



Win or lose, healthy or injured, fightsport veteran Don Frye always delivers

by Stephen Quadros

Photography by Fernando Escovar

the

PREDATOR

The first time I ever encountered Sierra Vista, Arizona, native Don Frye was in February 1996 while judging for UFC 8 in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. The UFC was at the height of its powers and it was the night featuring the "David vs. Goliath" tournament.

I remember sitting cageside at the sold-out Ruben Rodriguez Coliseum when the 30-year-old, 206-pound Frye walked into the arena—only to be greeted by boos. Then his opponent, the hometown boy, entered the scene: 410-pound Thomas Ramirez, a *pa kua chang* practitioner who claimed to be undefeated in 200 challenge matches. The crowd roared its approval.

I became worried, thinking, *What if this fight goes the distance and I feel Frye won?* I looked around at the crowd of over 15,000 fans simmering in the more-than-100-degree heat and wondered if I would get out of there alive.

As it turned out, the Arizona native (and newcomer to my radar screen) put away the big man from Bayamon in a mere 10 seconds. And even though Frye was a

second-degree black belt in judo and had more than 700 victories while competing in Greco-Roman wrestling, he did it with the punches he had honed during his brief pro boxing career. Before the tournament, Frye commented, "When I step into the octagon, my opponent will become my prey."

1996 was a good year for Frye. He won two UFC tournaments (UFC 8 and Ultimate Ultimate '96), compiled an impressive 11-1 record and never saw a fight go to the judges. After a five-year stint in Japan as a pro wrestler for Antonio Inoki, Frye became restless and yearned to fight in mixed martial arts again. His return to PRIDE at the age of 36 culminated in his first-ever scorecard victory at PRIDE 19: Bad Blood—a classic grudge match against UFC colleague Ken Shamrock.

FightSport: What did the victory over Ken Shamrock mean to you?

Don Frye: I really wanted to beat Shamrock because he was one of the best in the UFC and he's getting a lot of notoriety.

And I never got any of the notoriety that he got, so there's a lot of jealousy involved in it ... a lot of immaturity. I wanted to fight the best and beat the best.

FS: You mean jealousy on your part?

Frye: Yeah, jealousy on my part.

FS: You know, I've got to tell you, it takes a real man to admit that.

Frye: Thanks. I'm not above admitting my failures. I'm pretty good at it. *(laughs)* I've been married for a couple of years. I know how to say I'm sorry.

FS: You brought up immaturity. The whole fight game, the scuffles during press conferences, the trash talking, etc. ... Do you think this kind of behavior is immature for men in their 20s and 30s?

Frye: *(snickers)* Oh hell, I don't really know what kind of behavior is mature for men at that age. Basically, look at what we do for a living: We fight in our underwear. Not much maturity is based on what we do.

FS: Let's go back. It was a rule meeting, which PRIDE show Brian (Johnston) were *I'm not sure it was, but you and cornering (Kazuyuki) Fujita for his fight with Ken Shamrock. I hadn't seen you guys in a while and noticed that both you and Brian were limping. I walked over to you and said, "Don, Brian, when you guys do leg locks, do you tap out or do you guys just let it snap?" Then you laughed and explained it wasn't from training, but an excursion from the previous evening. Remember that?*

Frye: *(laughs)* Yeah, I do. We were downstairs at Wall Street (a bar in the Roppongi section of Tokyo) and Brian decided to go upstairs. Then we hear this [crash], so I ran upstairs ... and Brian's in a fight with seven Iranian guys. They busted bottles over his head. He had sandals on, so he flipped off his shoes and was standing there fighting in the broken glass. So I grabbed a couple of guys and started fighting, too. I chased one down the street and he jumped into a cab. I couldn't get the cab door open, so I punched through the window, pulled the guy out and started beating the piss out of him. The next thing I know, I had the Tokyo police force on me. And they pretty much beat the snot out of me and ran me into jail. When they realized who I was, we were shaking hands and taking pictures by the end of the night. I

