Do you remember where you were on May 15, 2004, the night Roy Jones Jr. fought a rematch with Antonio Tarver? I remember being at my University nightclub, the Turret, talking about the then-in-progress match with a random patron.

“So what do you think happened?” he asked.

“Of course Roy won!” I replied, incredulous that the result wasn’t a given.

Later on, the truth came out that a counter left hook had ended RJJ’s reign atop the pound-for-pound list. Jones never had the same aura of invincibility that had powered his virtuoso career up to that point.

Watching Fabricio Werdum slap on a triangle just 69 seconds into the first round at last June’s Strikeforce show was a similar moment—if you blinked, you’d miss the realization that Fedor had slipped. Saturday night at New Jersey’s Izod Center further bronzed that reality when Antonio “Bigfoot” Silva earned a second-round doctor’s stoppage over Emelianenko.

“B*llsh*t!” “Kill the doctor!” “Eff this!” “Let him continue!”—those were the alcohol-laced epithets of the venue spectators when the decision was announced and they were deprived of a third round. One genius even threw a full bottle of water in the direction of the cage—with the missile landing near the bewildered official M-1 photographer.

The first round did not provide a dominant display from the Russian. In the second round, as Silva got top position and rained down punch after punch on Emelianenko, the audience began cheering at Fedor’s escape attempts rather than any offense he put up. With tremendous will, Fedor survived the second round and made it back to his corner.

Neither the anger of the spectators nor the speculation of M-1 Global’s Vadim Finkelstein can deprive Antonio Silva of his rightfully-earned victory. Whatever slight chance of a comeback Fedor could have launched in the third, the momentum had turned against him. Not just in the fight—but perhaps in Emelianenko’s career.

What others refused to accept was made crystal clear by the Russian in his post-fight interview:

“Something went wrong from the very beginning and I didn’t re-adjust myself. Maybe it’s the

time to leave."

Going from Fabricio Werdum to Antonio Silva in the first round of one of the strongest heavyweight tournaments assembled in recent Mixed Martial Arts history was like going out of the frying pan and into the fire. In losing, the realization that he wasn't what he used to be was probably far more painful to Fedor than his facial trauma. He might have been the anti-star who shunned the media spotlight as a personal or cultural choice; he might not have had the wider appeal of UFC-backed heavyweights or the mythological ability ascribed to Rickson and Royce of the Gracie clan, but Emelianenko was known by core fans and educated media to be the very best of his era.

Like Sonny LoSpecchio's speech about real love in A Bronx Tale, "They come along like the great fighters, every ten years. Rocky Marciano. Sugar Ray Robinson. Joe Louis. Sometimes you get 'em all at once."

For a time, we had Fedor. The tapes will always be there—standing with Mirko Cro Cop ("Right leg, hospital; Left leg, cemetery"), dominating Antônio Rodrigo Nogueira—the truth is there, always preserved for future generations to find.

We are expected to tune into the April 9th edition of the Strikeforce tournament to see whether Alistair Overeem can knock off top-rated heavyweight Fabricio Werdum. The winner of that match-up has to be considered the favorite to win the whole thing. But having Fedor in the mix was as exciting as the idea of having Roy Jones Jr. or Sugar Ray Leonard competing in the Showtime Super-Six super-middleweight boxing tournament.

There will be other champions. But there will never be another exactly like Fedor Emelianenko—The Last Emperor.

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.

Comment on this article

FighterforJC says:

Fedor has most definitely slipped. His loss against Werdum was a fluke to me, but Fedor's unorthodox punching has always led me to believe that his nemesis would be someone with a more conventional, pro boxing approach to striking. Not only that, but the fighter has to be considerably large and fairly athletic for his size. I'm a huge fan of Fedor but the first time I was actually worried about him losing was against Brett Rogers. Against someone like Brock Lesnar I'm not worried about Fedor. Lesnar is all bulk but no striking prowess whatsoever.

brownsugar says:

this was the first time I saw him in action,.. of course you can't miss the news, results, and overall buzz about Fedor on the web,.. no matter where you go it's hard to not come across some type of referrence about him... Fedor fought valiantly against an opponent armed with 45 -50 lbs more bone and muscle mass which has to be a huge obstacle. and as slow as Silva was he didn't make any egregious errors that could have cost him the fight.. As much as I'd heard about Fedor's striking abilities I expected much more than just toughman caliber boxing skills(the straight right counter landed by Silva was actually the best punch of the fight)... but Fedor was otherwise resourceful and adaptable during the ground game. If Fedor is ready for retirement,.. then Brock should have retired a year ago. I'm still patiently waiting on the evolution of MMA. I'm confident that given enough time,.. it'll come.

FighterforJC says:

Fedor has very fast hands and his unorthodox punching is highly effective. They serve their purpose. He has good one-punch KO power when the opportunity presents itself, just take a look at his KO win over Brett Rogers and Andre Arlovski. Still, Fedor's striking is groomed for hyper aggressive ground and pound that open up his opponents to his true intention, which is to submit them.

brownsugar says:

beauty is surely in the eye of the beholder.

FighterforJC says:

MMA is not just about striking. Fedor has beaten a handful of competent strikers with more orthodox technique than he, like Arlovski (who trained with Freddie Roach), Mirko Cro Cop and Mark Hunt, along with Noguiera, who is widely known to be a very adept boxer. Fedor's "tough man" punching has been supremely more effective than his opponent's more traditional boxing punches. And in spite of his "inferior" striking, the 4oz gloves and the beauty of a right hand that he got caught with from a fighter who outweighed him by 40lbs or more, where did Fedor go? He didn't get outboxed or KO'd on his feet. He got outwrestled and outgrappled on the ground by a man who had sound BJJ skills and new how to properly utilize his size advantage.

brownsugar says:

FighterforJC,.. I know you're fan,.. but I'm not quite all the way there yet although I will tune in from time to time(my son is a huge fan and an MMA/Wresting expert). the best thing I see about the MMA,.... is that it has good potential for growth.

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[QUOTE=brownsugar;2576]FighterforJC,.. I know you're fan,.. but I'm not quite all the way there yet although I will tune in from time to time(my son is a huge fan and an MMA/Wresting expert). the best thing I see about the MMA,.... is that it has good potential for growth.[/QUOTE]

You don't have to be "all the way there." MMA has its stinkfests (like any GSP match and Jake Shields) where one fighter lays on top of another who can do nothing but try to wiggle out from underneath but can't. MMA is physically incapable of delivering the type of drama that the great boxing matches have provided. But it's a different dynamic, and the landscape overall has a lot more variety and interesting fighters that bring different things to the table.

ultimoshogun says:

I was glad to read today that Fedor will continue fighting...there's alot of people writing him off and saying he's not the fighter he used to be, he's slipped. Well I'm not convinced, and I'm glad Fedor isn't either...His loss to Werdum was a fluke, Fedor fell victim to his own overconfidence and thus getting caught in a triangle...However, I would consider his loss to Silva his first real loss...Silva was the perfect storm, a well rounded supersized HW... the perfect combo of size and grappling skill to put Fedor on his back and control him and eventually mouting him...something no one had been able to do until last saturday. So i'm not willing to believe Fedor is done just because he got beat up for the first time...the man can still compete at the elite level and i'm looking forward to seeing him back in action.