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DADDY COOL DOMINATES

By Ross McTavish

Melvin Guillard's exuberance may be a charming characteristic which saw the 24-year-old hype up his fight with Joe Stevenson in a typical display of bullish bravado ahead of Thursday's UFC Fight Night.

But within 27 seconds of the bout beginning, an over-zealous 'Young Assassin' made an amateur mistake, which was tantamount to shooting oneself in the foot.

Guillard was all talk in the days leading up to his clash at lightweight with Stevenson, proclaiming how he was better looking, a harder puncher and a more supreme athlete than his opponent. He's obviously been watching those Muhammad Ali tapes. But foolishly believing those traits were enough to win him this bout may well have been Guillard's downfall. Yes, Guillard does have terrific handspeed, is a dangerous striker and always looks to be in great shape. But there is far more to being a top mixed martial arts fighter than that – as Stevenson duly demonstrated.

The hilarity of the opening exchange must be noted. Guillard, jacked to the gills on adrenaline from running his mouth like a proverbial uzi, rushed from his corner into the centre of the octagon upon hearing the opening horn. The Baton Rouge native threw a series of wild punches, which never even fazed an unflustered Stevenson, who in a moment of true comedy, proceeded to plant one straight jab straight on the nose of Guillard,

just about knocking the cocky one on his ass.

Guillard's hand touched the canvas, but he was able to spring back up to a standing position. Not for long though, as Stevenson scored a trademark take-down and began looking for a leglock. There may have been no leg to lock, but there was a neck to choke, as Guillard forgot about the basic rule of keeping one's chin close to their chest. When Guillard tried to get to his feet, Stevenson simply wrapped his left arm around the throat of his foe, sat back into full guard and waited for the inevitable tap out.

Often in sport, a quick win of this nature tells us very little, but this bout confirmed what many already thought about both combatants. Guillard is young, full of beans and needs to work hard on improving his all-round game because he cannot simply rely on his hands. Stevenson on the other hand will be a serious contender in the 155 lb division. He may not quite have enough yet to defeat a B.J. Penn or Sean Sherk, but Stevenson is not 25 until June and therefore time is firmly on his side.

The only thing I would suggest that Stevenson has to improve is his nickname of 'Daddy'. But then again, the UFC is now a playground of monikers which need to be mocked, so at least Stevenson is in good company on that front. The man now residing in Las Vegas is also surrounded by a host of talented lightweights, but Stevenson showed here that he is a step above most of his young peers.

Kenny Florian further solidified

RESULTS:

UFC Fight Night 9 - Friday 6 April Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas

Thiago Tavares def. Naoyuki Kotani via Unanimous decision after 3 Rounds.

Roan Carneiro def. Rich Clementi via Unanimous decision after 3 Rounds.

Kuniyoshi Hironaka def. Forrest Petz via Unanimous decision after 3 Rounds.

Kurt Pellegrino def. Nate Mohr via Submission (ankle lock) at 2:58 of Round 1.

Drew Fickett def. Keita Nakamura via Unanimous decision after 3 Rounds.

Wilson Gouveia def. Seth Petruzelli via Submission (guillotine choke) at 0:39 of Round 2.

Kenny Florian def. Dokonjonosuke Mishima via Submission (rear naked choke) at 3:57 of Round 3.

Justin McCully def. Antoni Hardonk via Unanimous decision after 3 Rounds.

Joe Stevenson def. Melvin Guillard via Submission (guillotine choke) at 0:27 of Round 1.



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his place in the top end of the lightweight class though by beating Dokonjonosuke Mishima.

The Japanese fighter offered little throughout and was peppered by devastating leg kicks from Florian. However, during the third round, as Florian appeared to become a touch complacent with the winning line in sight, Mishima locked in a knee bar which almost brought him an unlikely success. Florian defended the attack though and freshly woken from his slumber, soon put Mishima to sleep with a rear naked choke.

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GSP VS. THE TERROR: CLOSER THAN YOU THINK?

