

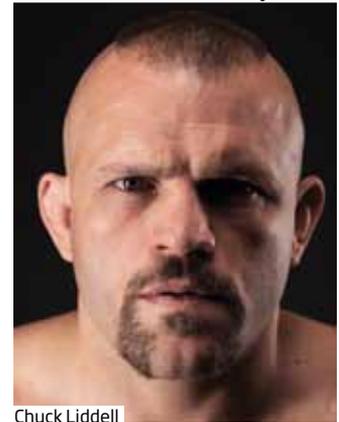
'Showdown' Joe Ferraro



Georges St-Pierre



Randy Couture



Chuck Liddell

Q & A WITH 'SHOWDOWN' JOE FERRARO

★ MMA Connected host discusses his career and where UFC is headed

By Adam Auckbaralle

THE GROWTH OF THE MIXED MARTIAL ARTS HAS RISEN SO RAPIDLY THAT IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO COME ACROSS A DIE-HARD FAN OF THE SPORT. WITH A PRODUCT GENERATING MORE THAN \$300 MILLION IN PAY-PER-VIEW REVENUE IN 2008, SURPASSING BOXING AND THE WWE FOR THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR, THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP IS FAST BECOMING A MAJOR PLAYER FOR FIGHT FAN ENTHUSIASTS. IT'S NOT A SHOCK THAT NAMES SUCH AS CHUCK 'THE ICEMAN' LIDDELL AND GEORGES 'RUSH' ST-PIERRE AND RANDY 'THE NATURAL' COUTURE ARE JUST AS RECOGNIZABLE AS KOBE BRYANT, ALEX RODRIGUEZ, TOM BRADY AND SIDNEY CROSBY.

Rogers Sportsnet's MMA Connected host 'Showdown' Joe Ferraro is no stranger to Mixed Martial Arts, having been attached to the sport for almost 20 years. UMM sat down with Ferraro to discuss his broadcasting career and many UFC-related topics including its cross over to the mainstream.



Royce Gracie

1. TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR BACKGROUND WITH MMA?

I was drawn to MMA after watching the very first UFC, especially when Royce Gracie used his Gi to choke out Ken Shamrock. From that point on, I was intrigued by how Gracie would defeat his opponents in the cage, but not with the skills from boxing and kick boxing - the sports we all grew up watching. I will never, EVER forget my friends saying "you can't win a fight like that...that's wrong", etc. My rebuttal was simple and concise - here's a guy who's

barely throwing any punches and kicks, choking and arm barring people, left, right and centre. I had to learn this submission stuff right away.

Circa 1995-96, I started taking Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and as MMA evolved, I dabbled in boxing, Muay Thai, Judo and wrestling. It was some intense stuff back then and it took a toll on my body. So bad in fact, that I would spend more times off the mat recovering from injuries than being on the mats training. As opposed to walking away, I knew I had to somehow stay involved with MMA and had to figure out how.

I ended up co-founding a clothing brand called 'Showdown Fightwear', which also spawned an equipment line called 'Showdown Boxing'. The company began to sponsor local MMA fighters like Shawn Tompkins, Mark Hominick, Antonio Carvalho, Justin Bruckmann and so many more. We also began sponsoring the events the guys were competing in and I quickly began garnering experience in live event operations, match making, consulting and managing. In 2001, I was invited to try my hand doing colour commentary for one of the events. They basically hired me on the spot and the broadcasting career took off from there.

Now I have the greatest job on the planet - I host a radio show on Toronto's Fan 590 and am Sportsnet's MMA Analyst and host of MMA Connected. Life is good.

2. TELL US ABOUT MMA CONNECTED AND WHY YOU ENJOY DOING IT?

MMA Connected is a magazine-style MMA show that focuses on bringing viewers up to speed on the latest news in MMA, while featuring various fighters and analysis of the events they are about to compete in. The show idea has been a brain child of mine since 2003 but was consistently shot down by all of the TV stations that I pitched the concept to. It wasn't until I met Bob Torrens, Senior Producer at Rogers Sportsnet that the idea finally came to fruition. Torrens got bit by the MMA bug and it spread through him like a virus. You had the both of us pounding the Sportsnet pavement until finally, after a lengthy period of time, the network executives bought into the idea. From the VP on down, everyone saw the potential of the show and of course,



Anderson Silva



Georges St-Pierre

capitalizing on the growing popularity of MMA. Trust me, there is nothing I like more than when I get stopped by a VP, Director or Executive who pulls me aside and offers their thoughts, opinions and suggestions on the show. It's gratifying to know that many of them want to learn as much as they can about a sport that was once banned on Pay Per View.

