

## While everyone else talks Lesnar, Ben Miller is thinking something else

THE QUEST FOR TEN MILLION By Ben Miller Ten million viewers or ten million dollars? That was the question that ran through my head after Dana White was asked about putting a Brock Lesnar match on SpikeTV. If Brock Lesnar fights on television, chances are all MMA viewership records will be shattered. Ten million viewers is not just a possibility, but a probability given UFC's newfound swagger with the sports media machine. But are the ten million unpaid viewers (and the accompanying goodwill) worth the ten million dollars that will be lost if Zuffa eschews pay-per-view for Mr. Lesnar's next fight? Ten million dollars pays for a lot of office workers, fight bonuses and influence peddlers. As successful as UFC is, they could do well to build on those three things. And as damaging as Brock's post-fight actions were, his contrition at the press conference saved most of the drawing power he surrendered. Now UFC is faced with a truly dramatic choice. A battle between two irreconcilable goods: give the people what they want or give the employees what they deserve. To listen to Dana White talk about his vision of promoting, it's clear that he has a populist lean. Like so many young, successful people of this era, part of what drives him is a desire to avenge the injustice and narrow-mindedness that he perceived when he was young. It's the classic thirst for rebellion that causes all societies to go through cycles of change. Young Dana hated that top boxers often avoided top competition. He hated that promoters tossed aside fighters who made them rich. And perhaps most of all, he hated that the public at large almost never got to see big time fights live on free (or at least basic cable) television. Mature Dana has accumulated enough power to right all three wrongs. But while the problems of competition and loyalty have been resolved through a mutual sacrifice, that ten million dollars makes any potential sacrifice hard to negotiate. Mr. White acknowledged the difficulties of SpikeTV fights after the question was raised. He said that he'll continue to put big fights on Spike and that he'll try to get Lesnar on board, but he also said that, "I'd have to work it out with [Lesnar] financially," before anything gets confirmed. The good news is that Dana has leverage over Brock right now. In any other sport (with the possible exception of boxing), Brock would have been fined and suspended for his post-match meltdown. He turned off mainstream viewers with his poor sportsmanship, MMA fans with his obvious attempt to give a money pro wrestling promo and an important sponsor with a dunderheaded potshot at Bud Light (though at least wrestling fans seemed to love it). In short, he owes Dana big time. He owes Dana for not penalizing him and for salvaging some of his image with a masterful orchestration of the post-fight press conference. But is that enough? Is the leverage and the potential viewership and the monetary sacrifice enough to put together a Brock Lesnar fight on SpikeTV? (It must be noted that in conversation after the show, Dave Meltzer said he was out and out angry at the thought of putting Brock on SpikeTV because of how much money would be lost.) So we are back to the original question: Ten million viewers or ten million dollars? Which to choose? There may be a way to get both. There may be a way to keep pay-per-view draws like Brock Lesnar off of SpikeTV and still draw ten million viewers: Bring back Tito Ortiz. Dana White still has an axe to grind with Tito Ortiz. It was evident in his response to a question about why none of Tito's victories were included in the 100 greatest UFC fights of all time. After first equivocating that there were some of Tito's matches included, he responded to the fact that all of those matches were losses with a sinister grin. "That's a good point. You're telling me that Tito's in the top 100 getting beat up in every one of them?" Dana's enmity aside, the stars are aligned for another blockbuster return for Tito Ortiz. Outside offers are failing to materialize. He's had time off to heal. And he has a potential fight that just might draw ten million viewers on SpikeTV. A rematch of one of the matches that should have been included in the 100 greatest UFC fights of all time -- Tito Ortiz vs. Forrest Griffin. Everything is set up perfectly if Anderson Silva cashes in his status as a -340 favorite next month against Griffin. Griffin will be coming off two consecutive losses, so his value as a pay-per-view draw will have been weakened. His star power remains strong, however, so a match on television will surely attract attention. The same goes for Ortiz, who despite coming far closer than anyone to beating Lyoto Machida in his previous fight, is not considered a championship contender. There are hurdles to overcome before a Griffin vs. Ortiz rematch is booked for SpikeTV. Griffin will surely want the fight, but he may have gotten used to main event paydays by now. Tito's financial demands are also sure to cause trouble, but perhaps he can be tempted by a guaranteed pay-per-view main event if he beats Forrest a second time. Whatever the difficulties, it behooves Dana White to consider this path because it might satisfy the quest for ten million viewers without sacrificing a match worth ten million dollars. \*\*\*\*\* Email: benjamiller@me.com Twitter: <http://twitter.com/benjamiller>