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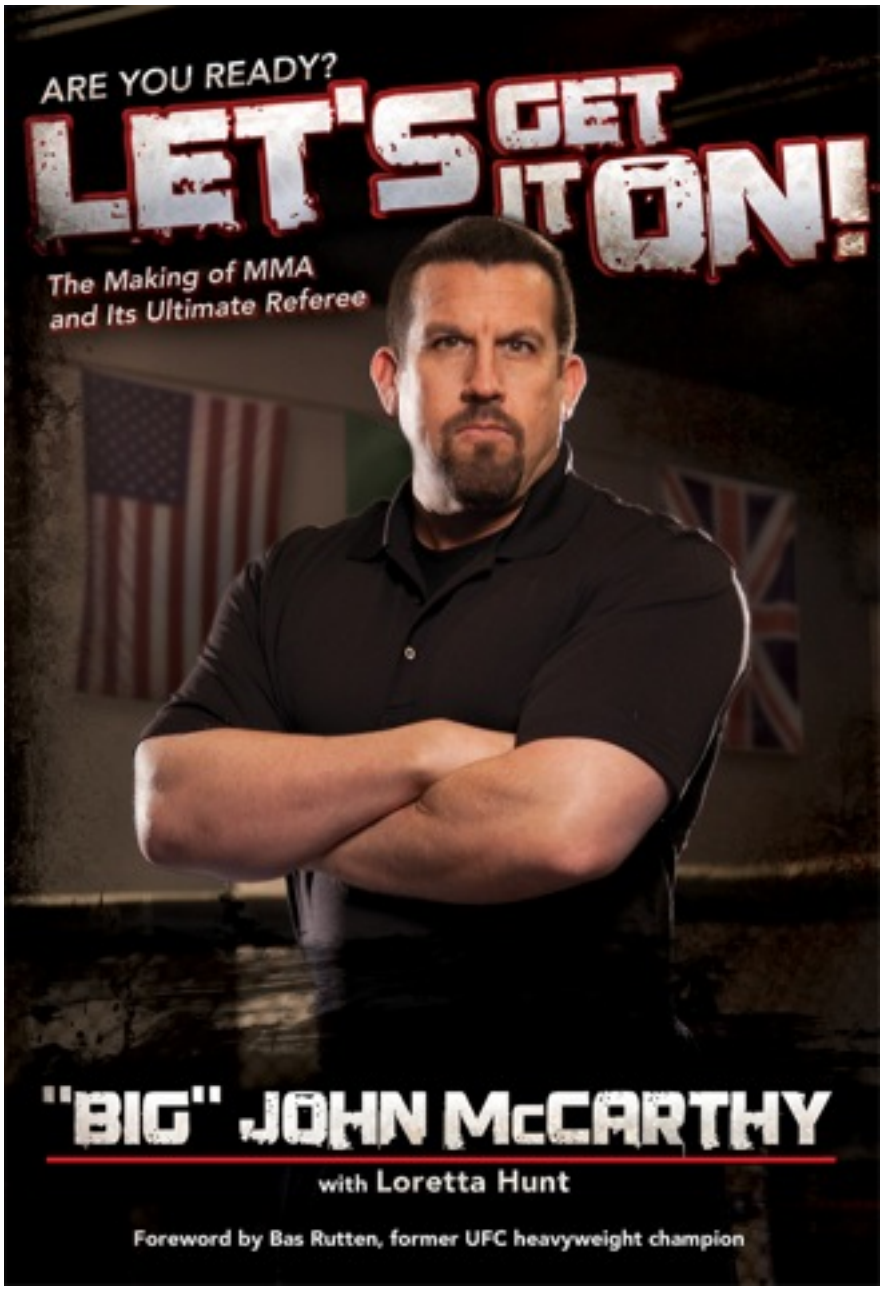

Typically, the two athletes duking it out for supremacy in the cage are the centerpieces for viewer interest. MMA referee “Big” John McCarthy changed this notion with his gradual rise to celebrity as the third man in the octagon. Now BJM, along with co-writer Loretta Hunt, bring fresh insight dating back to Big John’s start at historic UFC 2 in 1994 in their new book, ‘Let’s Get It On: The Making of MMA and Its Ultimate Referee’ (Medallion Press: September, 2011).

Big John really shines in the arc spanning from his childhood up until his time as a member of the LAPD that takes up the first 117-odd pages of the book. His father was a pioneering member of the LAPD, but there was no pressure for John to follow in his footsteps. John’s high school football career was aborted due to injury, and he made it into college on scholarship

thanks to his ability on the water polo team.

