

Can Gracie Stop “The Gracie Hunter” Sakuraba?

Written by David A. Avila
Thursday, 31 May 2007 19:00

Brazil’s Royce Gracie the legendary ju-jitsu master who’s considered the face of mixed martial arts, fights Japan’s own legendary Kazushi “Gracie Hunter” Sakuraba at the Los Angeles Coliseum on Saturday.

Gracie will be attempting to break Sakuraba’s stranglehold over his family when he meets the Japanese wrestler in a fight promoted by FEG, Pro Elite and Showtime in Los Angeles. It’s the first time an MMA event will be held in the expansive stadium.

The first hour of the fight card will be televised on Showtime for free and the rest can be viewed on pay-per-view.

Sakuraba, 38, gained fame after defeated not just Royce Gracie, but three other members of the famous Brazilian ju-jitsu family. No other MMA fighter can make the same claim.

Gracie wants revenge.

“He (Sakuraba) must know what he’s doing to be involved with the number one family in the MMA business,” said Gracie, 40, who lives in Torrance. “I don’t think it’s really a grudge match, he is just an opponent.”

Opponent or not, Sakuraba defeated Royce Gracie in 2000 during a tournament held in Japan that saw the Japanese fighter drill the Brazilian with an abundance of kicks to the leg that incapacitated Gracie. His family was forced to concede the win to Sakuraba.

Later Sakuraba defeated Renzo and Ryan Gracie. He had already defeated Royler Gracie a year before tackling Royce. The media dubbed the former Japanese pro wrestler the “Gracie Hunter.”

Gracie hopes the difference in rules will make a difference.

“It’s a different strategy,” said Gracie about fighting under five-minute rounds instead of 15-minute rounds in Japan. “You just have to get used to it.”

The Brazilian fighter was a key in bringing Ultimate Fighting Championship to the forefront of MMA. Gracie was the winner of UFC 1, UFC 2 and UFC 4. Today there have been 71 Ultimate Fighting Championship fight cards.

Gary Shaw, who is co-promoting the event, says who better to stage in an MMA fight card than Gracie.

“This is a historic match with Gracie and Sakuraba,” said Shaw.

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Others on the fight card include former pro wrestler Brock Lesnar, former USC football star Johnnie Morton, Mighty Mo, Jake Shields, Hideo Tokoro, Brad Pickett, Tim Persey and Jonathan Wiezorek to name some of the fighters on the card.

“It’s going to be exciting for me,” said Lesnar, who is familiar with performing in front of large crowds.

Most of the fans attending the first MMA fight card at the LA Coliseum will be curious to see what Gracie and Sakuraba have left.

“I’ve still got a few years left,” said Gracie. “I’m just training to win. I know how to win.”

So does Sakuraba.

Tickets begin at \$10 to \$1,000. The first fight begins at 6 p.m.

Margarito defends WBO title on June 14

WBO welterweight titleholder Antonio Margarito will defend his title against number one challenger Paul Williams on July 14 at the Home Depot Center in Carson, California.

Tickets go on sale today for as low as \$25. They won’t last long.

Margarito was supposed to fight Miguel Cotto for millions of dollars more but the WBO demanded he fight Williams first or lose the belt.

“I fought hard to win that title belt I’m not just going to give it up,” said Margarito. “After my fight with Paul Williams I want to fight Cotto as a champion to a champion.”

Chris Arreola at Home Depot Center

Riverside’s Chris “The Nightmare” Arreola will be also fighting at the Home Depot Center on July 14 in a heavyweight bout possibly against Vinny Maddelone.

The undefeated Arreola was last seen in a winning effort against Malcolm Tann scoring a eighth round knockout at the Palms Casino. He’s managed by Al Haymon who also has Floyd Mayweather, Vernon Forrest and Librado Andrade among others. Arreola is trained by Henry Ramirez at the Lincoln Boxing Club in Riverside.

San Bernardino boxer at Olympic trials

San Bernardino’s Malcolm Franklin a four-time junior U.S National amateur champion has been invited to participate in the Olympic trials that begin on June 1 in Colorado Springs.

Franklin, 18, fights at 106 pounds and has been fighting since age eight years old. He attends Milor High in Rialto.

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He’s a national Golden Gloves champion and a national Police Athletic League champion and a Ringside amateur world champion.

LAPD vs. NYPD charity boxing event

A law enforcement charity boxing tournament for the “Tuesday’s Children of 9-11” will pit Los Angeles Police Department against New York Police Department on Thursday June 7, at the Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers in New York City. Money from the benefit goes to the child survivors of the 9-11 victims.

The event begins at 6 p.m. and ends around 11 p.m. Both teams feature active police officers. For more information go to: www.tuesdayschildren.org

For ticket information call (212) 319-3988.