

# BLUNT FORCE TRAUMA

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS IN PHOTOGRAPHS

Lee Whitehead

Foreword by Dan Hardy



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## CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Introduction	11
Friendship	23
Killing time	39
Fight or flight	53
Brothers	71
Battle	95
Pain	111
Almost there	127
Mercy	141
Victory	153
Defeat	165
Respect	181
Acknowledgements	192

To all the fighters on their way up, at the top and  
those coming to terms with a life after the sport.



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# FOREWORD

## DAN HARDY, UFC WELTERWEIGHT CHALLENGER

In June of 2004, on a small show just outside of London, I began my professional career as a Mixed Martial Artist. In the following years, I fought my way through the grass-roots shows in the UK, climbing the rankings until I got my shot on the big show.

The recognition is a welcome reward for the small percentage that are fortunate enough to have success on the world stage. It validates the hours of hard work and sacrifice that it took to get there. But for those that aren't as fortunate, it is simply the love of the sport that keeps them fighting.

With little financial reward or international fame, it's difficult for people outside of the sport to see why fighters stay so dedicated. But they wear their scars with pride, like medals of bravery, risking everything for a shot at glory.

We all walk a similar path, contributing sweat and blood to the sport we love and to which we dedicate our lives. Some leave a mark in history, others just on the canvas in the cage, but all deserve to be remembered.

To tell each and every fighter's story would be impossible, but moments captured in time give an insight into a fighter's journey. Moments of glory and success or moments of pain and disappointment – all are a part of life as a fighter.





# INTRODUCTION

LEE WHITEHEAD, AUTHOR / PHOTOGRAPHER

My first experience of Mixed Martial Arts was different to most. It didn't come by way of blurry VHS tapes of early Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) material; it came first-hand at a small event called 'Night of the Samurai', held at The Sanctuary in Milton Keynes, promoted by a local martial artist called Lee Hasdell.

At the time the sport held its roots in Japanese Hybrid Wrestling based around the Rings rules system, which itself was derived from the Pancrase rules system that was in place as far back as 1993 – predating the inaugural UFC event in Denver. Those rules were very different from how they are today, but the ethos of real fights using a mix of techniques garnered from different martial arts was evident.

I can't lay claim to having followed the sport from its beginning, but from the moment I saw it I knew I was hooked and had to seek out more information. I then became aware of some obscure Vale Tudo fights that used to be played in a small local sports bar back in 1997 called Heroes. Speaking to one of the bouncers there painted a much bigger picture of the sport, and gave me access to early UFC footage through tape traders. I now knew that the concept Rorion Gracie employed to start the UFC drew a synergy with the Japanese approach that I was aware of.

Through my fascination with the sport I had the pleasure of watching early King of the Cage DVDs (held on Indian reservations in the United States), UFC, Pancrase, Shooto, Rings, Pride and various other shows, building my knowledge of the sport and understanding of its participants.

With the internet gathering pace and an increased availability of MMA-related content, I became an avid reader of *MMAWeekly* – a concentrated news resource on the sport that I could always rely on for qualified, factual information. I started writing for them purely out of chance as they needed someone to cover a couple of the promotions making waves here in the UK at the time: Cage Rage and Cage Warriors.

My initial task was to feed results back to the website's owner Ryan Bennett whilst a long-time friend of mine sat cage-side and took photos on a cheap £150 camera – the results were truly shocking, but at the time I was just happy to help increase the exposure these guys were getting.

A mix of circumstance and chance led me to take photos and report myself, and I invested in a small digital SLR to get the ball rolling; with no prior photographic experience and not a clue on how to shoot fast-moving objects, through a cage, with no flash and minimal ambient lighting I was ready to go. I had to learn photography on the job, through trial and error but I have always relied on my own knowledge of the sport and MMA training experience to read fighters' body movements, spotting telegraphed strikes and complex submission setups to pre-empt the shutter.

More than that, I have experienced firsthand what it feels like to get hit hard and hit someone back, be injured, run out of gas, get stuck, panic, get knocked out, submit and be submitted. It's not always pleasant, but it is always a test that I enjoy and it makes me appreciate what these guys have to go through.

Fast forward to 2010 and I find it staggering that the sport has grown so much since the early days. MMA is now mainstream – largely off the back of the stellar work the UFC has done in promoting its own unique brand of the sport; but to me, Mixed Martial Arts isn't promotion-specific; it doesn't belong to a particular nationality or country and is represented as much by top-flight guys fighting for titles as it is by the guy working 60 hours a week to pay his bills while still managing to make training and fight on a small show a couple of times a year.

Mixed Martial Arts is a sport, a community, a way of life; and I hope that through the pictures and stories highlighted in this book, you come to appreciate it for exactly that. These are real people finding out who they are and how they behave at the most primal level: by fighting.

There are literally thousands of fighters and hundreds of promotions worldwide that could have been included in this book, but this small selection represents the ones that have crossed my path and inspired me.

I hope that it does the same for you.





Fighting with an open mouth and a barbell tongue piercing is just plain dangerous... but it wasn't until the end of the second round that referee Marc Goddard found this out – by which point it was too late to do anything about it.

Fabricio Nascimento had his jaw tested several times in his bout with Jim Wallhead and thankfully escaped major injury, but the risks of entanglement, choking on the piercing and tearing of the tongue, make his an inadvisable MMA accessory.

Leaving your mouth open during a fight is inviting disaster – your jaw will have enough movement to either become dislodged or slide back into the nerves behind it, leaving you either broken or an unconscious mess on the floor.