By Stewart Allen

With the fifth season of *The Ultimate Fighter* underway and being hailed as the best opening episode since the first series, the spotlight returns this weekend to the one true highlight of the last season – the straight talking New Yorker Matt Serra – as he attempts to do what Travis Lutter spectacularly failed to achieve – take the final step to complete ‘the comeback’.

Originally scheduled to co-headline with Lutter’s fight against Anderson Silva in February, a knee injury to the Welterweight Champion Georges St. Pierre forced the match to be pushed back a couple of months – Serra preferring to wait for his contracted shot rather than take a tune-up fight in the interim.

I can’t blame Serra for that in the slightest. He had everything to lose and nothing to gain by fighting a tomato can in February. So, having seen Lutter spectacularly outclassed by Silva, can we realistically expect Serra to be able to do anything with the man who utterly humbled the heretofore unbeatable Matt Hughes to lift the gold last November? It’s a tough ask, but there are possibilities.

First, while St. Pierre may have trained with Renzo Gracie in New York in preparation for his victory over B.J. Penn (and actually received his brown belt from Gracie last year); Serra is famously the first American black belt under Renzo Gracie. St. Pierre is a hell of an all round fighter, but on the ground, I don’t think he should be able to do anything to Serra that Serra hasn’t seen or can’t counter. Everybody can be caught if they’re careless, but Serra should have the composure to be able to try and impose his will on St. Pierre when and if the fight goes to the ground.

The question is, of course, how long it will take Serra to get St. Pierre down? If history is anything to go by, he’ll shoot constantly and try his damndest to get the fight on the floor, but I have to think that St. Pierre will want to keep the fight standing.

For one, he decimated Hughes with striking ability, as he did with Sean Sherk, and secondly, because Serra was on the receiving end of one of the signature knockouts of all time in the UFC – the Shonie Carter spinning backfist from UFC 31.

The funny thing is, while that backfist was replayed during *The Ultimate Fighter* season

four, and was even replicated by Carter in the semi-final match with Serra, the American’s fight history has nothing which would suggest that he’s got a problem defending against strikes. In fact, that Carter match in 2001 is the only time Serra has ever been stopped. Of his last eight fights (everything since the Carter loss, not including *The Ultimate Fighter 4* matches), seven of them have gone to a decision, suggesting that while Serra has the smarts and skills to stay alive, he can’t always get the job done within the time limit himself.

That is interesting when you consider that St. Pierre has only ever let three of his 14 pro fights go to the judges’ scorecards. However, this is a championship fight made over five rounds. I can easily see this bout going past the third stanza, and the interesting thing to me will be how each combatant’s conditioning will last going into the fourth and fifth ‘championship’ rounds, should it reach that far.



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Also, one has to consider the physical and mental state of both fighters going in – which is often something that no-one outside the immediate camp knows about. So let’s speculate, because I think there are some questions that need to be posed. St. Pierre is coming off a knee injury sustained in training for the original February date. Is that injury now fully healed? Will St. Pierre be favouring one leg? If so, that immediately places a bullseye on that knee for Serra to aim for. And what about Serra? With three members of his training school fighting on the show (himself, Pete Sell and Luke Cummo), is he truly focused on number one? I certainly hope so.

One thing is for sure, this match with St. Pierre has been on Serra’s mind for months. Getting in the ring with the French-Canadian has been his goal – the culmination of a journey. Whereas for St. Pierre, I wonder whether his goal is actually the promised title defence against Hughes in Montreal that

is tentatively scheduled for this year, and that he considers the Serra match to be a bump in the road to home, so to speak?

If Randy Couture’s inspirational win against Tim Sylvia last month showed anything, it proved that young champions overlooking supposedly past it challengers can be a dangerous game. In fact, I’m sure Serra has taken great encouragement from Couture’s comeback as he prepares to mount his own title challenge.

But St. Pierre is a hundred times the fighter Sylvia is when it comes to dynamism and scope. He won’t stand back and let Serra dictate to him, nor will he be afraid to try something different if needs be. Actually, St Pierre is almost certainly far more vibrant than Serra is.

