



HELLO
my name is
Gummy
~~Bathroom~~
PITBULL

CAREFUL CONSIDERATION IS NECESSARY WHEN FIGHTERS CHOOSE A
PROPER NICKNAME.

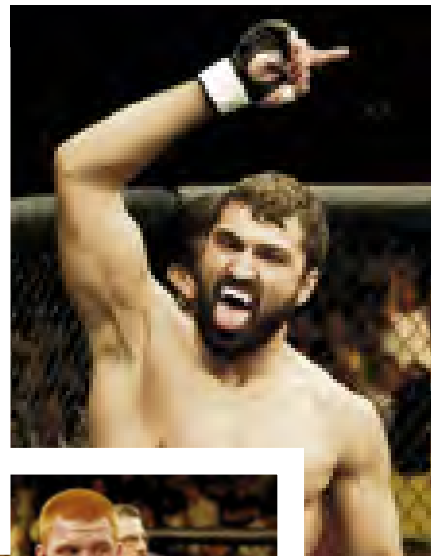
by Kelly Crigger

THE NICKNAME GAME

After winning a kickboxing match in 1999, 16-year-old Eddy Ellis found himself at a post-fight party losing his virginity to not one, but two women in the only unoccupied room in the house. Seven years later, the 23-year-old Ellis still can't shake the nickname veteran fighter Dennis Hallman gave him that night: The Bathroom. The XFC Champion, who also goes by Fast Eddy, has even been announced as The Bathroom before fights thanks to Hallman. "Dennis likes to have fun, and he did it to me with the nickname thing," says Ellis. While the label might not strike terror in the hearts of his opponents, the name has stuck for a number of reasons: It's true, it's funny and it's original.

While the best nicknames are a combination of the above qualities, many fighters adopt a nickname hastily, no matter how inaccurate, unappealing or overused it may be. A quick Internet search of MMA nicknames will result in nine Pitbulls, 12 Machines, four Hitmans and dozens of variations of the word Man. So, exactly how does a fighter determine an appropriate nickname?

Nicknames are an integral part of professional athletics, and cover the gamut from Buddy to A-Rod, Shaq-Diesel to Black Jesus, and The Big Apple to The Big Easy. A nickname can be clever, derogatory,



In the quest for an original and accurate nickname, Ed "Short Fuse" Herman (right) gets points on both counts. While Josh "The Baby Faced Assassin" Barnett (top) is deadly, he is docked points for lifting a moniker from boxing's Marco Antonio Barrera. Andrei "The Pitbull" Arlovski is penalized for adopting the most overused nickname in MMA.

prideful, self-effacing or just a shortening of someone's real name. The spectrum is broad.

Research on nicknames reveals that they were often "descriptive of physical characteristics like [T]he Small or Armstrong, or descriptive of character or mental or moral characteristics, such as Wastepenny, Careless and Bonfaith," writes Kristine Elliot of the Society for Creative Anachronism in her paper *A Brief Introduction to the History of Names*. "Sometimes a nickname can be metaphoric, yielding names like 'Peppercorn' for a small person and 'Fairweather' for a cheerful, sunny person."

The most obvious purpose of a nickname for a fighter is to gain a psychological advantage. Many hope their scary label will instill fear in their opponents, causing a drop in self-confidence and resulting in an edge in the ring—which is why you have a better chance of meeting a Crusher in the cage than a Snuggle Bunny.

But many fighters have different goals in mind when choosing a nickname. Take Team Quest fighter Ian "The Barn Owl" Loveland, for example. "I made it up because I wanted something unique," he says. "I'm not looking to scare anyone, I just wanted something funny without being too inappropriate. I've never even seen a barn owl."

Of the hundreds of nicknames in MMA today, most strive to be descriptive of the

person it's attached to, such as the nickname of "The Ultimate Fighter 3" finalist Ed Herman. "Short Fuse is perfect for Ed because he has such a quick temper," says Herman's teammate Matt Lindland. "He was easy to nickname."

"The Ultimate Fighter, Season 1" champion Forrest Griffin was given a nickname that unfortunately didn't stick. "An 8-year-old kid said I looked like Curious George, which I didn't really mind, but no one picked up on it," he says.

Some fighters don't choose their nicknames, but wish no one else would, either. Gumby is a name Jeremy Horn never aspired to be called and doesn't like. Frank "Twinkle Toes" Trigg agrees: "I was fighting in Japan when a woman in the audience picked me out and said, 'I like the fighter with the twinkly toes.' I have no idea why, but it stuck."

Oftentimes, nicknames can become problematic, especially as the years pass and fighters evolve or simply slow down. Consider Ken Shamrock's title The World's Most Dangerous Man or Vitor Belfort's moniker The Phenom, neither of which are as accurate today as they once were. Josh Barnett, who was labeled The Baby Faced Assassin at age 21, has a growing predicament with his nickname. "I got it after winning one of my first fights. Now I'm 28 and not sure how much longer I can keep it," he says.

Can a fighter make a legal claim to a nickname? According to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (PTO), a nickname cannot be copyrighted (like music or books) or patented (like an invention), but it can be trademarked as the legal property of the holder. Does this mean fighters will have to start emboldening a "TM" next to their nicknames like the Kansas City Chiefs? Yes, if they want to keep everyone else from using it. But trademarking a name or logo also means the possibility of litigation to protect it.

All professional sports teams trademark their logos and names for a good reason: money. A trademark can be expensive, but is worth the cost when compared to the millions of dollars in revenue it protects from merchandising. But permanent trademark status isn't guaranteed; the Federal Trade Commission can cancel it if it is successfully contested in court. According to the U.S. PTO, names cannot be protected if they are "disparaging, scandalous, contemptuous or disreputable."

