

Fedor vs Silva Kicks Off Strikeforce Tourney in NJ

Written by Brian J. D'Souza
Thursday, 10 February 2011 10:56



Publicity for the Strikeforce eight-man heavyweight tournament kicked into high gear with a presser at Chelsea Piers in New York City on Wednesday to promote this Saturday's night of fights at the Izod Center in New Jersey.

Set against a beautiful view overlooking the Hudson River, all eight participants including Fedor Emelianenko, Fabricio Werdum, Josh Barnett, Antonio "Big Foot" Silva, Andre Arlovski, Alistair Overeem, Sergei Kharitonov and Brett Rogers, were present to demonstrate the magnitude of the event, which airs on Showtime.

"When I look at them, I think, 'What a fine group of young men here. What fine, upstanding citizens,'" said former UFC heavyweight champion and PRIDE veteran Josh Barnett of his fellow tournament participants, "Quite attractive, well-dressed. I should think that when they get up in the morning, they should spend a little extra time thinking about what they've created for this world."

Jokes aside, there is no debating that the Strikeforce tournament houses some of the most accomplished names in the sport of Mixed Martial Arts: Dutch fighter Alistair Overeem currently holds three different titles as champion in Strikeforce, DREAM, and K-1; Fedor Emelianenko was the undisputed pound-for-pound king at heavyweight; Arlovski and Barnett both held the UFC heavyweight title at one point in their careers; and Fabricio Werdum was two-time champion at the ADCC world submission wrestling competition, as well as a two-time world jiu-jitsu champion.

"Sergei has titles from 32-man tournaments in Russia. That's a pretty impressive accomplishment in my book," explained Barnett.

Judging by the mood of the press conference, there will be no ear-biting or weigh-in scuffles between these combatants. There is genuine respect and admiration among them, simply because it will be extremely difficult for any of the fighters just to make it out of the first round. Injuries, licensing issues or other unforeseen circumstances could also knock the odd participant out of action, just as Jermaine Taylor and Andre Dirrell found themselves out of Showtime's Super-Six tournament. The contingency is for the winner of the Shane Del Rosario-Lavar Johnson bout this Saturday to become the first alternate should a replacement be needed.

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Barnett also voiced criticism of the public perception that the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) stands alone as the only representative of top-tier MMA, saying, "At the end of the day, it doesn't matter where we fight, where we put this thing together...it's about the fighters themselves."

Fedor's loss to Werdum last June hung heavy over all of the proceedings. It was assumed that the title of world's best heavyweight had passed with Fedor's loss to the winner of the Brock Lesnar -Shane Carwin clash. But as a nearly defenseless Lesnar cowered in the fetal position during the first round against Carwin, his capability as a well-rounded martial artist was put in doubt, even in victory in that fight. Lesnar's reign was then cut short last October when American Kickboxing Academy standout Cain Velasquez demolished him at UFC 121.

At the moment, Cain Velasquez is out-of-action with a torn rotator cuff, and Junior dos Santos is set to face the already-beaten Brock Lesnar for the interim UFC heavyweight title. Due to these circumstances, all bets on the rightful heir to the heavyweight throne are off until someone strings together more than a handful of good wins.

This all brings us back to the pivotal question: who among the eight tournament participants has what it takes to come out on top? With Fedor facing Silva and Arlovski matched with Kharitonov, this Saturday we'll get a small hint of the shape of things to come. Audiences will be just as concerned with how victory is attained as they are with the results. The favorites could return to form, or be supplanted by fresh blood—and the underdogs could aim for upsets, or crumble as expected.

Beyond the hype, there is the potential for a compelling set of matches. Every man involved in the tournament will have the opportunity to make their case for themselves.

"Over here, we have the seven best fighters in the world," said Alistair Overeem, motioning across the stage. "The winner of this tournament is going to be the number one in the planet."

Brian J. D'Souza is a Canadian writer who has covered Mixed Martial Arts for ESPN.com, FoxSports.com, CagePotato.com, Heavy.com and FIGHT! magazine.