The determining factor could be whether Serra can smother St. Pierre, take him down and score points by staying busy on the

ground. It might make for an absorbing battle of BJJ, or it might make for a boring fight. Of course I hope it’s the former. I’m a fan of both fighters and I hope they tear the house down. The funny thing is, I don’t actually think that this is Serra’s best weight in any event. Serra would actually be better served dropping to 155 lbs and participating in the lightweight division. Whatever this result, that might still be his long term best strategy, as long as fighting (rather than training) remains in Serra’s future – especially with the lightweight division about to start buzzing on the back of the current season of *The Ultimate Fighter*.

So, is St. Pierre the favourite? Yes, no doubt. He has the edge in striking, and will be skilled enough on the ground to cause problems. Realistically, with both men at their best, St. Pierre should stop Serra, but in a year of upsets, let’s not start planning the victory celebration until Bruce Buffer gives the official decision.

CHRIS BROWN ON THE UFC 69 UNDERCARD:

Diego Sanchez vs Josh Koscheck

This is by far the most eagerly anticipated fight on the card. Though it's probably the only eagerly anticipated fight on the card. A rematch from the first series of *The Ultimate Fighter*, this is the latest in a series of Heracles like tasks Diego Sanchez must complete before he gets a title shot. Though Josh Koscheck remains the better wrestler, the only way I can see him winning this fight is by getting the takedown and just laying on top of Sanchez, but with the New Mexico native's fantastic conditioning I think he'll win a decision.

Yushin Okami vs Mike Swick

I must admit I'm not totally sold on Mike Swick. He's got a lot of potential, but he was far too tentative against David Loiseau and he can't afford to fight so cautiously against high-level opposition. Yushin Okami

is a good foe for Swick. Not quite a top tier middleweight, but a dangerous opponent and a real test for a fighter looking to break into the elite. Swick should be forced to work much harder here than in his bout against Loiseau, and I can see him winning a close decision.

Thales Leites vs Pete Sell

There's not really much to say about this contest. Both combatants are relatively well rounded, with Thales Leites the better ground fighter and Pete Sell possibly having a slight advantage on the feet. Leites excels more in one area though, so I'm going to have to go with him.

Kendall Grove vs Alan Belcher

Kendall 'Da Spyder' Grove meets Alan 'The Talent' Belcher in the clash of the awful nicknames. None of Belcher's bouts have made

it to air over here, so I'm yet to see him fight and therefore must go for Grove.

Heath Herring vs Brad Imes

Heath Herring gets a chance to make a good second impression with a fight that has seemingly been tailor made for him. After a poor UFC debut, it looks like Herring will get his wish for a slugfest against 'The Hillbilly Heartthrob' (at UFC 69: *Bad Nicknames 'R' Us*). Still, it would be hilarious if Imes scored with takedowns and controlled Herring on the ground for a win.

Josh Haynes vs Luke Cummo

I'm starting to think that the UFC is playing a joke on us here. Josh 'Bring The Pain' Haynes? Surely that can't be real? It is? Don't call you Shirley? Stop doing that annoying fake conversation thing? I can't imagine anything but a Luke Cummo win.

US ROUND-UP: IFL PREVIEWED, ICON REVIEWED

By Michael Farrow

The IFL return to the MARK in the Quad Cities this weekend, as their native sons, Pat Miletich's Silverbacks, seek to return to winning ways against Ken Shamrock's Nevada State Lions.

The Silverbacks look scarily strong for their first bout in home territory this season. Bart Palaszewski will want to bounce back from his first defeat in IFL competition, a controversial split decision against Chris Horodecki of the LA Anacondas. Rory Markham returns after missing the match with the Anacondas and while the improving Mike Ciesnolevicz is absent, Miletich has dug deep into his camp to bring out alternate Sam Hoger, the five fight UFC veteran, in what looks to be a serious upgrade. Finally, Ben Rothwell, 5-0 in IFL, is present and correct. The only weakness in their lineup is middleweight Ryan McGivern, who would probably be a key fighter in any other team.