3. WHEN WILL A SANCTIONED MMA EVENT TAKE PLACE IN ONTARIO? WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO MAKE IT HAPPEN?

I believe MMA will be sanctioned in Ontario likely in late 2010 or at least 2011. There is a long process that still must be taken care of, one that must take into consideration the current government's interpretation of Section 83 of the Criminal Code, which currently has an archaic definition of 'prize fighting'. There also have to be some amendments to the Ontario Sports Control Act, as well as the role and definition of the Athletic Commission.

Thankfully, the UFC is now involved and I can more or less take a step back from try-

ing to lobby the government in favour of letting some real professionals do it. It's a breath of fresh air, but mark my words, when MMA comes to Ontario, the sport in Canada will experience another boom...I can't wait.

4. WHERE DO YOU SEE UFC IN 5 YEARS?

In five years, I believe the sport of MMA will have expanded globally, and we will see incredible fighters coming out of Europe, Mexico and current countries that have yet to even know what MMA is. We will also see the evolution of the fighter improve. There will be many more fighters who have the same skills (if not better) than Georges St-Pierre, Anderson Silva and Lyoto Machida.

5. ARE YOU SURPRISED AT THE POPULARITY OF UFC AND WHY DO YOU THINK IT IS SO POPULAR?

I am far from surprised at how popular the UFC is right now. I firmly believed over a decade ago that this sport (and the UFC brand) were going to explode. If you ask anyone who has known me before this



Brock Lesnar



whole 'Showdown Joe' thing came to be, they will all tell you the same thing. I've been plugging away and preaching this sport to anyone that would ever listen. Long before it hit the main stream, I was knocking on the doors of all of the Sports stations in Canada. I've had more doors closed on me than I care to remember but now things have changed.

The popularity of the sport can be explained on so many different levels. Its raw - its pure - its as close to a real fight as you are gonna get. When you attend any sporting event, be it hockey, football, baseball or basketball, heck, anywhere for that matter, when a fight breaks out, the vast majority of people are drawn to see it go down. Look at when a fight breaks

out in a hockey game - almost everyone in the stands is standing up cheering. For many of us, it's as if it's in our DNA - we are fascinated by a good old fashioned donnybrook. Now, when you add the very best trained martial arts self-defense and offensive techniques instilled into elite level athletes, well, you get the highest form of raw competition on the face of the earth.

6. WHO IS THE BEST POUND FOR POUND FIGHTER TODAY?

I have always professed that GSP is the best pound for pound fighter on the planet, but after watching Anderson Silva's destruction of Forrest Griffen at UFC 101, there is no doubt in my mind that

if all these fighters on the pound for pound list were of equal weight, Anderson 'The Spider' Silva would reign supreme.

7. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF DANA WHITE?

In many circles, Dana White is one of the most misunderstood individuals that I have ever met. There is nobody better in this business that makes my job easier than the UFC President. He never turns down an interview. He always addresses every question. And if you've ever been to a UFC event, or anywhere Dana does something live, he signs every autograph and takes hundreds of pictures with fans. People criticize his business practices and automatically assume he is this monster, or bad guy, but like I've said before...if they were in his shoes, they would do the exact same thing. If it wasn't for Dana and the Fertitta brothers (UFC Majority Owners), I would not have a job today.

8. WHAT IMPACT WILL THE LOSS OF BROCK LESNAR HAVE ON THE UFC?

Potentially losing Brock Lesnar could have a serious impact on the UFC's financials and growing popularity. Like him or not, Lesnar sells pay per views - and the UFC is in the business of selling pay per view events. When your biggest star is on the shelf, other fighters need to step up. But as it stands today, there isn't one fighter on their roster that can put up the same numbers as Brock.

GSP is getting close and may actually be on that level one day, but in order for the UFC to guarantee themselves a large pay per view buy rate, they will need a title fight plus two to three superfights. With Lesnar, well, he can do it all by himself.