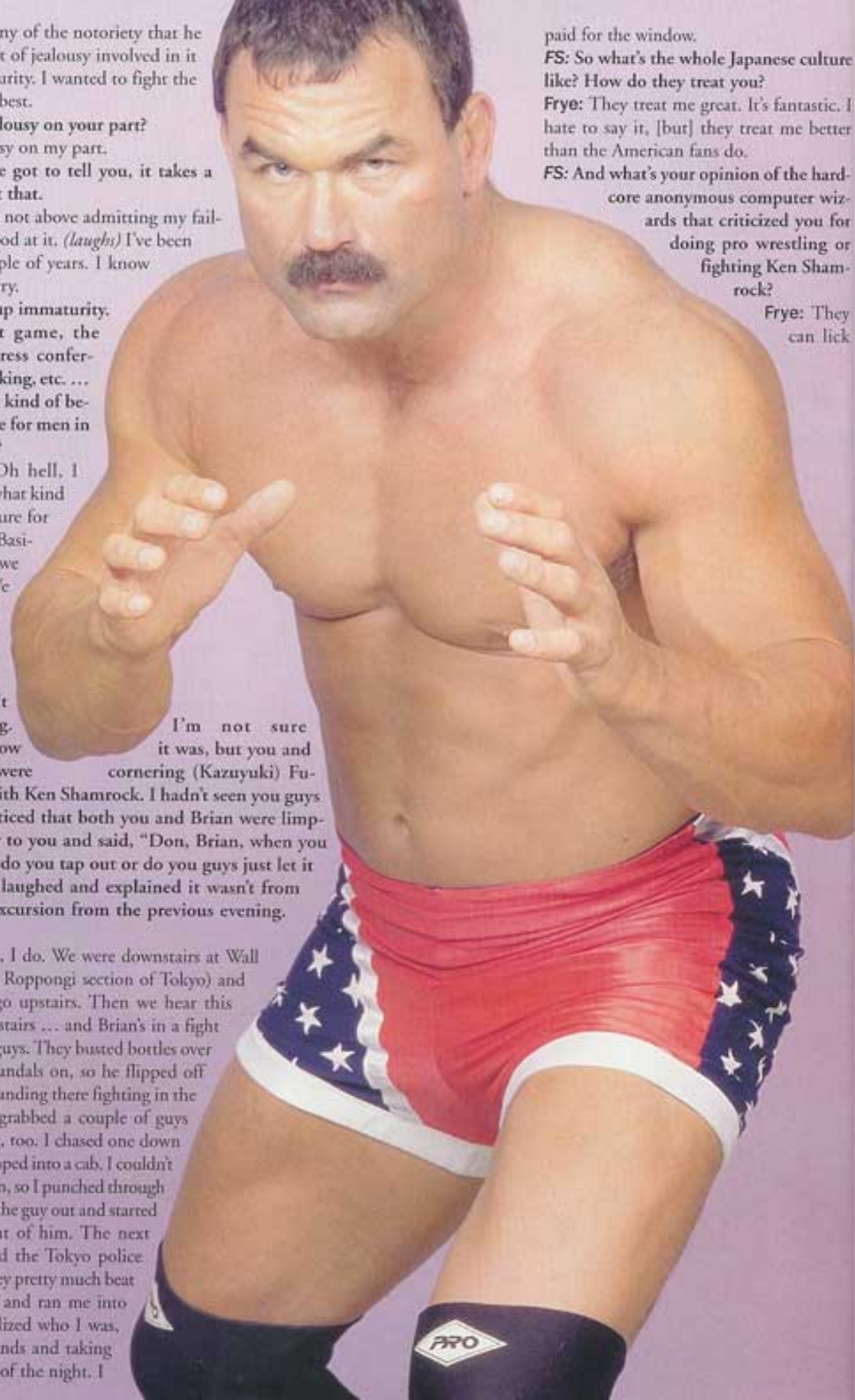
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