CHAPTER 1

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Historians differ as to the exact origin of Asian martial arts, but most tie its beginnings to India, where Buddhism, yoga and nata dancing all contain elements that would later become vital parts of most martial arts styles. Interestingly, at least some scholars believe the catalyst that turned those other pursuits into fighting sports was none other than *pankration*, introduced by Alexander the Great of Macedon, a Greek emperor whose realm, at its peak, extended all the way to India.

However it started, the earliest recorded reference to martial arts came in the fifth century when the Chinese government caught Buddhist monks storing arms and learning how to fight. The preeminent monastery among these was the Shaolin Temple in Northeastern China, which was founded in 464.

Then, a Buddhist monk appeared from the West and changed the Eastern world profoundly. Little biographical knowledge can be gleaned about Bodhidharma from contemporary records, but there is general agreement as to who he was, where he came from and what he did. Bodhidharma was probably born into a warrior

caste somewhere in India, perhaps just before the beginning of the sixth century. He became a Buddhist monk and traveled eastward in search of enlightenment. He was a big man, and is traditionally portrayed as having a long beard, heavy eyebrows and a hairy chest and arms. Many accounts refer to him as a "blue-eyed barbarian from the West," so he may have been from even farther away than India. He was impatient and known to be quick to anger.

But he had an idea. His philosophies—later collectively known as Zen—became immensely popular and his reputation grew from respected to revered. When he arrived at the Shaolin Temple, he was said to have been disgusted with the physical shape the monks were in. Wong Kiew Kit, a contemporary Shaolin monk and kung fu master, describes Bodhidharma's immediate influence:

> It was during this time that the venerable Bodhidharma came from India to China to spread Buddhism. In 527 he settled down in the Shaolin monastery in Henan province and inspired the development of Shaolin Kung Fu. This marked a watershed in the history of Kung Fu, because it led to a change of course, as kung fu became institutionalized. Before this, martial arts were known only in general sense.

The Shaolin Monastery has been the center of kung fu learning ever since. As Buddhism, Zen and other concepts spread through eastern Asia, they took the practices of kung fu with them and they developed into hundreds of diverse types of martial arts, from taekwondo to sumo.

Invasion and colonization of much of eastern Asia by European powers in the nineteenth century brought an immense number of firearms into the region, and the need for hand-to-hand combat

(and with it, unarmed martial arts) began to wane. It was still practiced as a sport and an art, but in many places it seemed arcane.

Beginning in about 1890, European interest in Asian martial arts brought a small stream of practitioners to the West, but their skills were generally seen as exhibitions of exotic Eastern traditions, not as sport. Many of these styles of combat involved kicking, which Westerners considered an unmanly, even devious, way to fight.

Four profound events of the middle of the twentieth century—the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1949, the end of open hostilities in the Korean conflict in 1953 and the end of U.S. involvement in the Southeast Asian conflict in 1973—changed things. Previous Asian immigration to the West had been small-scale, and those who did arrive stayed in tightly knit communities. But now there were waves of Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian and Thai arrivals, and they brought many diverse types of martial arts with them.

Japanese styles were the first to come into Western consciousness. Karate—originally from the Ryukyu Islands—is a striking style that depends on both punching and kicking. It became well known and later, when it was successfully marketed as a way for smaller boys and men to fight back against much larger bullies, it became well used. Judo became popular in the media if not in practice, although most Westerners knew it from the concept of a strike called the "judo chop," even though judo is predominantly a grappling style of fighting.

Asian martial arts could well have faded from Western consciousness had there not been a true champion for it. In the early morning of November 27, 1940, Lee Hoi-chuen—a singer from Hong Kong who was on tour in the United States with the

Cantonese Opera Company—rushed his German-Chinese wife, Grace Ho, to Jackson Street Hospital in San Francisco's Chinatown. In the year and hour of the Dragon, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

Ho, who had fallen in love with America and hoped to come back some day, named the boy Lee Jun-fan, which means "return again in prosperity" in Cantonese. A maternity-ward nurse grew attached to the bright-faced boy but couldn't pronounce his given name, so she started calling him Bruce.

