel knockout at the hands of Aleksander Emelianenko last year.



THE BOOK ON MIRKO 'CRO COP' FILIPOVIC

Before we even get started, let me say that I think 'Cro Cop' is among the worst nicknames in a sport full of terrible monikers, and that's the last time you'll see it in this column. It pains me that so few people seem to know Filipovic's actual name.

Strengths: On the flip side, 'Right leg, hospital, left leg, boneyard' is one of my favorite self-descriptions by any fighter in MMA. It's both poetic and accurate. Filipovic's left high kick quickly became legendary as a finishing technique due to its devastating velocity and power. With a handful of exceptions (Fedor, Hunt, Nogueira - all obviously mutants), to feel the Mirko high kick is to taste defeat.

As a former K-1 star, the fact that Filipovic's overall striking game is excellent shouldn't be a surprise. Besides the headline act that is his left kick, he's shown a supporting cast of powerful, accurate punches, deft footwork, and capable defence. Standing up with Filipovic is a choice most fighters will quickly regret.

Unfortunately for those combatants, they usually have little choice. Filipovic's takedown defence is somewhat overrated - more than one person has called his sprawl "the best in the world", which is patently absurd in a sport that contains Olympic-veteran wrestlers - but in saying that it is still fantastic. That sprawl is his last line of defence though. Before it, his ring generalship and footwork keep him out of vulnerable positions for most of his fights. When an opponent is able to close the distance, he's an able defensive clinch fighter who wisely focuses on regaining the separation he needs to operate effectively. Only once those are bypassed does he need to sprawl at all.

Like more and more top MMA fighters, Filipovic is a freak of an athlete. He's extremely powerful for his size, and blindingly fast for a heavyweight. His bout with Fedor Emelianenko was probably the fastest-paced heavyweight bout I've seen in MMA.

Weaknesses: But nobody's perfect. Filipovic is a specialist. He's arguably the best striker in MMA, but his grappling is almost purely defensive. On the ground, he's got a 'good enough to survive' guard, but is incapable of mounting much of an offence from his back. Nor is he much of an offensive clinch fighter while standing, expending most of his energy trying to return to his preferred range.

Filipovic seems to lack confidence in his grappling, also. His bout with Mark Hunt is a prime example. For 95% of the contest,



The Croatian Sensation Mirko 'Cro Cop' Filipovic (C) Dream Stage Entertainment Inc.

he was either bouncing ineffective strikes off of the adamantine dome of his New Zealander foe, or trying desperately to avoid his powerful counters. Only at the end, with mere seconds to go, did he try a takedown. Once he did so, he landed almost immediately into side control, in perfect position for an Americana. Had he changed tactics sooner, there's no reason to believe Hunt would've been any more capable of defending that approach, given Hunt's own rudimentary grappling ability.

Lack of confidence, while a somewhat surprising trait from a fighter widely perceived as arrogant, seems to be at the root of another Filipovic weakness. Very few, if any, fighters are talented enough to maintain an advantage throughout a contest against another top fighter. Inevitably, to be successful, a fighter has to be able to 'come from behind', or re-take the initiative after being in a position of disadvantage. Filipovic seems unable to do that. His wins are inevitably one-sided drubbings against overmatched opponents. His losses are to those able to stifle or endure his initial attack, and force him to the defensive. Until he improves this area, he'll never be the champion many feel he has the potential to be.

Finally, Mirko's a tiny heavyweight. He's almost exactly the same size as Chuck Liddell. Even assuming he's larger than

his Sherdog.com-listed 213lbs (which seems likely), he's well within weight range of a cut to Pride's middleweight division. Given the glass ceiling that is the presence of Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira and Fedor Emelianenko, that might be in his best interest.

Summary: This coming Sunday, Filipovic faces Wanderlei Silva in the semi-finals of Pride's Open Weight Grand Prix, in what promises to be a brutal slugfest of a match-up. I expect it to be a remarkably close fight, one in which (based on my recent 'successes') I refuse to predict a winner. I do predict, however, that the winner of that bout has virtually no chance to take the Grand Prix title. Given the style of the participants, I expect even the winner to be sufficiently battered and bruised to either be forced to withdraw altogether, or be fairly easy pickings for their less-damaged counterpart from the Barnett vs. Nogueira semi-final.

BY LEE CASEBOLT

