

Matt Hughes seeks to avenge loss against B.J. Penn

Written by Ralph Gonzalez

Thursday, 21 September 2006 19:00

It was the slam heard around the mixed martial arts world. The date was November second of 2001 and Matt Hughes had just pulled off an upset over the Welterweight champion Carlos Newton in spectacular fashion. The country boy from Hillsboro, Illinois had arrived with a loud thump and things would never be the same. "Things definitely changed for me. I became more recognizable, people started asking for my autograph and pictures. I got a lot of notice after that win," said Hughes (41-4) from Anaheim where he'll defend his UFC Welterweight title against Hawaiian B.J. "The Prodigy" Penn (10-3-1).

The match is the main event of a UFC Pay Per View taking place on Saturday with the TV signal emanating from the Anaheim Pond in Southern California.

Hughes was losing his bout against Newton who had his rival in a choke hold when Hughes, showing tremendous strength, stood up and carried Newton towards the Octagon fence and slammed the very credible champion onto the canvas where he was knocked out cold. It was the beginning of an excellent career for the 33-year-old that'll now face Penn for the second time in what will be an important rematch for Hughes. Penn has the distinction of being the last man to beat the former All-American wrestler in 2004's UFC 46. "I just wasn't as complete a fighter when I last fought B.J. I know it sounds like an old wife's tale but honestly I wouldn't be the fighter I am today without that loss. I learned so much from it. I learned that I had to work on many more things like my striking and grappling. I definitely gained something from that loss," says Hughes.

Originally scheduled to fight George St. Pierre who he already beat via submission, Hughes was elated to hear he'd be fighting Penn. "When I heard B.J. Penn was going to be my opponent I felt really excited and motivated. I'll take the opportunity to avenge a loss over just a regular win any time," said Hughes. B.J. Penn is a world-class fighter well versed in all subjects of the MMA science. "He's a well-rounded fighter. That's what makes him so great. He's a great striker and grappler and very fast. He's also a pretty decent wrestler. He's an athletic guy that ties all his strengths together very well," said Hughes. Penn is coming off a unanimous decision loss to Hughes' originally scheduled opponent St. Pierre. What's that old saying? Styles make fights? Very true in any combat sport.

Hughes' latest win came against the man who helped build the UFC. The Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu master, Royce Gracie, was untouchable throughout the ranks of the UFC for almost half a decade. Gracie defeated all comers whether they were wrestlers, grapplers or boxers; his Gracie Jiu-Jitsu proved greater than all the other martial arts.

But that was then and Hughes is now.

Hughes easily destroyed the legend and was on route to submitting Gracie with an armbar but reportedly told Grappling magazine "that he let go of the armbar because he did not want to break Gracie's arm."

Matt Hughes seeks to avenge loss against B.J. Penn

Written by Ralph Gonzalez

Thursday, 21 September 2006 19:00

It was obvious from watching the bout, that the prideful Gracie, who had never been submitted, wasn't about to be submitted for the first time now, even if he had to suffer a broken arm. Hughes then quickly mounted Gracie from the back and landed an unanswered volley of punches to the back of the Brazilian's head that prompted the referee to stop the fight. It was Hughes' highest profile win. What happened to Gracie? Was it his age? Were Gracie's skills irrelevant in the Octagon. Hughes has his own thoughts regarding the match and the former legend. "I never would of thought that I'd be able to dominate Gracie the way I did on the ground. I though that when we hit the ground he'd be the one dictating and I'd be the one defending. I feel like I evolved as an MMA fighter and Gracie didn't. He still had this notion that Gracie Jiu-Jitsu was so superior. But the facts are that you have to be well-rounded to be succesful in the Octagon," said Hughes.

Hughes is a devout Christian who doesn't see his faith clashing with his violent profession. "I don't go out there with the intent of hurting anybody. I go out there with the intent of winning. Besides, if you look at the Old Testament you'd see how violent God was," said Hughes. Hughes and his twin brother Mark came back to the church after being regular attendees as children. He and Mark were baptized and surrendered their life to Jesus. It was his religion that inspired him to think of others instead of getting caught up in the everyday rat race. Hughes spends his non-combat time between helping the youth of his community and helping out at a Mexican orphanage named Rancho 3M where he assists in the development and construction of dwellings.

The father of two feels grateful for his station in life and feels that MMA shaped his future into something he could've never envisioned. "If I wasn't doing Mixed Martial Arts as a profession I'd probably be working two jobs. I'd be working on the family farm and working some type of construction work. Something with my hands like construction, electrical, something along those lines," he stated.

Hughes is expecting Penn to show up as fierce as always but feels he'll ultimately avenge his loss. "He's technically better all over but I don't think he's changed a whole lot. I think he'll be pretty much the same type of fighter I encountered last time out," said Hughes. "I think I've changed a lot more than he has."

Surprisingly, the former wrestling phenom likes to watch one of the best strikers in the business when it comes to personal favorites. "Chuck Liddell is a very unique person that can throw punches like no one's business. He doesn't really worry about getting hit like most people do. He's got a hard head. If he gets someone to trade with him then he's pretty happy. I personally like watching the strikers more than any other fighters. Myself as a striker, I feel I match up pretty well against any of the MMA fighters. Against a boxer I'd be nothing, but in the Octagon I'm a pretty good striker."

Minutes before his fights, Hughes has a ritual that he goes through. "I'm usually pretty relaxed just before a fight. I'll hit the mitts for a little while and then sit there and visualize the fight," he says. So what can we expect from Hughes on Saturday night? "You're going to see a lot more tools than you're used to from me. I'm not going to go out there and go for the takedown right away. I'm going to let my hands go a little bit. If I can take him down then I will, but if not, I'm

Matt Hughes seeks to avenge loss against B.J. Penn

Written by Ralph Gonzalez

Thursday, 21 September 2006 19:00

more than prepared to exchange punches. God willing this will be my night and I'll avenge the loss. That will make it a truly satisfying win," ends Hughes.

Catch Hughes vs. Penn on Pay Per View this Saturday at 10 P.M. Eastern/7 P.M. Pacific. Also on the card are Mike Swick vs. David Loiseau, Jason Lambert vs. Rashad Evans Joe Lauzon vs. Jens Pulver, Gabe Ruediger vs. Melvin Guillard, Roger Huerta vs. Jason Dent, Mario Neto vs. Eddie Sanchez and Danny Abbadı vs. Jorge Gurgel. For more info go to www.ufc.com