

## Mike Coughlin on UFC 76

â€œThe Half-Guarded Truthâ€•

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â€œUFC 76 Previewâ€•

Let us dispense with the normal pleasantries and get right to it, shall we?

Chuck Liddell v. Keith Jardine

On one side of the cage will stand Chuck Liddell, the former UFC light heavyweight champion, the man who has knocked out Randy Couture (twice), Tito Ortiz (twice), Babalu Sobral (twice), Alistair Overeem, Guy Mezger, and Kevin Randleman. In a career that has spanned 9+ years and 24 fights, Quinton Jackson is the only man that can say, Chuck canâ€™t beat me.

On the other side of the cage will stand Keith Jardine, the former TUF 2 contestant who has unavenged losses to Stephan Bonnar, Houston Alexander, Travis Wiuff, and Rashad Evans (while they were on the reality show). His biggest wins are a first round knockout of Forrest Griffin and a unanimous decision over Wilson Gouveia.

Jardine has solid leg kicks, decent â€“ not spectacular â€“ power in his hands, and a willingness to press the action. Liddell is almost impossible to take to the mat, more difficult to keep there, and can knock out anyone at anytime with a single punch.

Where Jardine tends to move straight forward, Liddell uses lateral movement, both to cut off the cage and to force opponents to chase him. Prior to the UFC 71 loss to Jackson, Liddell had displayed a chin rivaling any in the sport. Jardine is tough. Against Gouveia, â€œThe Dean of Meanâ€• was being peppered with shots from head to toe, but he weathered the storm and came back to earn the decision win.

Had this fight taken place on May 25, 2007 â€“ the day before Liddell lost to Jackson for the second time â€“ I suspect those willing to pick Jardine would be few and far between. Iâ€™m not of the opinion that three years of light heavyweight dominance should be ignored because Jackson timed a right hook perfectly.

On one side of the cage, one man will raise his hands in victory. On the other side, one man will lay crumpled on the mat, having just been knocked out with a jaw-shattering punch.

Chuck Liddell, round one, knockout.

## Forrest Griffin v. Mauricio Shogun Rua

Always a bridesmaid, never a bride, Forrest Griffin needs at least one signature win on his resume before he can seriously be considered a challenger for the light heavyweight championship. This is a golden opportunity for such a win. All he'll need to do is beat a man many consider the best 205 lb fighter on the planet.

It's not every day that UFC fans get to witness the debut of one of the sport's greatest fighters, but that's exactly what they'll watch in Shogun Rua. Pound for pound, there are few in the sport that have displayed the skills of Rua. He bested Quinton Jackson while standing, out-grappled Judoka Kazuhiro Nakamura, outlasted Rogerio Nogueira in a war of attrition, and finished both Ricardo Arona and Alistair Overeem (twice) with frighteningly efficient ground and pound. In fact, in the Arona bout and second Overeem fight, Shogun knocked out both men with a single strike from the top position, a feat that would cause even Fedor to nod with approval.

Where Shogun can point to any of a half dozen wins as his most impressive, Griffin's biggest victory was a moral one, when he went the distance with Tito Ortiz in April of 2006, losing a split decision that is still argued about today. One half of the UFC's single most important fight of all time -- his decision win over Stephan Bonnar on the finals of the first Ultimate Fighter -- Griffin is as well known for his charisma, wit, and charm as he is for his never-say-die attitude in the cage.

In his UFC career, Griffin has never truly outclassed anyone of note. The closest he came was in his rematch with Bonnar. Even then, though it appeared that Griffin had matured and grown as a fighter, his win was one best categorized as solid and unquestionable, but not an outclassing. He lost to Keith Jardine, had an unimpressive, though still unquestionable, win over Hector Ramirez, and hardly looked world-class in knocking out Elvis Sinosic. While Griffin looked the equal of Ortiz, Shogun has constantly proven himself a class above even fighters like Ortiz.

2007 has featured more upsets than one can count, and it has become trendy to see another one in the making with this fight. After all, fighters coming directly from PRIDE, notably Mirko CroCop, have seemed all too human inside the Octagon and some wonder if Shogun will suffer a similar fate. This is the 3rd time in his career that Rua will fight in a cage. He split victories the previous two times, knocking out Eric Wanderlei and then tapping out to Babalu Sobral. Rua will also find himself without two of Chute Boxe Academy's favorite techniques, the dreaded soccer kick and stomp. Shogun is still going to win. Wherever the fight goes, Rua has the advantage and a Randy Couture-like miracle would be needed for Griffin to win.

Mauricio Rua, round two, knockout.

## Jon Fitch v. Diego Sanchez

The official record will show that Diego Sanchez's first loss was to Josh Koscheck this past April the 7th. In reality, he was defeated eleven months prior. John Alessio, now fighting with moderate success for the UFC's sister promotion, the WEC, showed the world how Sanchez can be beaten: be patient, concentrate on stuffing the takedown, keep the fight standing, and never overextend yourself. Credit to Sanchez that he was able to use his near-legendary stamina to never stop pressing the action and force Alessio into making a mistake. Though Alessio drew up the game plan, ultimate execution fell upon the shoulders of Koscheck.