Following Lee's tour, the family returned to China. After being kicked out of a series of high schools for low marks and fighting, Bruce ended up in a Catholic high school where he was mentored in Western-style boxing. He was extremely well suited to the sport and won two high school boxing championships. In fact, only one opponent ever made it out of the first round against him, and he only managed to survive until the third.

Lee was a good fighter, very good. He had an uncanny ability to think and react quickly and to mix styles as the fight progressed. He quickly became the leader of a gang of street toughs that called themselves "The Tigers of Junction Street," although he lived around the corner on Nathan Street (the site of his house is now covered by a shopping mall). And he ran into trouble. The police told his family that if they caught him fighting one more time, he'd go to jail. And some friends told them that Lee had beaten up the wrong man, a member of the local triad, and that the gang had put a price on his head.

That was enough for his parents, who sent Lee (now widely known as Bruce) to join his older sister Agnes, who was living with friends in San Francisco. With $100 in his pocket, which he earned on the journey by giving cha-cha lessons to first-class passengers, he instead moved to Seattle, where he lived with and worked for

family friend Ruby Chow. A remarkable woman, Chow opened the first Chinese restaurant in Seattle outside Chinatown and served three terms on county council. And she was strict with Lee, offering him room in the restaurant's attic and board in exchange for hours of hard work, graduating high school and college and keeping his fights inside the ring. He also made extra money giving dance lessons.

Lee graduated high school and attended Edison Technical School (now called Seattle Central Community College) before moving up to the University of Washington. Lee told his family and friends he was studying philosophy, but was actually enrolled in the school's dramatic arts program. He financed his tuition and lifestyle by providing martial arts lessons, eventually opening Lee Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute (he preferred to use the Cantonese "gung fu" over the more universally accepted Mandarin "kung fu"). The school proved successful, and Lee dropped out of college in 1964. He and a friend, James Yimm Lee, relocated the school to Oakland, California. There, they made a valuable connection—Ed Parker. Parker was a rare American martial arts master—he developed his own style called American kenpo, which was a very fast-moving style of karate. Lee not only learned kenpo from him but he also received an invitation to perform at the Long Beach International Karate Championship in 1964.

Bruce made yet another connection. His new friend, Jhoon Goo Rhee, was a Korean taekwondo master who, like Lee, had put up with a great deal of criticism for teaching martial arts to non-Asians. In exchange for some of Lee's best moves, Rhee taught Lee some of the most effective taekwondo kicks.

At about that time, Lee came to an epiphany. He realized that his combination of wing chun, tai chi chuan, boxing, American kenpo and taekwondo was far more effective than using any one

discipline. He knew that he was the best fighter in the world not because he was the master of a martial art, but because he had managed to mix the best of many of them while disregarding the parts he did not need. And, still angered by martial arts masters who refused to teach non-pureblood Asian students, he was determined to teach anyone who wanted to learn. With that new philosophy, Lee established his own fighting style that sacrificed the stodgy formalities of traditional martial arts and substituted them with moves he knew from experience would win fights. He called this new style jeet kune do (which means "the way of the intercepting fist").

But in 1970, Lee suffered a debilitating injury. While performing a "good morning" exercise—in which he placed a barbell that weighed almost as much as he did on his shoulders and bent down from the waist, he injured a nerve in his pelvis. Doctors ordered an indefinite term of bed rest and told him he'd never perform martial arts again. Lee did take some time off—in fact, he used it to develop the TV series that later became *Kung Fu*, which he planned to star in—and eventually regained his strength.

Despite earlier success in appearing in *The Green Hornet* and *Batman*, after the injury Hollywood wanted nothing to do with him, so he went back to Hong Kong. He starred in three local films—later known in the West as *Fists of Fury*, *The Chinese Connection* and *The Way of the Dragon*. They were simple local-kid-gets-bullied-then-takes-his-revenge stories, but they were just what Hong Kong's audiences wanted and they were huge blockbusters by regional standards.