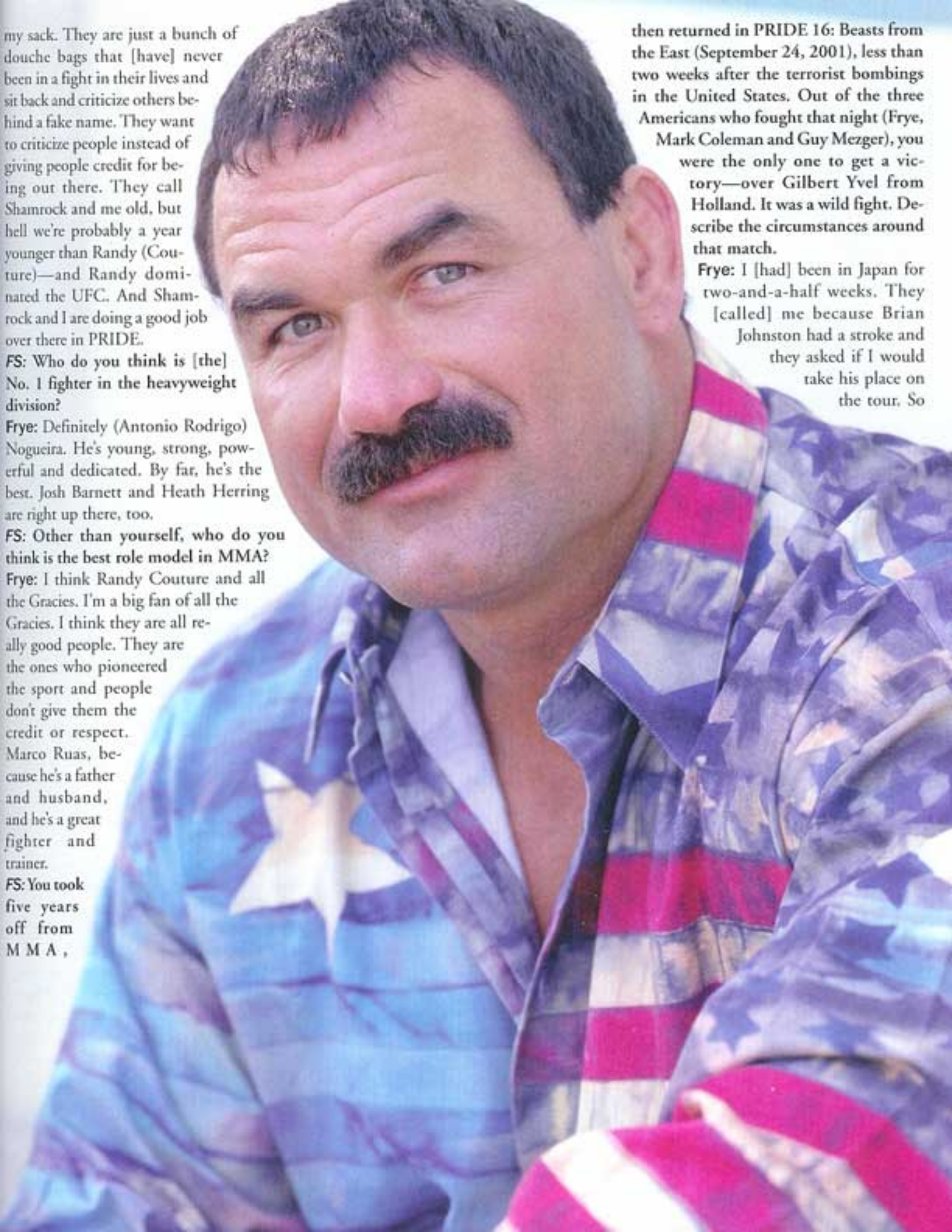
FS: So what's the whole Japanese culture like? How do they treat you?