Whether respect for the wrestling pedigree of a former NCAA National Champion, the ill effects of staph infection, or a little of both, Sanchez never even attempted to take down Koscheck, let alone force the American Kickboxing Academy standout to defend one. From there, the rest of the plan worked perfectly. Koscheck remained patient, picked the right moment to throw a punch or two, and never got too greedy. It may have made for a boring fight, but it was a clear win for Koscheck. If there was a knock on Koscheck, it was that he didn't finish Sanchez.

What Alessio started, and Koscheck made work, Jon Fitch will complete.

If a man can be known for being unknown, it's Fitch. For a while, he was considered the welterweight division's best kept secret. Teammate Koscheck may have got all the attention from his Ultimate Fighter experience (a show that Fitch was literally a plane flight away from being on until plans fell through at the last possible moment), but Fitch has been waiting in the wings, honing his skills. A former captain of the Purdue wrestling team, Fitch is a brown belt in jiu-jitsu, and has shown crisp, accurate punching ability, with knockout power at times. Though this is clearly his attempted coming out party, it seems like the secret has leaked and while folks may not know a lot about Fitch, they know they should know.

Sanchez often lives up to his nickname, "The Nightmare," in overwhelming opponents with speed and athleticism that never relents, and causing many a fighter to wonder what it is they've stepped into. Hidden behind his awkward boxing is true knockout power, and few have combined wrestling and jiu jitsu like Sanchez, but it is his stamina that allows him to compete at a world-class level. He is a juggernaut that moves like a cheetah. He comes forward, then comes forward again, and again, and again, and again. He must have the lungs of Paul Bunyan because Sanchez seems to take one giant breath at the beginning of the first round and then exhales only once the fight is over. He doesn't stop to breath, he doesn't think when he fights, he moves on instinct and feel.

Unfortunately for Sanchez, his bread and butter is to use his wrestling ability to create a takedown, and then overwhelm a foe on the mat. Fitch will be difficult to take down. Though Fitch is a legitimate brown belt in jiu jitsu, Sanchez has had illustrious grapplers like Karo Parisyan and Nick Diaz on their backs and neither of them seemed prepared for what Sanchez offered. Still, Fitch is sound enough that it isn't a guarantee he loses if forced into guard. And if Sanchez can get it to the ground, he's in trouble. Koscheck, using nothing more than a jab-straight combination over and over again was able to outbox Sanchez. Fitch is a better striker than Koscheck and the longer the fight stays standing, the more danger Sanchez is in.

Can Sanchez take Fitch down, keep Fitch down, and do damage? Or will Fitch follow in the steps of Alessio and Koscheck? Robert Frost may have taken the road less traveled, but Fitch will walk in the footsteps of others and find victory at the end of the night.

Jon Fitch, unanimous decision.

Tyson Griffin v. Thiago Tavares

Death, taxes, and in 2007, Tyson Griffin having a fight of the year caliber bout. Griffin entered the UFC with a 7-0 record and was considered the next big thing in the lightweight division. Time will tell if the hype will ever lead to a world championship, but there is little question Griffin has been amongst the most consistently entertaining fighters in MMA this year. UFC 67. On a card featuring Anderson Silva, Mirko CroCop, and Quinton Jackson, it was the Griffin v. Frank Edgar fight that had everyone talking when the night was over. UFC 72, the first ever card from Northern Ireland. The main-event of Rich Franklin v. Yushin Okami failed to light the world on fire, but Griffin v. Clay Guida may as well have set the enter universe ablaze. One hesitates to call upon a cliché, but a cliché is demanded, "Griffin-Tavares: In this fight the real winner will be the fans."

Heavy hands, a good chin, a good ground game, and some of the freakiest balance in MMA have helped Griffin to victory in the past. Solid Muay Thai, great athleticism, and having trained Judo since he was 5 and jiu jitsu since age 9, Tavares might know a thing or two on the ground. Undeclared in his career, Tavares won't want Anaheim to be home to his first loss.

If a fight is decided in the gym, this continues to be a toss up. Griffin is a Caesar Gracie product, having trained with the Diaz brothers, Dave Terrell, Jake Shields, and Gilbert Melendez. Tavares? Just a few guys named Rodrigo Nogueira, Murilo Bustamante, and Milton Vieira.

Winners, losers, who cares? Either man could challenge for the lightweight title (assuming the Sean Sherk mess ever clears) and either man would make an excellent champion.

Tyson Griffin, unanimous decision.

Official picks for the entire event:

Chuck Liddell d. Keith Jardine, R1 KO

Shogun Rua d. Forrest Griffin, R2 KO

Jon Fitch d. Diego Sanchez, unanimous decision

Tyson Griffin d. Thiago Tavares, unanimous decision

Kazuhiro Nakamura d. Lyoto Machida, unanimous decision

Anthony Johnson d. Rich Clementi, R2 KO

Diego Saraiva d. Jeremy Stephens, unanimous decision

Christian Wellisch d. Scott Junk, unanimous decision

Matt Wiman d. Michihiro Omigawa, R3 TKO

Mike Coughlin is the host of Five Star Radio, a weekly radio program covering all the world of MMA, found exclusively at [f4wonline.com](http://f4wonline.com)  
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