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FighterforJC says:

That Silva is one weird looking dude. I hope he gets his condition taken care of and I hope it's not going to kill him later on. Glad to see Fedor back in action. We'll see if he can come back from the Werdum loss. I would love to see tha punk Rickson Gracie fight these guys, though. Rickson feasted on fighters who weren't cross trained the way modern MMA fighters are. Rickson still talks some serious trash that disrespect these MMA fighters, including Fedor and Big Nog. I know Rickson is 52 now but for starters I'd like to see him fight Couture, who is very close to his age.

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ultimoshogun says:

This HW tourney reminds me of the good ole days of PRIDE, which in my opinion was the pinnacle of MMA until its demise. A collection of who's who in the HW division. It's good to see Strikeforce gaining some momentum and stealing some of UFC's thunder...they aren't the only show in town anymore. To me this will determine who the #1 HW in the world is. Fedor has been one of my favorites since I first saw him make his debut in PRIDE...the man is a pure wrecking machine. My heart will be rooting for him to win it all. However, Overeem's been collecting wins/titles the last few years and just may add this tourney to his list...this would be huge since he just won the vaunted K-1 Grand Prix. I'm hoping to see the long anticipated clash between Fedor and Overeem in the semis, but neither can look past their first round opponents. My dark horse of the tourney is Josh Barnett.

the Roast says:

HOLY CRAP!! Fedor looks like his face was hit by a brick! That was a fun fight. Edge of your seat stuff. Very nice!

FighterforJC says:

I feel bad for Fedor but I'm happy for Silva. That guy's head is intimidating. He's monstrous. Strong guy. I only saw him fight once in a pretty boring fight on CBS I think it was the undercard of Fedor vs Rogers, not sure. But he's pretty well rounded. His ground skills were very good for a heavyweight his size and he seems to have a solid boxing base as well. As for Fedor, well I saw the fight on YouTube after I read the reports, it wasn't that bad of a loss. It was bad considering it was Fedor, but the articles would have you believe that Fedor got obliterated. He had a bad 2nd round, a very bad one at that. The highlight shown at ESPN made it seem like he got knocked out. But after getting pummeled under the full mount, Fedor regained his composure and managed to attempt a heel hook of some sort before the end of the round. And to his credit, he took his beating like a man and didn't fold the way Brock Lesnar did when he took several hard blows to the face. You still couldn't count Fedor out in that fight and despite the beating he took in that round, had he come out for the 3rd there's no telling what Fedor could've still done to turn things around. With that said, Fedor's inactivity has most definitely hurt him. This was his 4th fight in 2 years. In boxing nowadays that sounds about right, but there were some substantial layoffs during those 2 years, plus the fact that he's now in his mid-30's. He's definitely past his prime. He needs to re-focus and fight more regularly and perhaps take the Randy Couture route and not allow these setbacks to stop him.

the Roast says:

After a close first round of standup Silva tackled Fedor in the opening seconds of the second. He never got up. Silva got on top and pounded Fedor's face into a swollen mess. His eye was closed, they had to stop it. If that was the end for Fedor he went out with alot of class.

brownsugar says:

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Now That's the way I like my MMA,.. With Most matches ending in the first round.... no prolonged rolling around the canvas. Silva was slow and lumbering but technically sound enough to know how to not give away his advantage... and like a slow moving Iceberg he gradually ground his man down with his huge size and weight advantage..no wonder they call him BigFoot... It's time for the guy who looks simultaneously like a traditional old school Jesus portrait or a Terrorist (depending on your point of view) to call it quits... overall some good entertainment to fill in a slow boxing night... I'm sure I'll catch the finals,.. should be a blast too.

brownsugar says:

Silva's next opponent should try to land on the temple,... looks like a man could break his hand on that chin. The knee might work though.

FighterforJC says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;2508]Silva's next opponent should try to land on the temple,... looks like a man could break his hand on that chin. The knee might work though.[/QUOTE]

Seriously though, his his condition probably does make his entire head tougher than most humans. Not only is it ridiculously huge, his entire skull is probably thicker.