Just ask the Washington Redskins, who lost their

WILL THE REAL EL GUAPO PLEASE STAND UP? PLEASE STAND UP?



BAS RUTTEN

How does a Dutchman come up with a Spanish nickname? "It came from the movie 'The Three Amigos,'" says Bas. "I used to call myself Handsome and then Ken Shamrock's ex-wife Tina told me about the guy in the movie who called himself El Guapo, which means handsome, so I started calling myself that." So what does Bas think of Matt 'Handsome' Wiman? "I think you should have fun with a nickname, but it should also suit the person. There are too many nicknames that are overdone, like Terminator and Eliminator. Although Mark Hominick definitely deserves to be called The Machine."

JOSH HAYNES

"The Ultimate Fighter, Season 3" finalist Josh "Bring the Pain" Haynes has a nickname that implies a challenge to other fighters. "It was given to me at a time when I was getting pounded on," says the Pacific Northwest fighter. "I would absorb a ton of punishment and then step in and finish the fight with something they weren't expecting to see." Although he couldn't pull out the victory against Michael Bisping to win the "TUF 3" title, Haynes proved it takes a lot of punishment to bring him down.

MATT LINDLAND

Having a memorable nickname is great for a fighter, but what about having a law named after you? After a controversial loss in the 2000 U.S. Olympic team trials, Matt Lindland successfully challenged the outcome and was awarded a rematch, which he won. That result was arbitrated all the way to the Supreme Court before the ruling was upheld, ending in a renovation of the appeals process for USA wrestling. "At first I didn't want to reopen that chapter of my life, but now I use The Law as a euphemism in the ring and because it's original."

QUINTON JACKSON

Rampage may seem like a pretty generic nickname, but the man who proudly wears it tattooed on his arm earned it—and not in the ring. "My cousins gave it to me when I was 8 years old," he says. "They used to get me spun up on purpose and watch me rampage around the house destroying things and getting into fights. I would even hyperventilate and have to breathe into a paper bag to calm down." Besides his own, what's Jackson's favorite nickname? "I like The Law, because I broke it," he says, referring to beating Matt Lindland by decision earlier this year.

DEAN LISTER

Dean Lister wasn't thinking of his childhood when he earned the nickname The Boogeyman. "It was given to me after my first fight because the guy I was supposed to fight got injured, and they went through a list of eight replacements before they got someone. My trainers said I scared them all away like the Boogeyman." His thoughts on nicknames mirror Rutten's. "The only reason I allow myself to be called that is because it's goofy and there isn't another one," he says. "My guys wanted to call me The Machine, but I don't think the tough-sounding nicknames do anything for a fighter."



NICKNAME

FIGHTER

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Soul Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Ryan Healy |
| Baby Faced Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Luke Cummo |
| Alaskan Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Gjermund Larsen |
| Eastside Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Melvin Guillard |
| Young Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Josh Barnett |
| Silent Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Mikey Burnett |
| Hawaiian Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> David Terrell |
| Irish Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Sam Hoger |
| Norwegian Assassin <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Kauai Kupihea |

Answers: Soul Assassin/David Terrell; Baby Faced Assassin/Josh Barnett; Alaskan Assassin/Sam Hoger; Eastside Assassin/Mikey Burnett; Young Assassin/Melvin Guillard; Silent Assassin/Luke Cummo; Hawaiian Assassin/Kauai Kupihea; Irish Assassin/Ryan Healy; Norwegian Assassin/Gjermund Larsen

trademark in 1999 after a group of Native Americans successfully took them to federal court over it. The team wasn't required to drop the name, but until they won it back in 2003, they were vulnerable to an estimated \$20 million loss in merchandise sales.

A fighter can apply for, and receive, federal trademark status for his nickname as long as he can show primary usage (no one else has it) or secondary usage (everyone calls him by it). But "if three or four people call themselves something in the same market, none is likely to have any rights," says Thomas Field, PhD, professor of law at the Franklin Pierce Law Center in New Hampshire. "It's like all the public school teams that call themselves the Cougars or whatever. The more common the nickname, the less likely anyone would associate it with a particular individual or firm."

Several athletes have borrowed nicknames from famous comic-book heroes. Currently, Iceman, Superman, Batman and two Spider-Mans are active fighters, and Captain America recently retired. DC Comics, which own the rights to the "Man of Steel," refused to comment on Dennis "Superman" Hallman, "probably because our sport is too new and too small for them to care," says Hallman. The nickname wasn't even his idea. "I had this Superman sweatshirt that I wore before every fight, so when a promoter forgot my name he just used 'Superman' and it stuck."

Marvel Comics protects the images and logos of its characters with trademarks, such as the Spider-Man mask and costume, but not the names. "There isn't much we can do about a nickname," says the Marvel legal department. "If [someone] wanted to use an image of Spider-Man on merchandise or dress up like [him], that would be a problem. We can't simply let people, no matter how well intentioned, run away with our intellectual property. But overall, it's a net positive when celebrities are fans of our characters."

The most obvious remedy to the nickname dilemma is research. Fighters should take the time to adopt a name wisely and only after careful consideration. After all, no baseball player in his right mind would think of calling himself Charlie Hustle or The Babe. But as MMA gets more mainstream, disputes are sure to arise over the dual usage of a nickname, especially when it involves merchandising dollars.

Randy "The Natural" Couture is one fighter who has trademarked his nickname. So how does the UFC Hall of Famer react when John Alessio enters the Octagon with "Natural" tattooed across his back? "I'm not offended by it," says Couture. "But since it's trademarked and my business depends on the name, we'll probably have to have a conversation about it soon." 🤝