Frye: They treat me great. It's fantastic. I hate to say it, [but] they treat me better than the American fans do.

FS: And what's your opinion of the hardcore anonymous computer wizards that criticized you for doing pro wrestling or fighting Ken Shamrock?

Frye: They can lick





my sack. They are just a bunch of douche bags that [have] never been in a fight in their lives and sit back and criticize others behind a fake name. They want to criticize people instead of giving people credit for being out there. They call Shamrock and me old, but hell we're probably a year younger than Randy (Couture)—and Randy dominated the UFC. And Shamrock and I are doing a good job over there in PRIDE.

FS: Who do you think is [the] No. 1 fighter in the heavyweight division?

Frye: Definitely (Antonio Rodrigo) Nogueira. He's young, strong, powerful and dedicated. By far, he's the best. Josh Barnett and Heath Herring are right up there, too.

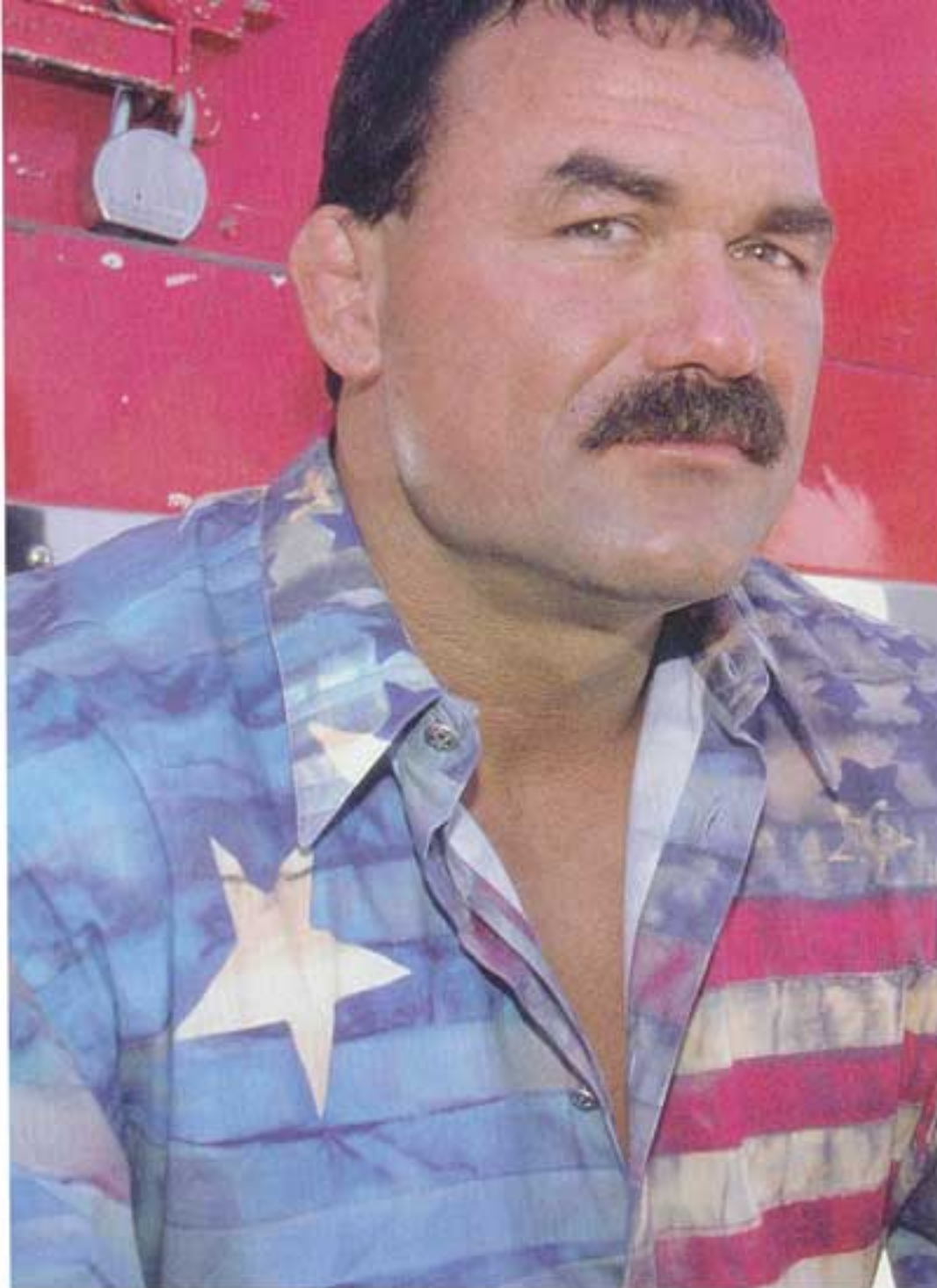
FS: Other than yourself, who do you think is the best role model in MMA?