Hollywood couldn't ignore him anymore and he returned to film *Enter the Dragon* in 1973. It's a silly plot, many of the performances are poor and the production values vary considerably. But

Lee was masterful in it and captured the imaginations of Western audiences just as he had those in Hong Kong. For an $850,000 investment, producers would realize more than $25 million in gross earnings, and the film achieved a cult status that survives today.

But Lee wouldn't live to see it. A number of his fellow cast members noticed that Lee wasn't feeling well during the dubbing and looping of the film's soundtrack. He collapsed at a dubbing session on May 10, 1973, and was rushed to Hong Kong Baptist Hospital. His diagnosis was not promising; Lee had a cerebral edema, an in-cranium swelling commonly known as "water on the brain." Doctors reduced the swelling and prescribed a diuretic. On June 20, 1973, Lee was meeting with producer Raymond Chow and actress Betty Ting Pei at her Hong Kong apartment when he complained of a headache. Chow left for a dinner meeting, and Lee retired to the couch for a nap. Pei offered him a pill she took by prescription, an aspirin-based painkiller called Equagesic that is no longer legal in many countries. Lee took one and never woke up from his nap. When Pei could not wake him, she called an ambulance. Doctors at Queen Elizabeth Hospital said that he had an allergic reaction to the Equagesic, which worsened his edema, and that he died "via misadventure."

Despite his short career and limited exposure to Western audiences, Lee is probably the most famous and successful fighter of all time. Of course, his good looks and winning personality had a lot to do with it, but the fact that such a small man could not just beat, but literally destroy far bigger opponents was a big part of what put him on top. And the way he did it—by taking the best of various martial arts and putting them together as the fight demanded—prompted UFC President Dana White to call him "the father of mixed martial arts."

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While Bruce Lee may be the metaphorical father of mixed martial arts, more realistic claims can be made by businessman Art Davie and martial arts teacher Rorion Gracie.

In the early 1990s, Davie was an executive working for an advertising firm. Sent on a research assignment to find out what was going on in the world of martial arts, he went into Gracie's Torrance, California, gym because he had heard that it was the epicenter of what was hot in southern California. What he saw being taught was Brazilian jiu-jitsu, a hybrid form of martial arts that was taking the West by storm.

Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) owes its existence to two men—one from Japan, the other from Brazil.

Born in the northern Japanese city of Hirosaki in 1878, Mitsuyo Maeda grew up wanting to be a sumo wrestler, as it was the most popular sport in his home region. But with a 5-foot-4 frame carrying about 140 pounds, Maeda had little hope of ever becoming a sumo. So when his parents sent him to Tokyo for college, he was eager to sign up for judo, because he had heard that's what the best fighters there did.

He was a devoted student, and when judo started to become popular in the West, he was one of three men invited by businessman Sam Hill to come to the United States in 1905 to demonstrate their prowess. At the time, Theodore Roosevelt was an avid judo practitioner and he convinced the U.S. Naval Academy to allow the Japanese contingent to try out for positions as wrestling coaches for the Academy's students. The judo masters had no problem with the first few men they faced (including the incumbent wrestling instructor), but lost the job when hulking All-American football center Harold Tipton literally threw the group's leader, Tsunejiro Tomita, out of the ring.

Maeda and his group would have more success on the rest of their tour of the United States and Cuba and even more in Europe. Maeda made a home in London and wrestled professionally with some level of success while augmenting his income by teaching judo to the locals. After he lost a much-publicized bout to American boxer Sam McVey, Maeda realized his time in London was over and headed south to Spain.

He hated Belgium and was lukewarm on France, but he really enjoyed himself in Spain, where he was welcomed with open arms. And it was there that he acquired the stage name Conde Koma (Count Koma), a reference to *komaru*, a Japanese word that can mean disturbed, agitated or even crazy.

In 1909, a group of Japanese judo masters including Maeda took a trip to Mexico, where wrestling has a long and storied history. Maeda offered a challenge—the equivalent of $50 (then a huge sum) to any man he couldn't put to the ground and $500 to any who could pin him. There is no record of anybody collecting. Maeda liked the New World and continued to wrestle in Mexico, and occasionally Cuba, while trying unsuccessfully to drum up interest in the United States.

