

## Coughlin previews UFC in Belfast

â€œThe Half-Guarded Truthâ€•

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â€œUFC 72: Clay Guida and â€˜The Other Griffinâ€™â€•

You know thereâ€™s too much MMA on TV when a guy previews one show, then a few days later has to preview another. Said guy then looks at the calendar and realizes that next week there are two more shows, on consecutive days no less, that need previewing. Then he uses the word â€œpreviewâ€• too many times in a paragraph because he canâ€™t find his thes

Yes, folks, thereâ€™s another UFC event, and unlike the last one or the one a week from Saturday, they expect you to pay for this bad boy. Now, Iâ€™m the kind of guy that can watch every MMA show around and still pop in a tape of old events during the down time to keep my company, so Iâ€™m happy thereâ€™s a PPV this Saturday, but I canâ€™t imagine anyone else cares. Heck, with a main-event of Rich Franklin v. Yushin Okami, I think there could be a two-year MMA broadcast drought and few would give a crap. I understand that this was originally designed as an HBO special, and that Spike TV then decided to pass on airing it for fear of over-saturation (someone gets it), but asking people to shell out hard-earned money for a Yushin Okami fight is borderline insulting. People are going to pay to watch a PPV that is arguably less interesting than the free TV special that airs a week later? The UFC brags about how UFC 73 is named â€œStackedâ€• and features two title fights, Tito Ortiz, and the debut of Rodrigo Nogueira. Would it have been so tough to take just one of those fights and put it on this card? Was giving Nathan Marquardt a title shot so pressing? Couldnâ€™t the UFC have taken Okami, matched him up against Marquardt and then had Franklin rematch Silva?

Despite presenting a card that may not appeal to the casual fan, there is still reason to watch UFC 72, live from Northern Ireland: Tyson Griffin is fighting Clay Guida.

A bout featuring two basically unknown guys â€“ both coming off losses in fights that werenâ€™t even on the main card â€“ is normally something about which fight fans need get excited, but they should. Part of writing these preview columns is that I make predictions. â€œAnderson Silva knocks out Rich Franklin,â€• or, â€œNick Diaz finishes Takanori Gomi in the second round,â€• come to mind. Well, Iâ€™m going to make a prediction about this fight that differs from any prediction Iâ€™ve made before. Yes, Iâ€™ll break the fight down, and yes, Iâ€™ll even write who I think will win, but my prediction is a simple one: the pace of Griffin-Guida will match any previously set, and may mark the standard by which all future fights are judged.

Tyson Griffin (no relation to fellow UFC 72 card-member, Forrest Griffin) is aggressive in the way that a starving dog smelling prime rib is aggressive. He can strike (ask Urijah Faber), he can wrestle (ask Frankie Edgar), and he can submit (ask David Lee), but thatâ€™s not particularly noteworthy in 2007; there are more guys that can do it all than guys that only specialize. No, it is aggression that makes Griffin special. He comes out and immediately puts the pressure on his opponent, taking the fight to whomever dared step forward that day. Itâ€™s not surprising then that of his eight wins, seven have come in under five minutes, and all eight were conclusive finishes. Whatever doubts people may have once had that such fury can sometimes get out of control should forever be put to rest now that Griffin has relocated to Las Vegas to train with Randy Couture. Striking, grappling, aggression, and the mind of Couture in your corner all make for a combination that rightfully has many insiders pegging Griffin as a future world champion.

