

Coughlin on the PRIDE vs. UFC "battle"

• The Half-Guarded Truth •

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For the week of 09/23/07

• The Myth of the PRIDE v. UFC War •

Following Forrest Griffin's surprising third round submission of Mauricio "Shogun" Rua, much of the talk in the MMA world has once again centered around the question of which promotion was better, that is, which company had better fighters: PRIDE or the UFC. As far as pointless debates go, this is a good one.

There have been five notable PRIDE debuts in the UFC this year:

Quinton Jackson, runner up in the PRIDE 205 lb Grand Prix, former #1 Contender for the 205 lb title

Jackson has had a tiny, tiny, tiny bit of success inside the 8 sides of cage. Finishing Marvin Eastman and Chuck Liddell, then defeating Dan Henderson to become the undisputed light heavyweight champion of the world is a pretty darn good little year. When people talk about PRIDE fighters not doing well in the UFC, they never mention Rampage. Hmmm.

Mirko CroCop, 2006 PRIDE Open Weight Grand Prix Champion

Easily the biggest bust of a signing for the UFC since Pedro Rizzo was inked to a 6-fight guaranteed contract, CroCop's time in the Octagon has been awful. He looked lackluster in chasing Eddie Sanchez around the cage, lost by brutal high kick to Gabriel Gonzaga, and then lost a decision to Cheick Kongo. This is in stark contrast to his PRIDE career, where he had victories over Aleksander Emelianenko, Josh Barnett, and Heath Herring, just to name a few.

Heath Herring, former #1 contender for the PRIDE Heavyweight Championship

Heath's gone 1-2 in the Octagon, losing his much-hyped debut to relative unknown Jake O'Brien, then beating relatively unskilled Brad Imes in a 3 round sloppy war, before finally losing a decision to former PRIDE foe Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira. Seriously, Jake O'Brien.

Mauricio Rua, 2005 PRIDE 205 lb Grand Prix Champion

Shogun walked into the Octagon universally recognized as one of the top light heavyweights on the planet, and walked out having been tapped by Griffin, a man most assuredly not universally recognized as a top light heavyweight.

Rodrigo Nogueira, former PRIDE Heavyweight Champion

This one perplexes me, but his fight at UFC 73 is brought up, for some reason, as evidence of UFC superiority and I'm not sure why. He fought Herring, a "PRIDE guy," and with the exception of one kick at the end of the first round, dominated the entire fight. Still, I suppose that Nogueira not submitting Herring in the first 3 minutes is a sign that he's off.

Three of those five can safely be called disappointing while the jury awaits Nogueira's next fight. But, so what? Does this really prove the UFC fighters are better than PRIDE fighters? If so, what does it mean that Quinton Jackson, clearly the epitome of a PRIDE fighter, has gone 3-0 in the UFC this year, including handing Chuck Liddell his first loss since Liddell fought Jackson in 2003!

UFC MW champion Anderson Silva fought in the PRIDE ring well before coming to the UFC and he looked nothing short of unstoppable during his UFC career. Of course, Silva's last stop prior to the UFC was Cage Rage, so I suppose we should all be in awe of Cage Rage, which is now owned by EXC, so EXC > UFC?

Kazuhiro Nakamura lost on Saturday to Lyoto Machida. Was that a UFC guy beating a PRIDE guy, or was Machida actually representing Antonio Inoki? Is the Inoki Genome what-cha-ma-call-it wrestling promotion better than PRIDE?

Why stop with just PRIDE guys coming to the UFC, why not go the other way around? Guy Mezger's first listed professional fight was in the UFC (he then went to Pancrase, then back to the UFC). The first time he fought in PRIDE was at PRIDE 6, against Akira Shoji. Mezger lost that fight. He then lost to Sakuraba, beat Masaaki Satake, then lost to PRIDE 205 champion Wanderlei Silva. Did Mezger's lack of success in PRIDE mean the UFC was inferior?

Josh Barnett left the UFC as the heavyweight champion. While in PRIDE, he three times (really twice because the first fight shouldn't count) lost to PRIDE's Crocop.