In 1914, his traveling tour took him to Brazil. Almost immediately he became incredibly popular there and settled down in the northern city Belém do Pará, took a wife and the name Otávio Maeda. While his career as a performer was still going, he opened a business teaching judo to the locals. But he didn't call it judo. Instead, he called it jiu-jitsu, in honor of the forerunner of modern judo (itself developed by another undersized teen who was picked on, 99-pound Jigoro Kano). It proved a success, and jiu-jitsu became one of Brazil's most popular sports, especially in the region surrounding Belém.

Gastão Gracie was also a resident of Belém, his family having arrived there from Scotland in 1926. He ran a number of businesses, including one that helped immigrants become naturalized Brazilian citizens. Maeda was one of his clients, and the two men hit it off right away and became friends. In 1917, Gastão brought Carlos, aged 14 and the oldest of his five sons, to see Maeda fight. Carlos was astounded by what he saw and decided then and there to make jiu-jitsu his life's work. Carlos took lessons from Maeda and passed the knowledge on to his bothers Oswaldo, Gastão Jr., Jorge and Hélio.

The family moved to Rio de Janiero in 1921. Although they were no longer taught by Maeda, they continued their training on their own, and in 1925 Carlos opened his own training school. It proved relatively popular and attracted all kinds of clients, including some quite prominent ones.

One of those high-profile students was Bank of Brazil director Mario Brandt. Carlos was late for one lesson in 1928, so 16-year-old Hélio volunteered to step in. When Carlos arrived and apologized for being late, Brandt told him it was no problem and that he so impressed by Hélio and his different kind of jiu-jitsu that he wanted Hélio to be his own personal instructor.

Carlos taught something very close to the traditional judo Maeda performed. Judo is a grappling sport in which the aim is to subdue one's opponent by means of locking, twisting or throwing. There are strikes in judo, but they can only be used by higher-level practitioners for training purposes and never in competition.

That's fine for a big, strong guy like Carlos, but Hélio was much smaller. To keep up with and even best his many fighting brothers, Hélio had to develop his own style of fighting. Its basis was in traditional judo, but he added hand strikes taken from boxing and karate, and kicks borrowed from muay Thai (kickboxing) and

karate. His new style of fighting became known as Gracie jiu-jitsu and eventually, Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

It and he became very popular. In fact, in 1935 four of the Gracies attacked a gymnastics coach named Manoel Rufino in front of dozens of his students. For his part in the assault, Hélio was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison, but was immediately pardoned by Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas against the express wishes of the Supreme Court. There were many rumors about why Vargas pardoned Hélio, but none were conclusively proven. Still, Hélio did teach Vargas's son Maneco years later.

The original Gracies were followed by dozens of others (Carlos himself had 21 children), many of whom found success in the family business. And BJJ probably would have stayed in Brazil if it hadn't been for a few coincidences.

Hélio had nine children—seven sons and two daughters—all of whom had first names starting with the letter R. All of them were involved in the family business, and one of them, the eldest Rorion, performed before audiences while still in diapers.

In 1969, 17-year-old Rorion traveled to the United States. After visiting relatives in New York City and Washington, D.C., he made a pilgrimage to Hollywood. He loved it and finally moved to southern California in 1978. He rented a small house in Torrance and supported himself doing work as an extra in movies and TV shows. He set up some mats in his garage and invited everyone he met for a free BJJ lesson. It took off. "Over the years, I always had people coming to my garage to fight," Rorion later said. "That happened almost as soon as I got to America." By 1985, Rorion had so many students that he recruited his 18-year-old brother Royce to come up from Brazil to be his assistant.

