

UFC 100: It's Here!

Written by David A. Avila
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UFC 100. It's Here!

Mixed martial arts is here to stay. If you need proof, just count to 100.

After more than a decade of underground existence and hand-me-downs from other sports, MMA in the form of an organized traveling promotion company has built a fan base that has grabbed followers like a modern day piper.

Ultimate Fighting Championship 100 is here.

Probably inspired by Hollywood motion pictures like the Octagon, Enter the Dragon, and Bloodsport, the beginnings can be traced back to Nov. 12, 1993 when a "no holds barred" tourney in Denver featuring wrestlers, boxers, savate experts, karate and Brazilian jujitsu black belts was the first official Ultimate Fighting Championship.

UFC has become one of the most powerful prizefighting organizations in the world and hits the century mark with heavyweight champion Brock Lesnar (3-1) in a rematch against former champion Frank Mir (18-4) at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino on Saturday July 11, in Las Vegas. Also on the blockbuster card is welterweight champion Georges St. Pierre. It will be televised on pay-per-view at 7 p.m. local time.

In the beginning there were setbacks that forced UFC to work primarily out of Las Vegas, but now its tentacles have spread worldwide and have been accepted to most of the United States except for New York.

UFC took its hits and went underground following a scathing attack by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz). But after careful maneuvering and changing its creed of no holds barred to mixed martial arts, steadily UFC has crept into respectability and emerged with international star power.

St. Pierre, who defends his UFC welterweight title against Brazil's Thiago Alves (22-4), said he remembers being inspired by the very first UFC event.

"The first time I saw UFC I saw Royce Gracie winning the first tournament," said St. Pierre (18-2), who lives and trains in Quebec, Canada. "The fact that he was using a martial arts weapon that nobody knew at the time, which is Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and he was smaller than all the guys and he was able to win. That's what really inspired me."

The Canadian has emerged as one of the truly gifted MMA fighters and faces a dangerous Brazilian fighter in Alves.

Perhaps the biggest draw will be former pro wrestler Lesnar, seeking to avenge his MMA loss to

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Mir 17 months ago. The massive fighter was making his UFC debut and was ensnared by one of Mir's Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu holds and it was over.

That was in February 2008. Two fights later Lesnar quickly adapted MMA methods and techniques and beat UFC's legendary Randy "The Natural" Couture by second round knockout to capture the heavyweight title.

Mir reached the title fight by stopping Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira in the second round to insure himself a chance to win the UFC heavyweight title a second time.

"He's faster, stronger and bigger than I am," said Mir, who used an ankle lock to force a submission from Lesnar in their first encounter. "I'm a risk-taker kind of fighter."

Lesnar, who wrestled on the pro circuit for several years before leaving, exiled himself into a remote area of Minnesota and brought a number of the best MMA teachers available.

"I enjoy what I am doing. I got the best job in the world, I get paid to train, and paid to fight," said Lesnar, 31, who has endured criticism for getting a crack at the UFC title with only three total MMA bouts. "There are going to be critics and jealous people. I don't give a damn."

Temecula's Dan "Hendo" Henderson (24-7) fights in Las Vegas for the first time since returning to UFC and faces England's Michael "The Count" Bisping (18-1) in a middleweight match. Both were opposing coaches on the popular The Ultimate Fighter reality TV show.

"I don't care what he says. It doesn't matter, it's not going to change how I fight him," Henderson, 38, who is formerly from Victorville. "I'm still going to try to knock him out."

Also on the fight card will be Jon Fitch against Paulo Thiago; and Stephan Bonnar facing Mark Coleman. Several other bouts are scheduled.

The historic and sold out UFC fight card represents a successful and long journey to respectability and admiration.

"Before the sport was not mainstream, it was for many people like human cock fighting," said St. Pierre about UFC's growth. "Now they (media) talk about us like real athletes and that's what we are."