If you ever wanted a reason to love Travis Lutter, here's one: his losing at UFC 67 in the second round to Anderson Silva meant there was enough time left on the PPV to air the fight between Tyson Griffin and Frankie Edgar. Easily a Fight of the Year contender, Griffin-Edgar was an amazing display of lightweight athleticism. 15 minutes of both men giving it their all, culminating in the final seconds with Griffin "down on the cards at that point" locking in a knee bar and cranking it for all he's worth, made the fight an instant classic. When a normal man would have tapped from the agony of their knee bending in a manner nature never intended, Edgar held on, stopped fighting Griffin and instead fought the pain. As a reward for surviving, Edgar was awarded a unanimous decision victory. Edgar pulled off the upset, Griffin's quest to one day become the UFC lightweight champion was momentarily derailed, and everyone watching applauded. However, a hard-fought, Fight of the Year loss is ultimately still a loss, which makes it imperative that Griffin net a win and get back on course. To do that, he will need to get through a man that surpasses his own tenacity "Clay Guida.

Chicago-area born, bred, and still residing, Guida is notorious for his wrestling and conditioning. He made his MMA debut in 2003, and until March of 2006, had kind of gone unknown to a lot of fans. He would pick up a few nice wins "Bart Palaszewski, Joe Jordan" but also suffer a few losses, to guys like Gabe Lamley and Tristan Yunker. Guida's fate changed when he was matched against Josh Thompson as part of the Frank Shamrock v. Caesar Gracie card. Thompson was, and is, a top lightweight that Strikeforce was grooming to be a focal point of their 155 pound division, and on the undercard of the event that still holds the North American paid attendance record, he and Guida stole the show. For five rounds, both men fought like there was a million dollars on the line, and when the final bell sounded, it was Guida that had his hand raised. The Chicagoan shouldn't have won the fight; Thompson was a much better striker, slicker on the ground, physically bigger, and a comparable wrestler. Guida won because never stopped coming forward. He relentlessly broke Thompson down, punishing him with one takedown after another, and when on the ground, keeping active the entire time. Forget about taking a round off, Guida didn't take a single second off. In 25 minutes, Guida had made himself a name. He would have a few more fights before finally being beckoned to the Octagon. His debut saw him live up to the hype, as he overwhelmed Justin James, eventually securing a choke in the 2nd round.

Guida's last fight was a close loss to MMA veteran, Din Thomas. As he had in his other fights, Guida pressured the Ultimate Fighter 4 star. With his wild, caveman-like hair whipping through the air, Guida shot in on Thomas time and again. Thomas would escape and the two would battle standing until Guida once again shot. The fight concluded with Guida the loser, but it was close enough that some observers felt "The Carpenter" won, and no one thought he gave it anything less than his all. UFC President, Dana White is fond of saying he likes guys who go out and fight, not just win; Clay Guida is that kind of fighter.

Of the two men likely to steal the show this Saturday, Griffin is the more well-rounded fighter, but Guida's "make a tornad blush" pace can be unnerving. He doesn't seem to care if his opponent can throw his hands more accurately, or that someone might be faster, stronger, and more skilled on the ground, Guida simply comes forward like a blitzkrieg. Guida doesn't make you fight for 15 minutes, he makes you fight for 900 seconds. Some fighters like to get in a rhythm, allow the fight play out a bit, get a feel for how things will happen, and maybe turn the contest into a chess game. Clay Guida's a speed-chess master on crack; he's a Ferrari going through a school zone; he's Roger Clemens firing a 90 MPH fastball during a slow-pitch softball game. And he never gets tired.

I think Tyson Griffin is going to take the fight but he'll have to earn it. He's fought fast and hard enough in the past that Guida's pace shouldn't overwhelm him, and from there he just has too many tools. Griffin is so powerful that he can stop the takedown and in the few short moments that pass before Guida shoots again, Tyson can imitate the man whose name he shares and throw bombs. It's inevitable that Guida will get the fight to the mat, and once there he'll never stop moving, constantly looking to either punch or pass guard, but Griffin has demonstrated solid enough submission skills that he shouldn't be totally lost when this eventuality occurs.

In a lightweight pool so deep it should be renamed the lightweight Marianas Trench, two losses in a row will probably keep a fighter from a title shot for a few years. With land in the form of a contender's spot a ways off in the distance, it is sink or swim for Tyson Griffin and Clay Guida.

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