Rorion was working on a movie set when he was introduced to director Richard Donner. Donner, best known at that point in

his career for *The Omen*, watched a short demonstration of BJJ and hired Rorion to choreograph the fight scenes for his next movie, *Lethal Weapon*. He became an overnight sensation in the American martial arts world, and was even profiled in *Playboy* magazine. Rorion produced a documentary, *Gracie Jiu-Jitsu in Action*, which showed members of the Gracie family (starting with Hélio) taking on and soundly defeating judo masters, kickboxers, karate champions and all kinds of other fighters in Brazilian exhibition matches. It was never released by a studio—instead being distributed by Rorion himself—but it caused a sensation in the martial arts community.

His star was rising. By the middle of 1989, he had clearly outgrown the garage. With 120 regular students and 80 more on the waiting list, Rorion opened a gym in Torrance, which is now referred to as the Gracie's "World Headquarters."

And it was that gym that Art Davie visited in 1991. Impressed by Rorion and BJJ, Davie became a member and quickly gained Rorion's trust by making him some money. "Rorion had done this videotape called *Gracies in Action*, which showed some of the mixed-style fights his family had done," Davie recalled. "I volunteered to do a direct-mail base for him. He didn't know what it was, but I convinced him to do it. He had 25,000 names in a database he had collected over the months and years. We did a mailing list and grossed over $100,000. So then I had credibility with him."

Davie then befriended another student, screenwriter and director John Milius—most famous for writing *Apocalypse Now* and directing *Conan the Barbarian*, but also known for being the model for John Goodman's Walter Sobchak character in the Coen brothers' film *The Big Lebowski*. The three of them would train and watch Rorion's videotapes of Brazilian *vale tudo* fighting.

Normally vale tudo is translated as "no holds barred" because it is basically without rules, but the literal translation is something closer to "to win everything," similar to the concept of "winner takes it all."

Vale tudo began in Brazilian traveling circuses, in which strong men would fight for money and would often challenge the locals to pin them or knock them out. Any type of fighting was allowed and foreign fighters with exotic techniques, especially those from east Asia, were considered a huge draw. But the best fighters were usually those who mixed their techniques and honed them through years of street fighting.

The sport's popularity peaked in 1959–60 when a TV show called *Heróis do Ringue* (Heroes of the Ring) aired in the Rio de Janeiro region. There were Gracies everywhere, serving as staff, hosts and competitors. The show was a great success, until one night in 1960 when João Alberto Barreto broke his opponent's arm on live TV. Shocked, the network cancelled the show. Even without widespread media coverage, vale tudo remained relatively popular, but had been tainted with an association to uncontrolled violence and went underground.

But Davie and Milius loved it. Their watching the videos started some pretty predictable conversations. The three men pondered a number of age-old questions: Could a boxer beat a wrestler? How about a karate champ against a judo master? Of course, it all culminated with the bigger question—what's the best of all fighting styles? And the even bigger, unspoken question—who is the best fighter in the world?

Under normal circumstances, three men posing such questions would not amount to much. But Rorion was a champ with many years of experience and generations of knowledge, and

he was an entrepreneur who knew what he had to do to get his message across. Davie was a high-powered marketing man with contacts everywhere. And Milius—though universally regarded as eccentric—was among the most famous writers and directors in Hollywood. He had lots of valuable friends.

There had been plenty of exhibition matches pitting different styles of fighters before—often in Southeast Asia, Brazil and Mexico. Davie himself had seen a Thai boxer take on an Indian wrestler in Bangkok when he was in the Marines. But they wanted to put on something bigger, more definitive.

Davie came up with the plan. They would pit eight men—all from different fighting styles—against one another in a single-elimination tournament to determine who was the best fighter in the world. He even had a name—*War of the Worlds*. Rorion and Milius (who was named creative director) signed on and Davie immediately went to work making it happen. He showed his 65-page business plan to a number of potential investors (many of them Rorion's students) and got a $250,000 stake from 28 of them. He called the new company W.O.W. Promotions and began to negotiate for a television deal.

