

## GARETH A DAVIES GUIDE TO UFC

THE Ultimate Fighting Championships' first fight night took place 14 and a half years ago in Denver, US, a one-off event pitching different martial artists against each other. Could a karate expert defeat a wrestler or a judo fighter? Would the skills of Brazilian jiu-jitsu overcome a wrestling specialist or a boxer? The one-off event was a hit, and spawned new contests, developing into the sport of Mixed Martial Arts - known as MMA.

Today, under the auspices of sanctioning bodies and formulated rules, the Ultimate Fighting Championships - football's equivalent of the Champions' League within the sport of MMA - pitches elite modern-day gladiators against each other using a hybrid of mixed martial arts inside 'the octagon', a 30ft fighting zone.

It is a rapidly-growing, international sport, with a huge global fan base. The sport is booming in the US and around the world - with the UK, France, Holland and several Eastern European countries showing rapidly increasing numbers of fans.

Some professional rugby league and rugby union players are now learning MMA skills, while the athletes involved are increasingly respected by other professional sportspeople. UFC is, without doubt, a modern sporting phenomenon. Like all combat sports, it has its critics.

UFC President Dana White, a former boxer who bought the rights to the UFC brand for two million US dollars, with two partners, in February 2001, says the sport is now totally different to what it was when it started in 1993. Two years ago, the men in suits behind the sport injected a further 40 million US dollars, and their investment has paid dividends.

Last year alone, UFC grossed over 200 million US dollars, and attracted millions of fans worldwide. "The sport bears no resemblance to what it was when it started in 1993. Anyone who thinks so has been living under a stone for the last 14 and a half years," says White. "UFC is here to stay."

UFC has made Michael Bisping, a 29-year-old former amateur boxer from Lancashire - whose father was an Army sergeant major with the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, and whose three brothers followed his father into the forces - a huge star both in the US and increasingly in the UK after he won the televised US series of 'The Ultimate Fighter' in Las Vegas.

In 2007, an indication of his popularity came when Bisping was voted 12th in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award. Over the coming months, I will be reporting on UFC super fight events, and bringing you the interviews, the issues, news and debate from this fast-evolving sport.



GARETH A DAVIES



**Household name:** Michael Bisping, above, dishing out the punishment, and, left, copping a punch, is now a huge star in both the UK and the United States



## FIGHTING FACTS

### What is Mixed Martial Arts?

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is the fastest growing sport on both sides of the Atlantic. Two combatants compete against each other using a mixture of martial art disciplines such as boxing, Greco-Roman wrestling, freestyle wrestling, judo, taekwondo (all Olympic sports) as well as other traditional martial arts such as kickboxing, karate, jiu-jitsu, and Thai boxing.

### How long do contests last?

Contests last for three five-minute rounds (five rounds for UFC title fights) unless a combatant wins inside the distance by scoring a stoppage or submission. If the bout lasts the distance, a winner is found via the scorecards of three ringside judges, who use the same '10-point must' system utilized in boxing.

### What is the Ultimate Fighting Championship?

The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) is the world's premier mixed martial arts organisation. Established in 1993, the UFC is the equivalent of football's UEFA Champion League of mixed martial arts and boasts the world's elite and most experienced MMA athletes.

### Celebrity UFC Fans

- Pamela Anderson (pictured)
- Lee Majors
- Paris Hilton
- Keanu Reeves
- George Clooney
- Girls Aloud
- Man Utd players
- Ricky Gervais
- Jonathan Ross
- Yasmin and Simon Le Bon
- Mandy Moore
- David Haye
- Danielle Lloyd
- Jay-Z
- Beyonce