Frye: I think Randy Couture and all the Gracies. I'm a big fan of all the Gracies. I think they are all really good people. They are the ones who pioneered the sport and people don't give them the credit or respect. Marco Ruas, because he's a father and husband, and he's a great fighter and trainer.

FS: You took five years off from MMA,

then returned in PRIDE 16: Beasts from the East (September 24, 2001), less than two weeks after the terrorist bombings in the United States. Out of the three Americans who fought that night (Frye, Mark Coleman and Guy Mezger), you were the only one to get a victory—over Gilbert Yvel from Holland. It was a wild fight. Describe the circumstances around that match.

Frye: I [had] been in Japan for two-and-a-half weeks. They [called] me because Brian Johnston had a stroke and they asked if I would take his place on the tour. So



impossible to defend. It takes away a great weapon when they remove it.

FS: It makes the guard less practical.

Frye: Right. Makes a hell of a difference when you're in the guard when your hands are tied up and his hands are tied up. The head butt makes a difference. I think it's a great weapon. I like it.

QUICK FACTS

Name: Don Frye

Nickname: "The Predator"

Year of Birth: 1966

Hometown: Sierra Vista, AZ

Height: 6'1"

Weight: 230 pounds

Career Record: 14-1-0

Most Recent Opponent: On June 23, 2002, Frye faced Yoshihiro Takayama at PRIDE 21: Demolition. Frye defeated Takayama by TKO (strikes) at 6:10 in the first round. He was originally slated to face Mark Coleman, but Coleman suffered a head injury that prevented him from fighting.

—Raymond Horwitz

FS: Do you think you'll be remembered as a pioneer who combined wrestling and striking?

Frye: I don't know. I don't know if anybody will remember me. I hope so—and [I hope they] remember me in a good way.

FS: Do you have any parting thoughts for the readers of *FightSport*?

Frye: Yeah. Support the fights. And the people that get [on] the Internet and they think they are hard-core fans, they're gonna ruin the sport by the comments [they make]. It needs everyone's help. It doesn't need everyone trashing the sport. I'd like [a] rematch [with] Mark Coleman. That's what I want to do next. (Frye's only loss was to Coleman in the finals of UFC 10.) They say a mule will wait 20 years to kick you. Well, I've been waiting six years to kick Coleman. Then I'd like to fight Nogueira. I want to have the belt before I walk away. And if I beat Nogueira, I gotta defend it at least once or twice before I leave to be able to say it's mine. **FS**

I was (pro) wrestling for New Japan while trying to prepare for this fight. [During] my last wrestling match, I pulled my abductor, so I took four days off. Then I went back and worked out a bit and I tore it, so I took the last three days off. We got there for the fight, I got a massage, [got] acupuncture, taped it up and I limped out there. All Yvel had to do [was] stay away from me. I would have never gotten him. But he's an aggressive fighter, a great fighter to watch. That's what fighting is all about. It's about fighting and not running—and that's what he did. He kept attacking me and I countered it. He ended up sticking a couple of fingers in my eye and I couldn't

see which way he was coming from. And they eventually disqualified him for eye gouging and holding onto the ropes.

FS: There was a little old-school UFC action from you in that fight.

Frye: Right, a little tit for tat. I'm gonna throw a head butt if he's gonna gouge my eyes.

FS: You go back to the days when head butts were legal. In fact, up until your last fight in the UFC, head butts were still legal. What do you think about head butts being banned?

Frye: Well, I think having the elbows, knees and head butts keep the sport pure. But I could see the problems with it. It's almost