The owners of HBO and Showtime declined, calling the idea "crazy," but Davie did get a deal with New York City–based Semaphore Entertainment Group (SEG). The founder and president of SEG, Bob Meyrowitz, was well known at the time because of his syndicated radio show, *The King Biscuit Flower Hour*, and became one of the pioneers of pay-per-view television after broadcasting profitable performances by Whoopi Goldberg and Barbra Streisand. Meyrowitz was well known for taking chances and was just a few months removed from producing a very successful exhibition tennis match in Las Vegas between Jimmy Connors and

Martina Navratilova when Davie approached him early in 1993. It was agreed that W.O.W. would pay for the event and SEG would pay for the telecast, with the two companies splitting the revenue. It has been said that Meyrowitz's employee Michael Abramson came up with the name "Ultimate Fighting Championship."

They decided on McNichols Sports Arena in Denver as the venue. Right next to Mile High Stadium, McNichols (or "Big Mac" as it was known) had a 16,000–17,000 capacity and was then home to the NBA's Nuggets and the NHL's Avalanche. It wasn't their first choice. They wanted it to be in Brazil, but the logistical problems were huge and Meyrowitz wasn't sure American viewers would be that interested in a new event held in such an unfamiliar country.

Davie had done some homework and found out that Colorado was the only state in which bare-knuckle boxing was legal, there was no governing athletic commission *and* limited liability insurance for such events was legal and easy to acquire. He incorporated there and booked the arena.

The date was set for November 12, 1993. They lined up their on-camera talent. Kickboxers Bill "Superfoot" Wallace and Kathy "The Punisher" Long would team up with NFL-Hall-of-Famer Jim Brown for the play-by-play and future Fox News personality Brian Kilmeade provided fighter interviews. SEG took care of the pay-per-view. Rorion tried to recruit his friend Chuck Norris to be a commentator, but Norris had questions about the legality of the match and, although excited about its potential, could not even be persuaded to attend in person.

The competitors were harder to decide on, but mostly easy to recruit. The fighters were to be paid just $1,000 to appear and the winner of the tournament was to receive $50,000. Davie placed ads in martial arts magazines and wrote letters to major dojos around North America.

And, of course, there had to be a Gracie. While the stated purpose of the Ultimate Fighting Championship was to determine which discipline of fighting was the best, it was certainly in the best interest of the Gracies to showcase the family business at the same time. It has been widely reported that SEG had expressed a desire for Rickson Gracie—who was, at the time, the family's best and certainly toughest-looking fighter—but Rorion had a different plan. So confident was he that the Gracie school of BJJ would dominate any fight, he instead chose little brother Royce. At a thin 178 pounds and with a baby face, Royce didn't look like a badass. The sight of Royce beating up much bigger, stronger men added significantly more allure to the Gracie style of BJJ. And, potentially, more paying customers.

With the fighters in the fold, the next task was marketing. SEG's head of development, Campbell McLaren (sometimes referred to as the "brains behind the UFC") viewed the fight strictly as a one-off. "The last thing we want is for this to be a sport," he said. He was joined by colorful local promoter Zane "Insane Zane" Bresloff, who had to work in secret because his usual employer was the WWF.

After the elimination rounds, the championship match pitted Royce Gracie against Gerard Gordeau, a tall (6-foot-5) rangy Dutchman. In addition to a bandage on his hand, Gordeau had another on his right foot, covering wounds from an earlier bout in which two of his opponent's teeth were embedded in his instep, while others flew into the crowd. Seconds after the bell rang, Royce went in for the shoot. Gordeau didn't fall for it and stayed on his feet. Royce grappled with him and locked his right foot behind Gordeau's left leg. The two limped to the fence together, Royce put his arms around the big man and finally took him down. On the bottom, Gordeau was trying to find a hold when he received two

nasty head butts. Gordeau broke Royce's hold and rolled over on his belly. But that gave Royce an opportunity to get his left arm under his opponent's throat. Gordeau, in incredible pain and in danger of passing out, knew he had no recourse. He tapped out. Little Royce Gracie had won the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

No noteworthy commentator has ever accused the UFC's organizers of fixing the event (and there is no evidence they did), but it could not have worked out better for the Gracies. Not only did David slay a number of Goliaths, but the sling he used was nothing other than Gracie BJJ.