A lack of discipline, failure in academics and inability to cut it in a 50-meter pool (versus the 25-yard pool he’d dominated in high school) led to John dropping out of California State University Long Beach. McCarthy tried a two-year junior college, but his wild side again caught up with him.

Luck saw him fall in with world-class powerlifters, as he worked in a gym and met Elaine, his future wife. Experiments with steroids and anger management issues reared their ugly head; John makes sure the reader knows that steroids weren’t illegal at this time, and that he stayed with legal drugs like alcohol, never having smoked marijuana.

It was McCarthy’s need for steady income that pushed him into joining the LAPD. He passed the tests, and after months of waiting, was finally told his training academy class was being scheduled, when a workplace matter nearly derailed his career trajectory. While working at a mini-Indy car track in Fountain Valley, John was forced to eject two unruly patrons who had overstayed closing time. The two men elected to spit on McCarthy when he politely tried to nudge them into leaving. He gleefully recalls sending one of the men across the room so hard, he smashed an arcade game. The second man had an even sweeter door prize for coming out. “I grabbed the other guy next and leveled him before doing what I’d done for so many years,” explained McCarthy, “I started stomping and pounding the p--s out of him. He was out, but I just didn’t care.”

A phone call to the right people in the inside of the LAPD helped prevent any blowback from the episode and McCarthy got a telephone call the very next day telling him to report to the academy.

Big John’s 22-year career on the Los Angeles police force yields some anecdotes more interesting than his time in MMA. For instance, he references his time on Prostitution Enforcement Detail (PED) where he followed “one of the biggest celebrities of all time through Hollywood as he picked up [transvestites] and drove them back to his Beverly Hills home.”

Is there any doubt whatsoever that McCarthy is referring to superstar actor and comedian Eddie Murphy, who made headlines for being stopped by police with a transvestite in his car back in May of 1997?

Big John’s vantage point as a member of the LAPD also puts him between two opposing forces: dealing with ruthless criminals while acting as a lighting rod for political blowback. The 1991 Rodney King incident, as well as the subsequent 1992 LA riots, were pivotal events that demonstrated how police are used to handle dangerous situations, but were held solely responsible when order deteriorated.

McCarthy deconstructs the events in a manner far different than the sensationalistic news clip disseminated throughout the world, pointing out that two black males who cooperated with the arresting officers were taken into custody without incident, as well as noting how King provoked the beating by going after an officer. On recognizing one of the officers involved in the beating,

McCarthy shares that, “With the badge on, sometimes he’d act much tougher than he actually was.”

The only way of approaching the corruption, excessive force, anger management issues, racism and general abuse of power found in the LAPD is for Big John to minimize or ignore it. Putting ordinary people into difficult situations always influences their actions, as the findings of the 1971 Stanford prison experiment clearly demonstrated. In that groundbreaking psychology experiment, students were assigned roles as guards or prisoners; the guards demonstrated blind obedience to authority and took the experiment as seriously as if they’d been assigned to San Quentin. The members of the LAPD have developed similar defense mechanisms, such as cognitive dissonance, in order to survive and endure the difficult conditions of their workplace.

The political fallout of the LA Riots included the formation of a Civilian Martial Arts Advisory Panel where different martial arts experts would pontificate on the effectiveness of their respective arts. McCarthy was the police representative, and ended up meeting Rorian Gracie, who later founded the UFC to prove the power of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

This was the course change that saw McCarthy rescued from the drudgery of police work to his role as an integral part of the UFC’s evolution and growth. The book is abound with details concerning the stoppage of fights, as MMA’s rules were never static; rather, they evolved with every event that occurred.

Big John’s former position as a salaried employee of the UFC makes him feel that he owes a lifelong debt to the organization. Rather than delve into the frequent criticism of the UFC, McCarthy papers over the cracks with nice, neutral vanilla statements. This is the best policy, as it was minor events like a request for a business class airline seat and a statement made to a radio DJ over the so-called ‘Zuffa myth’ that ended up creating a rift between BJM and Dana White.

The book isn’t an overview or history of MMA, as it tells events solely from BJM’s perspective. ‘Let’s Get It On!’ is a good supplement for dedicated MMA fans who already have knowledge of the sport.

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

Amazon.com link: http://www.amazon.com/Lets-Get-Making-Ultimate-Referee/dp/1605421413/ref=cm_cr_pr_product_top

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