The Lions will finally get to activate the vastly-experienced Vernon White, who will probably rack up some much-needed victories. John Gunderson, Roy Nelson and Pat Healy are also useful fighters who will do well for Shamrock. However, they're overmatched this time.

For their clash with the Tiger Sharks, the

Red Bears have again shuffled the pack, with three changes to the side that was somewhat humiliated in their last outing against the Pitbulls. Mike Corey comes in for Peter Kaljevic at lightweight, Homer Moore enters at light-heavyweight and Adam Maciejewski replaces Mo Fowzi at heavyweight. However, it is again difficult to judge how well they will match-up with the Tiger Sharks. One would think that Reese Andy and Allan Goes are going to prove too tough at the higher weights and only Bristol Maounde hasn't performed at all for Maurice Smith in the past.

The 'superfight' sees Illinois welterweights Jeff Curran and Kevin English face off - a bout which certainly belies its billing...

Meanwhile, Hawaii-based ICON Sport caused a stir with their 'Epic' show on Saturday.

ICON's middleweight division is amongst the best outside of the UFC and Pride, and did not disappoint on this occasion. In the fight they're all talking about, Robbie Lawler continued his career rehabilitation with a fourth-round knockout of Frank Trigg to win the ICON Sport Middleweight Title. Lawler could soon face Jason Miller or Renato Verissimo, who both scored first round TKOs against weak opposition to set up potential marquee matches with the new champion.

Lawler always seems to be putting his career back together after a shock loss. After two excellent victories over Niko Vitale, Lawler dropped his ICON Sport Middleweight Title to Miller last September in an upset. Trigg then returned to MMA last December after a seven month absence to beat Miller for said championship.

Trigg started the mindgames early, kissing Lawler at the weigh-in and toying with him before the fight. After the bell, Trigg showed his usual dominant wrestling to start, which put Lawler on the defensive. However, as the fight wore on, Trigg's conditioning looked below par, the takedown attempts became weaker and Lawler began to impose his game. Lawler sent Trigg to the mat twice in the second round, but Trigg survived the onslaught and the stanza. He started the third fast, but the pace took its toll and, again, he found himself fighting Lawler's fight.

By the fourth, Trigg was just trying to look good for the judges, staying active but his punches and knees lacked power. Lawler caught Trigg flush in the midst of a flurry and followed up with two more shots that sent the Las Vegas native crumpling into the ropes. However, though he was down and clearly finished, Lawler gave Trigg one last punch, a graceless blow that left a sour taste in the mouth and which could lead to Trigg demanding a rematch in the future.

GIANT'S LAST STAND AS THE **DREAM** ERA ENDS



'Zuluzinho' Will Fight 'Butterbean' At Pride 34 (C) Dream Stage Entertainment Inc.

By Robin Jahdi

Having used my 'best of times, worst of times' intro for Pride when analysing their last show, I guess for the final Dream Stage Entertainment promoted Pride event, we now have to go with the 'fall of the Roman empire' metaphor.

A few short years ago, the greatest fighting promotion in the world, Pride, got poisoned by the lead water pipes of alleged Yakuza involvement and slowly what was once the most celebrated, extravagant MMA promotion of them all became inexorably moribund. Of course, Pride Fighting Championships is not going to die per se. If anything, it is now subject to its most stable financial backer in its decade of existence, the Fertitta brothers. However, there is a definite feeling that this is the end of an era. Though we are also on the verge of a new, potentially heart-stopping age in terms of dream matches becoming tangible, the Pride of old is gone.

Pride 33 in Las Vegas was a stunning show that belied the true trouble the drowning promotion was in; it was a night of great fights, massive upsets and excitement. If only that was the swansong for Dream Stage Entertainment. As the DSE-produced

Pride splutters to its final demise, viewers are given Pride 34. An illustration of how things have changed in the fight world could not be starker. After Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira was seen sitting with Dana White at the ninth UFC *Fight Night* and with Mirko Filipovic already fighting in the octagon, the Pride heavyweight division has encountered a turning of the tables.