If you had been at the Big Mac that night, you might not have seen what a success *UFC 1* was. After all, the 2,800 fans there may have been excited (there was even a small riot in the stands at one point), but they were vastly outnumbered by empty seats. But far more important were the 86,000 pay-per-view subscriptions SEG sold, not to mention the numerous VHS cassettes and the incredible amount of good publicity the Gracies' BJJ school received. The original investors saw a return in revenue of at least seven times what they put in.

They had proved McLaren wrong. They had made a sport of it. Just a few months later, *UFC 1* was followed by *UFC 2* on March 11, 1994. Also staged in Denver—but at the more appropriate 3,700-seat Mammoth Events Center (now called the Fillmore Auditorium)—the event drew just 2,000 fans. But SEG sold an incredible 300,000 pay-per-view licenses. What had been a one-off idea by a bunch of California-based martial arts fans had morphed into a multimillion-dollar industry—and a burgeoning sport. And since Royce won again, the worldwide reputation of the Gracies and their brand of BJJ kept growing.

But things began to change. Many in the martial arts world noticed Royce's success and began to emulate his style. But periods of

slow action in the fights turned off many viewers and the number of pay-per-view customers began to decline sharply. To combat this, the UFC instituted time limits for the matches. But there was a problem. Without judges, there was no way to declare a winner if a fight reached the time limit.

And on April 7, 1995, at *UFC 5* in Charlotte, North Carolina, the worst-case scenario occurred. A long-awaited rematch from *UFC 1* between Royce Gracie and Georgia-born Ken Shamrock saw the pair go at it for what seemed like forever without any discernable action, never mind a conclusive winner. The crowd was alive with boos, and even Shamrock's second—his own father, Bob Shamrock—was shouting at him to "do something!" After an excruciating-to-watch 31 minutes, the event's referee, John "Big John" McCarthy, stepped in and separated the pair. After a five-minute break, they restarted. But after another five minutes of grappling, with the crowd booing lustily, McCarthy stepped in again and ended the fight, declaring it a draw. *UFC 5* was instead won by Dan "The Beast" Severn whose kimura forced fellow wrestler Dave Beneteau to submit.

It was a turning point for the UFC, and the desire for new rules and the inclusion of judges proved decisive. Rorion was said to be angry that the new-look UFC would be a diluted version of what he had originally envisioned, and he divested himself of the organization. Davie also sold his share—leaving SEG as the UFC's sole owner as Milius had only invested in the first event—but stayed on as the league's commissioner until the end of 1997.

Things were looking up for the fledgling organization, despite the loss of the Gracies. Mixed martial arts had become popular nationwide and, even though they had dropped, pay-per-view licences were still running at up to 260,000 per event and VHS sales were strong. More money and more exposure led to a better class of fighter, which in turn made the league even more popular.

But there would be a barrier to success. Known now for his 2008 run as the Republican presidential candidate who lost to Barack Obama, John McCain had been in Arizona government since 1983, and was a well-respected senior senator when he was sent some VHS tapes of UFC events. A lifelong boxing fan, McCain was shocked by the uncontrolled violence in the Octagon. He made it a personal campaign to wipe it from the face of the Earth. He personally wrote impassioned letters to the legislatures of all 50 U.S. states and 10 Canadian provinces imploring them to outlaw the sport. He called it "repugnant" and famously referred to it as "human cockfighting."

It worked surprisingly well. Before long, exhibitions of mixed martial arts competitions were banned in 36 states and seven provinces. He also used his connections at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to contact pay-per-view distributors to convince them not to carry UFC events. That worked, too. SEG's main distributor, Viewer's Choice, and many smaller carriers dropped the UFC.

One of the states that outlawed the UFC was New York. That posed a problem: *UFC 12* was set to be held in New York City. It was a huge blow because a show in Manhattan would be a big boost to the sport's national and international recognition. Frantically, the organizers looked for an alternate venue. They settled on one in Portland, Oregon, only to be rebuffed when that state also refused to sanction the event. Finally they settled on Dothan, Alabama—a 65,000-person dot on the map that calls itself "The Peanut Capital of the World."