Sean Sherk once fought in PRIDE, it's true. He even won his fight against Ryuki Ueyama at PRIDE: Bushido 2. Was that proof of UFC superiority?

Or, how about when UFC middleweight champion Murilo Bustamante left Zuffa, headed to PRIDE, moved up a weight class, and lost to Rampage Jackson. PRIDE's #1, PRIDE's #1!

Few saw it at the time, but Wanderlei Silva, after starting with the UFC, then going to PRIDE, came back to the UFC and lost to Tito Ortiz in a LHW title fight. Silva returned to PRIDE and dominated. I'm still not sure which organization claims credit for his success (and failure).

Less remembered was when former UFC heavyweight champion Ricco Rodriguez, well on his way to becoming a fighting whale, took on Rodrigo Nogueira and lost a close fight.

Heck, if any fighter that made a name in the UFC is a "UFC fighter" and any fighter that made a name in PRIDE is a "PRIDE fighter" does the recent 3rd round knock out of Ninja Rua at the hands of Robbie Lawler in EXC show UFC dominance?

What about Nick Diaz, pot flowing through his veins or no, tapping out Takanori Gomi? Speaking of Gomi, he once knocked out former UFC LW champion Jens Pulver. UFC beat PRIDE which beat UFC? Wait, what?

Mac Danzig is currently a star on TUF 6, yet he lost in the PRIDE ring to Hayato Sakurai (of course, Sakurai lost to Anderson Silva while in Shooto, and also lost to Matt Hughes in the UFC).

Let's not just limit the discussion to UFC and PRIDE. Strikeforce has been the launching platform for many a great fighter. When Gilbert Melendez beat Tatsuya Kawajiri, was that a big win for Strikeforce? If Melendez shows up in the UFC, does he represent Strikeforce or PRIDE? Maybe he could carry a Shooto flag, as he fought there on occasion, or a WEC banner that was an even earlier stomping ground. Was Fedor's dominance of PRIDE a big victory for RINGS?

All of this is pointless.

Fighters are better than fighters, that's it. When Rampage knocked out Liddell, it was proof that Rampage was better than Liddell, it wasn't proof that PRIDE was better than the UFC. Likewise, when Griffin taps out Shogun, he doesn't mean squat as to the overall quality of PRIDE or UFC fighters.

Even more ludicrous than the whole PRIDE v. UFC debate is the idea that the UFC brought the PRIDE guys in with the intention of seeing them lose. Really? I'm supposed to believe that Dana White is so insecure that he was willing to drop \$350,000, PER FIGHT, on Mirko CroCop because he wanted to see CroCop get beat a few times? Zuffa paid Shogun THREE TIMES what Griffin got because they really wanted to show their fans that Forrest was better than some guy said fans have never heard of?

The UFC signed the PRIDE guys for one reason: they're great fighters! Zuffa wanted CroCop, Shogun, Nogueira, and (fingers crossed) Fedor to come in and be star attractions. It's not like Dana was sitting around and thought, "Ya know, feel bad for those PRIDE guys, I think I'll sign them to big money deals out of the generosity of my heart." Now, the UFC may get a bit of satisfaction out of "improving" to everyone that the UFC was always just as good as PRIDE, but again, what does that mean? It's not like this is an ongoing war or anything. MMA is about one thing: two guys get in a cage, they fight, one guy walks out a winner. White has known this for some time. At the time CroCop was first signed, Dana was asked a question along the lines of, "What'll it say if a PRIDE guy comes in and beats all the UFC guys?" Dana approximately responded that it didn't matter because the UFC had CroCop under contract. He was right! CroCop, Rampage, Nogueira, Shogun, etc. are all UFC fighters now. When Rampage beat Liddell it wasn't PRIDE beating UFC, it was UFC beating UFC.

Mixed martial arts is an individual sport and the glory of victory belongs to the individual, not the name of the promotion.

Mike Coughlin hosts Five Star Radio, found exclusively at f4wonline.com. He'll also be on The Fight Network this Thursday. Yes, they invited him back.
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