The Pride FC website mentions four heavyweight fights for this card, one of which being the epoch-defining Pride/UFC collaboration bout: Kazuyuki Fujita vs. Jeff Monson. This would seem not to be quite on the scale of fantasy matches such as Fedor Emelianenko vs. Tim Sylvia or Andrei Arlovski vs. Nogueira. Though it lacks the sense of occasion such a fight should bring, this clash between Fujita and Monson should still be engaging on its own terms. Both are very physically strong fighters with decent wrestling and very heavy hands. Fujita has a definite chance if he can secure an early takedown and carefully pound (if that's not an oxymoron) out a stoppage from the mount. Otherwise, the fight seems to be all Monson.

I see Monson being slightly more accurate on the feet, even though his reach seems to be in the negative region. If 'The Snowman' gets a takedown on his terms, then

Fujita is not likely to have sufficient submission defence to prevent the American 2005 champion of the Abu Dhabi World Tournament from doing what he wants. While Monson might connect with Fujita's face in the way Wanderlei Silva did last July at *Critical Countdown Absolute* (or Fujita somehow controlling Monson for a decision), the theoretical money here is going on Monson by choke.

The heaviest fight on the card lumbers into view as Wagner 'Zuluzinho' da Conceicao Martins takes on Eric 'Butterbean' Esch; a grand total of seven hundred and forty pounds in combined weight apparently. Not the most thrilling proposition to this fight fan, Esch is likely to knock out the Brazilian giant. While grudging props go to 'Zuluzinho' for certainly not shying away from definite losses in the past (his last two Pride bouts were against Rodrigo Nogueira and Emelianenko), he is not the most skilled fighter. He is unlikely to ground and submit the American, most known for Tough Man contests and concussing Johnny Knoxville, and therefore I predict a short, painful night for the Brazilian, capped off with unconsciousness. The victim of that last bit might just be me though.

Slightly more credible is the meeting of Don 'Magnum P.I.' Frye and James 'The Debt Collector Is A Better Nickname Than Colossus' Thompson. This is likely to go longer than the 'Butterbean' fight, but will be no less brawly. Frye is a bit of a legend in the sport, and another total gamer; he took on Jérôme Le Banner in a K-1 rules match in summer 2002, even though his destruction was almost certain. That was quite the knockout. Around that time, he took part in the famed head-punch-stravaganza that was his bout with Yoshihiro Takayama. Frye took that one, along with the features off Takayama's face.

Still, time waits for no man and Frye is now two-hundred-and-eighty-five years young (or perhaps forty-one, depending on one's sources). In the opposite corner stands Thompson, centuries younger, inches taller and about twenty-five pounds heavier than Frye, with a very angry look on his face.

Thompson has had recent mixed fortunes to an almost unbelievable extent. Making his name getting knocked out in seconds by Aleksander Emelianenko, he rebounded with a few easy wins. A defeat in a war against Fujita signalled a losing streak that was only stopped when he ended up smashing Hidehiko Yoshida in frankly surreal fashion. And

then he lost in under a minute to 'Butterbean' at Cage Rage 20. Thompson, then, stands on the pantheon alongside luminaries like Kevin Randleman, as a figure who can win and lose any fight. Granted, that applies in a sense to everybody, but bet on Thompson to win and he will lose. Bet on him to lose and he will astound the odds makers.

Unless one of this pair has been engaging in super secret submission training (or, in Frye's case, bathing in the blood of virgins in order to reverse the ageing process), this fight is likely to feature a lot of punching. Then more punching, until Frye either tires or loses consciousness. However, this being a Thompson fight, we apply the relevant Bizarro Rules, and Frye gets the nod, by the aforementioned KO/tiring.

Deserving less words is the meeting of Yoshihiro Nakao (whose career in a nutshell saw him kiss Heath Herring and bore against Kazuhiro Nakamura) and Edson Drago (looked like an unstoppable killer until he fought someone decent, in Pawel Nastula, and got handled with ease). I can only imagine that, aside from necessity being the mother of invention in booking this card, this fight is going to be a showcase for the fists and knees of Drago. One can but hope.