The event itself was different. As a nod to fans who were tired of seeing 175-pound martial artists take on 400-pound behemoths, weight classes were established. It was crude—participants over 200 pounds were heavyweights, those under were lightweights—but it was a sign that the UFC was willing to make adjustments to

keep fan interest. It also marked the beginning of the UFC's association with popular comedian Joe Rogan.

But it was a tough time for the league. Although 3,100 people attended the event (selling out the Dothan Civic Center), the pay-per-view audience was limited, with only then-small DirecTV carrying the event. Although no reliable numbers regarding the pay-per-view audience were ever made public, most experts agree that the number was not far from 25,000. *UFC 12* marked the beginning of what some fans call the "Underground Era" or even the "Dark Ages" of the UFC, during which the league held events in the few states without sanctioning bodies, in Japan and in Brazil. The live crowds were enthusiastic but the pay-per-view audiences were tiny. Even finding distributors for the videotapes proved increasingly tough.

Desperate to end the marginalization of their sport, UFC officials met with state athletic commissions and let it be known that they were willing to make big changes if it meant that their product could get sanctioning. Although the Gracies, Davie and Milius probably would have disapproved, the UFC began to institute a number of rules and more weight classes. Responding to criticisms about fighter safety, the UFC instituted gloves as mandatory equipment and eliminated kicks to the head of a downed opponent, hair pulling, fish-hooking (inserting fingers into the mouth or nostril of an opponent), head butts and strikes to the groin. That was followed by bans on strikes to the back of the neck and head as well as small joint manipulation, such as the twisting of fingers and toes.

Surprisingly, it was another mixed martial arts organization—the much smaller International Fighting Championships (IFC), which was based in the United States but held its first event in Kiev, Ukraine—that first achieved sanctioning in the United States. It happened in Mississippi in 1996. But it didn't mean much to the

UFC because it was already holding events in states very much like Mississippi without the need for sanctioning. It wasn't until the IFC was sanctioned in New Jersey on September 30, 2000, that the UFC really took notice. Not only is New Jersey home to nearly 9 million relatively affluent Americans, but it's well within the New York City communications universe. Acting quickly, the UFC adopted New Jersey's "unified rules of mixed martial arts," which had been developed by the IFC, and set up an event in the Garden State.

Set at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino Hotel in Atlantic City on November 17, 2000, *UFC 28* marked the beginning of a new era for the UFC. Gis and any clothes other than trunks and the now-mandatory gloves and shoes were banned. Rounds lasted five minutes and were judged. If no fighter submitted or was knocked out after five rounds, the judges would declare a winner. Even McCain, once the UFC's greatest opponent, changed his mind. "The sport has grown up," he told a British newspaper. "The rules have been adopted to give its athletes better protections and to ensure fairer competition."

It worked. To some extent. *UFC 28* sold all 5,000 tickets, but the pay-per-view audience was still minuscule. And, as a result, SEG was facing bankruptcy. Dana White, a former aerobics instructor who managed two prominent UFC fighters (Tito Ortiz and Chuck Liddell) at the time, caught wind that SEG was looking for a buyer for the UFC, so he called his old friend Lorenzo Fertitta, who co-owned Station Casinos with his brother Frank and had previously been Nevada's state athletic commissioner. The Fertittas put together a company called Zuffa, LLC, bought the UFC, gave White a 10 percent share and named him president.

Zuffa put a lot of money into the UFC, increasing advertising, promotion and DVD distribution. And they worked very

closely with state and provincial authorities in an effort to gain more widespread acceptance of their product. After that, the UFC began to come back.

And by the time GSP made his debut in *UFC 46* in Las Vegas on January 31, 2004, the Dark Ages were well and truly over. Mixed martial arts had eclipsed boxing as North America's martial art of choice and professional wrestling as its most popular combat sport. Held at the Mandalay Bay Events Center, *UFC 46* had 10,700 spectators for a claimed gate of $1,377,000 and a pay-per-view audience of 80,000.

The UFC had established itself as a major sport. And it was looking for a hero.