



Total MMA: Inside Ultimate Fighting

Jonathan Snowden

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Since the beginning of time, men have engaged in hand-to-hand combat. In Ancient Greece, they called it Pankration, a no-holds-barred battle. Over time, one complete combat system was replaced by a variety of limited ones like karate, boxing, and wrestling. In the modern age this created an eternal question: who was tougher? Could a boxer beat a wrestler? Could a kung fu artist dispose of a jiu jitsu man? The Ultimate Fighting Championship answered those questions emphatically in 1993 -- and Mixed Martial Arts was born. Early stars like Ken Shamrock and Royce Gracie propelled this new sport into the North American public's consciousness while pro wrestlers Nobuhiko Takada and Masakatsu Funaki led a parallel evolution in Japan, where cultural forces led to fighters becoming mainstream celebrities. With no television contract and little publicity budget to speak of, the UFC was forced to adopt an aggressive marketing scheme to get public attention. The potential for carnage and blood was played up and a predictable media outcry soon followed. Politicians, led by Arizona Senator and Presidential candidate John McCain, were able to ban the sport in most states and even managed to suspend pay-per-view broadcasts. While the popularity of MMA was at an all-time-high in Japan, MMA failed to thrive in America until Spike TV finally took a chance on the controversial sport and The Ultimate Fighter thrust mixed martial arts back into the mainstream, creating new mega-stars like Forrest Griffin and Rashad Evans, and breathing new life into old favourites. For the first time, Total MMA: Inside Ultimate Fighting arms you with all the history and information you need to know to understand the contemporary world of Mixed Martial Arts, where the backroom deal-making is as fierce as the fighting.

Total Mma: Inside Ultimate Fighting Details

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Adam says

Super good. I've read a lot of MMA books, but few of them have this breadth and depth. Lots of back story on stuff that usually gets left out of the usual history books: e.g., the legitimate contribution of SEG, Japan's influence on MMA, how the Gracie's broke into the U.S., etc. Pretty entertaining and surprisingly balanced - definitely critical on issues (shady-ness of Zuffa, shady-ness of Gracie propaganda, etc.) other books shy away from. Even clocking in at around 400 pages, it's still obvious that the book could be longer. It ends with the UFC having potential competitors, which has changed dramatically: EliteXC, Affliction (in terms of putting on shows), IFL, and Strikeforce are all dead. It would be great to have a follow-up chapter in a couple years. In short: great book, well-researched, very critical, very informative, and easy to read.

Mike says

This was a great book and essential for any serious MMA fan. Covering everything from the "Gracie propaganda machine" to the successes and failures of every significant fighter, promoter, and organization MMA has had to offer. A great read.

Troy says

I have multiple copies of this historical "textbook for MMA fans" to give to friends who are novice fans of MMA and want to learn the history behind the sport. The last sentence should be enough to epitomize what I think of the book. It would be nice if the author released an updated and revised version, but as of now that's just a bone-picking complaint.

Moominboy says

An excellent overview of the evolution of the sport. It describes not only UFC's development but also Pride, pre-Zuffa UFC and even earlier history. Almost all major characters and events are described and the book finishes sometime in 2008. A very good and concise material for both an MMA follower and a newcomer. Or a sports marketing executive, for that matter.

Luis Perez says

Nonfiction. A look inside mixed martial arts, from its origins to modern day fighters and the intricacies of present-day competition.

Solid, detailed book on mixed martial arts. I got an advance copy, so it contained quite a few errors. Worth

reading if you like combat sports.

Stephen says

If you want to know where MMA came from, and weren't originally a fan back during its upstart, this is a great way to fill in your ____ to the present day.

Jayson says

(A-) 83% | Very Good

Notes: Essentially a collection of interview quotations sewn together, it provides a surprisingly comprehensive base history.

NinjaK says

A much stronger, more interesting, and more engaging read than 'No Holds Barred.' This one was also better written. I highly recommend to anyone who's an MMA fan, or interested in how the sport got its start.

Jeremy says

Excellent book on the history of not only the UFC but also MMA in general. Lots of great stories and information I never knew about. For a person interested in martial arts or ultimate fighting I would say this is a must read.

Nate says

I just tore through "Total MMA: Inside Ultimate Fighting" Jonathan Snowden's excellent history of MMA. Its a hefty tome at almost 400 pages -- with 32 pages of color photos and 11 pages of notes(!) but a very quick and entertaining read.

If you're looking for a one volume history of Mixed Martial Arts it would be hard to do better than this. The evolution of MMA in both America and Japan are covered nicely with a natural emphasis on the UFC and PRIDE. Early Pancrase gets a good amount of attention as well.