With the one particularly engaging fight of Wanderlei Silva vs. Igor Vovchanchyn now apparently being off the table before it was even announced, there are three remaining confirmed bouts to ponder over.

Most intriguing of these is Ricardo Arona vs. Rameau Thierry Sokoudjou (or just SOKOUDJOU, according to the Pride site). Sokoudjou rose to renown after he blasted Antonio Rogerio Nogueira (reminder; a trained amateur boxer who had never been knocked out in professional MMA competition) into unconsciousness in twenty-three seconds. The litmus test of Sokoudjou's ability comes in the form of another Brazilian light-heavyweight, even more known for consistency than Nogueira.

Arona routinely gets accused of being boring, which is a tad unfair. He was right to be cagey against Silva, but otherwise he has brutalised Kazushi Sakuraba, dominated Alistair Overeem and just came up short against Quinton Jackson in a very compelling fight. Arona is a man who wrestles well, and knows how to use his weight effectively. It would be nice to see his killer instinct more often; perhaps this fight will be the time.

After a feeling out period in which Arona will desperately be trying to avoid the fate that befell his compatriot this past February, things could get interesting. Arona would tra-



'The African Assassin', Cameroon's Sokoudjou (C) Dream Stage Entertainment Inc.

ditionally go for a takedown when warmed up, but once down there, he might want to be careful. Not to predict an upset here, but Sokoudjou is a national champion at judo who currently trains with Team Quest. While Arona definitely has the edge in experience and in winning big matches, the man from Cameroon may prove something of a spoiler once more.

Shinya Aoki is booked to face Pride debutant Brian Lo-A-Njoe. Little is known by me about Dutch Lo-A-Njoe, other than he is a kick-boxer who won his last fight by choke. He also got choked out by Genki Sudo back in 2001. That would suggest he has either improved his grappling game in that time, or that one Oktay Karatas isn't very good.

What is known is that Aoki is inarguably one of the deadliest submission artists in the lightweight division (and technically a 170-pounder, as opposed to Lo-A-Njoe's 155 lb status). It is possible that Lo-A-Njoe might knock Aoki out in this year of upsets, but Aoki hasn't been knocked out in years. Add to that the fact (made up by me, just now) that good MMA fighters who grapple tend to submit less good MMA fighters who kick box, and this is all Aoki.

Rounding out this rather underwhelming card is Makoto Takimoto vs. Zelg Galesic - who, as those familiar with Cage Rage will probably tell you, is pretty handy, having ended his last five fights in as many minutes, largely by strikes. Takimoto is coming off two losses and his best win has come against Dong Sik Yoon (unless you count Sentoryu as a 'good win', as opposed to 'victory column free gift'). I was a tad down on this at first, but it could be entertaining. Can

Takimoto's judo skills undo the striking ability of the Croatian middleweight? Not likely admittedly, but this is probably the dark horse fight of the card.

So that's that for Dream Stage Entertainment and for the active presidency of Sakakibara-san. Let us never forget how he remarked that the pummelled, inhuman, visage of Sakuraba after his beating at the hands of Arona was somehow a good thing. In the light of that, the constant enquiries from Dana White about whether pasty hopefuls 'wanna be fucking fighters' is suddenly music to the ears.

All that remains now is for us to take a moment to reflect on our favourite Old Pride moments. That *Bushido 9* tournament was something else and made us all believe again, yeah? Or the wicked first Rodrigo Nogueira vs. Heath Herring fight; what an epic display of superior skill against near-infinite guts that was. It's sad that what was once an event to be eagerly awaited (even if there was the odd Giant Silva or small native pro wrestler on cards) has been reduced to a card of fights that may or may not be some cop and could be on a par with the likes of 2 Hot 2 Handle.

Whatever the future holds for Pride, we will always be able to look fondly back on what once was (with the added bonus of rose tinted spectacles!). One thing's for sure; this is likely to be an emotional show at the very least, as the Japanese public sees Pride handed over to the new Pride International Holdings LLC. At least Takada-san will be sticking around. Will he be hitting any more gigantic drums while in his pants? Who can say, in this brave new world of MMA.