



Out-of-action due to a flare-up in his diverticulitis that required 12 inches of his colon removed through surgery, Brock Lesnar has released his autobiography, *Death Clutch: My Story of Determination, Domination and Survival* (May 25, William Morrow). Right now is the ideal time for former UFC heavyweight champion to tell his story—he's at the peak of his notoriety as an MMA fighter.

Right off the bat, Lesnar opens up and acknowledges that he didn't come from a privileged upbringing. Raised on a dairy farm in Webster, South Dakota, Lesnar's parents encouraged him to take up wrestling at an early age.

Brock Lesnar's Death Clutch: Book Review

Written by Brian J. D'Souza SPECIAL TO TSS
Wednesday, 22 June 2011 09:24

"Both my mom and dad were very supportive. My mom just didn't want to hear any whining if I lost," Lesnar explained to me during a telephone interview to promote his book.

Brock's wrestling prowess brought him all the way to the 1999 NCAA Division 1 heavyweight final where he lost to Stephan Neal. Vowing to be first, he came back and defeated his then-rival Wes Hand for the top spot in 2000.

But wrestling accolades don't pay the bills, so when the WWE came calling, Lesnar made haste in answering the call, becoming a superstar in the process. The WWE, however, exacted a punishing schedule upon the wrestlers, who are deemed independent contractors. Lesnar found himself downing many painkillers just to get through the grind.

Although Lesnar left the WWE in 2004, he still had to pay the cost of living. A motorcycle accident impeded his chances of making the Minnesota Vikings, so he had to ask Vince McMahon for another shot in the WWE.

"Vince wanted to bully me like he does everyone else, because most people who end up on the outs with Vince McMahon don't have a pot to piss in. They have to crawl back on their hands and knees, begging for scraps," Brock explains in the book of McMahon's decision to offer the proven superstar a rookie contract out of spite.

Although Brock was still willing to start at the bottom, Vince's disrespect prompted him to seek out other options in wrestling in Japan. There was still a legal battle with the WWE that nearly destroyed Lesnar's entire career.

Lesnar had made the fatal mistake that the majority of professional boxers and MMA fighters make on a regular basis—and continue to make each and every single time their contract comes up for renewal: he signed a dangerous clause that restricted the financial opportunities available to him in the future. In this specific case, it was a no-compete clause that prohibited him from wrestling professionally for other organizations.

Only through an expensive series of legal maneuvers, education and a willingness to stand up to McMahon's strong-arm tactics (including halting royalty payments to Lesnar) did Brock force the WWE to settle the case out of court in 2006.

It's Lesnar's rise to the top of the UFC ranks that deserves the most attention. Unfortunately, neither Lesnar, nor co-writer Paul Heyman sought to reveal too much about Lesnar's tactics and training. We don't find out much about Brock's go-to moves, nor about the technical details that go into his success in MMA. Fighting is fighting, something Lesnar is among the best in the world at, but a book is a great chance for analysis and insight into a number of subjects like weight-cutting, strength and conditioning routines, integrating multiple disciplines into MMA training and performance enhancers. Then again, perhaps it's too early for a current heavyweight contender to reveal his secrets to training.

The other major flaw with Death Clutch is Lesnar's inability to speak in concrete terms on his financial contracts, whether with the WWE or the UFC. This is obviously due to legal reasons,

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but it does leave an interesting question for the reader—is Lesnar being paid fairly?

Asked how close the *ESPN: The Magazine* estimate of his salary at \$5.3 million dollars came to the truth, Lesnar stated, “I’ve got no comment. No comment for that.”

The UFC makes money off of its fighters through several revenue streams: the pay-per-view buys (where about half the money goes to the carrier); live gate ticket sales, concessions like hot dogs and \$10 beers, and any merchandise sold at events; the UFC video game made by THQ that bears the likeness of all the UFC stars (save Randy Couture, who had the sense not to sign his likeness rights away); licensing UFC content to Spike TV, as well as TV stations across the globe like ESPN UK, Rogers Sportsnet, etc; and through sponsors, which must pay a direct fee to Zuffa in order to sponsor individual fighters in the UFC (and now Strikeforce).

There are expenses in production, staff salaries, fighter payroll, marketing, creating fight promos, lobbying politicians to open up markets where MMA is banned, flying fighters in and out of events, discretionary bonuses, paying judges for overseas fights in Australia and the UK—but without any transparency in terms of opening up the books, it’s hard to pin down an exact number on Zuffa’s profit margin.

With any luck, there will be some government legislation on the table that opens up MMA to the same scrutiny boxing is regulated under, through The Muhammad Ali Reform Act. Fighters need to be able to see exactly what the financial breakdown is before committing their signature to any contract—and it’s very likely that even a superstar like Brock Lesnar might actually be underpaid based on his contribution to the UFC’s bottom line.

Lesnar concludes his book without really confronting his loss to Cain Velasquez. It’s an open wound that reminds readers of the emotional sensitivity that athletes are subject to.

“I don’t even want to think about it. I’m not ready yet,” he explains.

The question of whether Lesnar will return in early 2012 and write a new chapter in his UFC history hangs over the entire story. But he’s proven the critics and cynics wrong many times before. Whatever he decides, no doubt there will be much more to be revealed in the future about Brock Lesnar.

Here is audio of the D'Souza-Lesnar interview:

PART ONE:{youtube}evhn7WwHQLI{/youtube}

PART TWO:{youtube}h1NwzbryCS0{/youtube}

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