

Dan Henderson's UFC Bout Makes Wrestling Proud!

By Steve Fraser

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Our U.S. Olympic Team Leader John Bardis made arrangements for some of our U.S. World Championship Greco-Roman Wrestling Team to participate in the recent Dan Henderson vs. Anderson Silva UFC fight held in the great wrestling city of Columbus, Ohio. Bardis, who is also a big Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) supporter, coordinated with the UFC so that our World Champion Greco Team could escort Dan Henderson out from the locker room for his main event fight against the Brazilian champion, Silva.

Wow, what an exciting and big time event this was! Just fewer than 20,000 people were there to watch in this sold-out arena. With a huge pay per view audience as well, the fight was deemed as one of the best match ups ever in UFC history. The atmosphere was electric! The crowd was thrilling! Everyone was anticipating a tremendous contest between these two warriors.

The ringside seats where we were enjoying the battles from made the experience very cool, to say the least. People like Buster Douglas and Hilary Swank were seated just an arms length away. No question about it... the UFC and this fairly new sport of MMA is totally big time. I couldn't help to be a bit jealous of seeing how MMA and wrestling are so different when it comes to the fan base and general population interest. Amazing!

What I am very proud of is how our former wrestling stars can make the MMA transition so well. Wrestlers like Henderson, Randy Couture, and Matt Lindland, to name just a few of my Greco guys have done very well. And there has been many other freestyle wrestlers including our national freestyle coach, Kevin Jackson who have all been fairly successful in the MMA game. In fact, on the night of this event the UFC was inducting Mark Coleman, former NCAA Champion from Ohio State and Olympian in freestyle, into the UFC Hall of Fame.

Dan Henderson unfortunately lost his fight with Silva. He looked great the first period by taking Silva down and punching him numerous times, totally controlling the round. However, in the second period of the fight, Dan seemed to get caught with a knee blow and eventually got taken down where he was caught in a choke hold and had to submit with only 8 seconds left on the clock. How did Dan handle the defeat? Like a true champion. Humble, modest, and classy!

These former wrestlers who have ventured over into this new and growing sport have all been great examples of class guys and class competitors. All have been very well spoken and modest in their approach and demeanor. From all that this author has seen, our wrestlers have acted in a way that shows wrestling and wrestlers in a very good light. I am proud whenever I see a wrestler being interviewed on TV or whenever I see a wrestler win or lose after a MMA contest. They always act respectful and humble.

I think this is what the great sport of wrestling can do for our young people. Doing what it takes to become a wrestler builds an inner character that stays with you for life. The discipline traits learned; the willingness to make sacrifices; the dedication wrestling takes; and the humble yet tenacious attitude wrestlers develop are just a few of the benefits derived by being involved with this great sport of ours.

My hat is off to the wrestlers like Dan Henderson that have been able to go from a great wrestling career to a great MMA career. This is not an easy task for wrestlers especially because of the huge differences in the MMA rules and techniques that are required to win. The “guard”, for example is a very different position for wrestlers. Wrestlers are trained to never go to their backs. In the MMA game, going to your back in the guard position is very common. Plus with all of the submission holds, kicks and boxing type punches it makes for some very different skills necessary to be successful. No easy transition for a wrestler.

My congratulations go out to Dan Henderson and the rest of our former grapplers that compete in the MMA game. I am proud to say I am a wrestler whenever I see an MMA event that presents our boys going into action. Wrestling... still the best discipline in the world. I know I am biased, but when all things are added up, this is what I think.

As always, expect to win!