

Liddell/Ortiz II: Whose evolution is more adept?

Written by David A. Avila

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Might doesn't always make right as many will see when Tito "Bad Boy" Ortiz engages UFC light heavyweight champion Chuck "The Iceman" Liddell on Saturday.

Two years have passed since Liddell and Ortiz first met and now the world anxiously awaits the aftershock of their first encounter with a sold out show at the MGM Grand and an expected record-breaking pay-per-view telecast.

Forget about the numbers, Ortiz wants his title back.

"That title is mine and I'm taking it back," said Ortiz (15-4) during a press conference held in November. "I'm not the same fighter I was when we last fought."

The rather lithe Liddell bludgeoned Ortiz on April 2004 with his usual fistic attack that few have been able to solve. With his pure knockout power in either hand, Liddell continues to build a more rounded attack to his game.

"I began as a boxer," Liddell (19-3) said. "Over the years I've learned to adapt my style."

Both fighters have evolved from their original elements. For Ortiz, his wrestling base that enabled him to win the UFC light heavyweight title before losing to Liddell was more than enough. But the loss showed him he needed more to remain with the elite.

"I picked up a lot of boxing technique. I'm not the same fighter I was when I lost the title," said Ortiz, 31, who grew up in Huntington Beach, California.

One boxer who worked with Ortiz was former junior middleweight world champion boxer Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas. Others have come to his aid with boxing secrets.

Ortiz used his newly added boxing technique to his wrestling skills to beat Forrest Griffin and Ken Shamrock twice in the last year.

Liddell, 36, a boxer changed into a martial artist, has evolved from the other side of the spectrum. He too has added other sheets of armor to his war chest.

"Yes I'm really a boxer who has learned to adapt to mixed martial arts," Liddell said. "If you look back to the beginning of UFC, you can see how much everyone has changed from those early days."

In the beginning the grapplers controlled the UFC, but soon other elements of full contact along with adjusted rules have caused changes that make it mandatory for all mixed martial artists to combine boxing, wrestling, jujitsu, kickboxing and street fighting.

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Liddell, a noted dangerous striker, explained how a true boxing stance proves too vulnerable to take downs by grapplers.

“I don’t want to take it to the ground,” says Liddell. “My strength is standing up.”

In his wide almost goofy-like stance, Liddell has developed a method of striking and evading takedowns.

“I developed it over the years,” Liddell says.

On Saturday the world will see whose evolution is more adept.

Tickets are still available and can be purchased at the MGM Grand or by going to www.UFC.com. The first bout begins at 4:30 p.m.