Royce Gracie, Ken Shamrock, Frank Shamrock, Kazushi Sakuraba, Frank Shamrock, Tito Ortiz, Chuck Liddell, Randy Couture and Bob Sapp get the most attention. Yes, Bob Sapp has a full chapter dedicated to his career. Flipping through the table of contents I was a little non-plussed to see that, but on reading I realized Sapp's odyssey was an excellent way to tell the story of Japanese MMA's brief time at the crest of pop culture. No single fighter better epitomizes the status of MMA in Japan than Sapp.

Snowden draws on Erich Krauss' "Brawl" (2002) and Clyde Gentry's "No Holds Barred" (2005) a good deal as well as many web sites, original interviews and back issues of Full Contact Fighter. He does a good job of interweaving the various strands of his tale although sometimes the chronological jumping can get a little confusing.

As a lunatic obsessive I would have liked to have seen a little bit more about Shooto and the Dutch, Russian and Brazilian events of the 1990s but I totally understand Snowden's decision to focus on more central events and promotions.

The book is even handed, dispelling the Zuffa myth at length but also giving Dana and the Ferittas credit for their accomplishments. Snowden even spends the better part of a chapter reviewing the Ferittas family history in illegal gambling in Galveston, Texas in the 1930s to 1950s.

He likewise understands and conveys the strengths and weaknesses of Ken Shamrock and the Gracies. Pulling no punches when describing their failings but also very clearly conveying what they did to achieve greatness and make major contributions to MMA.

The account of Frank Shamrock's split with the Lion's Den is the best I've read anywhere. Snowden does a good job of telling both Ken and Frank's side of the story.

Check it out if you get a chance. Snowden is a talented writer who cares about MMA and put a lot of work into documenting its history.

Oliver Bateman says

a good history of MMA to the dawn of the lesnar era, though the earlier entries feel much deeper and richer than the later sections, which appear to be cut and pasted from prior online articles. snowden is the go-to guy on mma, and will remain so until the bullshit "serious academics" begin carving up and ruining this subject. perhaps they already are. if so, i'll make sure i get in on the action!

Andrew Rizos says

The best, most expansive rundown of the history of MMA I've seen. More books like this are bound to come with the sport's skyrocketing popularity but I think this one will remain a how-to. Great balance of traditional and modern, great recognition of the SEG era. While dated it's a must read for an MMA or combat sports fan.

Artiom Karsiuk says

This is actually a very informative book full of history and interesting facts, so as far as sheer knowledge goes, this is a very useful read for any MMA fan who doesn't know the origins of the sport and got acquainted with it only through UFC. I did rate it only 3/5 stars because the writing is very dry. It isn't

captivating or written in an entertaining manner - it's just a history "textbook" for fans.

Jeremy says

For me, the first half of the book was very involving. Back when I was first watching some of the early UFC days I had no idea what was going on behind the scenes. There was no bloodyelbow.com or similar site to visit, I lived only off of the tapes I got hold of. So it was great to get a look at all the backstage stuff with fighters and the businesses. Getting to watch the history unfold in a (mostly) linear fashion was something else I enjoyed in the book. When watching things here and there, sometimes playing catch-up (especially with Pride) or missing events all together it was great to get another chance to relive it. This book definitely made me nostalgic and want to rewatch many of these fights again.

The second half of the book (from a bit past when zuffa bought UFC and especially once Pride was gone and the TUF era began) was a bit less interesting to me. Mostly because it was information I've come across online, read elsewhere, re-watched these "more modern era" fights in many reruns on Spike, etc. That's not to say the second half is not still good, just pointing out the difference in the emotional connection I had. First half sucked me right in; second half was a bit more leisurely read. For any fan that was just getting into MMA when TUF started and didn't dive fully in; there would still be quite a bit of history in there to learn.

As a whole the book took a fairly even approach to events it talks about. Giving readers a look at something they rarely see on mma history lessons often featured by the UFC (now that they are the top dog and own most of every great fight library)-- both sides of the story. Not to say it attacks the UFC, quite the contrary; it simply gives you all the shades of gray and let's you make your own decisions. In the end it really didn't change my opinion on any company view or fighter view I had, it just have me more information about it all.

All in all it was a good book and I'd highly recommend it to any fan. Even if you are one of those fans that already knows-it-all; you might still enjoy reliving the early years of the sport.

Henry says

The best and most authoritative book on MMA. Docked for poor editorial decisions: The last third of the book comes off as having been dated by the time it was published, with a lot of perfunctory stuff on fighters who were stars when the book was being written but now seem irrelevant. Snowden's heart seems to be more in strange stories of the sport's early days, when things weren't quite so glossy as they are, and it would have been better to emphasize that aspect than to try to make this comprehensive. Invaluable for those interested in the subject, though.
