

“We’d get a tip in the middle of the night and have to **roll on some guy’s house.**

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-Keith Jardine

# Punching the Clock

By Kelly Crigger

THE MAJORITY OF MMA FIGHTERS STILL HOLD A DAY JOB. HERE'S HOW THEY SPEND THEIR 9-TO-5.

## Packing up her belongings

and heading down the Yellow Brick Road with nothing more than a dog and some sketchy directions from a strange witch was a harrowing prospect for a young, pigtailed

Kansas girl. But Dorothy managed to muster up the courage to make her way to the wonderful wizard. The same can be said for MMA fighters, who struggle to reach that break-even point between working and training where they can finally leave the job behind and devote their lives to being better fighters. Training full-time without a job is a rare luxury, unless you don't mind living in your parents' basement and mooching off your friends. But in the still-burgeoning sport of MMA, a square job is a necessary evil for athletes to support their training.



Before winning "The Ultimate Fighter, Season 2," Rashad Evans (above right) worked in a hospital transporting bodies to the morgue. In his fight with Sean Salmon (above left), Evans returns to old habits and sends another body away on a gurney.

Love them or hate them, the cast of "The Ultimate Fighter 1" made a courageous foray into the unknown when they sequestered themselves in that Las Vegas domicile for six weeks. Those brave souls took a leap of faith and left their day jobs behind, helping elevate MMA to a new level and opening lucrative future doors for other fighters. These days, even making the finals of "The Ultimate Fighter" doesn't pave the way to the promised land of full-time MMA training. Take Josh "Bring the Pain" Haynes, finalist of the third season of the reality show, who manages a gentleman's club

outside of Portland, Ore. "It sucks, but it lets me train during the day and keeps a steady paycheck coming in," he says. Haynes garnered massive exposure from the show, yet he still works to support his wife and three kids, hustling between his home, the Team Quest gym and the club. "It's tough to keep my life my own, but I get by with it," he says. "My wife is real supportive." Granted, Haynes has a family to provide for, which not everyone has to worry about, but fighters can't rule out the possibility of supporting a family in the future.

"At least 50%, if not 60, still work," says promoter and manager Monte Cox. "A lot of fighters right now are young, entry-level guys who won't be financially solvent for a while. They'll need to work for a few years before they can earn enough to do nothing but train."

Many fighters thrive in the blue-collar world where pushing a wheelbarrow develops grip strength and swinging a hammer improves hand-eye coordination. A good number of fighters come from the electrician-carpenter-bricklayer side of the tracks, including Strikeforce superstar Duane Ludwig and IFL young guns Benji Radach and Rory Markham. When heavy-weight contender Paul Buentello got the call to fight Andrei Arlovski for the UFC heavyweight title, he was still pulling jobs for his construction company up until two weeks before the fight. "I like working because there's tangible results. I get to see what I've accomplished at the end of the day," says Buentello.

If ever there was a real-life Sylvester Stallone from "Over the Top" (i.e., a truck driver trying to earn money to do what he loves), it's Eugene "The Wolf" Jackson. This veteran of seven UFCs drove thousands of miles across the country training in the back of his rig on a pull-up and dip bar he made himself. These days, Jackson has the more prestigious job of inspecting repossessed houses in Oakland, Calif. "I walked through a yard with 20 syringes in it a few days back, but it's really interesting work," he says.

## FULL-CONTRACT FIGHTER

Is the life of a full-time fighter all it's cracked up to be? Rashad Evans and Ed Herman—both recent winners of UFC contracts—think so. In 2006, both left their day jobs in the dust. "I used to drive a forklift," says Herman, "which sucked."

Evans also knows the value of being able to train full-time. A former security guard for a Lansing, Mich., hospital, he was frequently called upon to deliver corpses to the morgue. "It was an

experience, because one minute you're watching a woman have a baby and seeing the miracle of life, and the next minute you're taking a body down to the morgue. It goes from good to bad real quick," he says.

So how have each adjusted to their new lifestyles? "It really taught me discipline," says Evans. "I never had to manage my time so closely before, but now it's get up, wrestle for an hour, do cardio for an hour, eat, box for an hour,

rest, eat, work jiu-jitsu for an hour, rest, eat, watch a video ... you get the picture."

Herman's only regret is not having the time to train others. "I used to teach MMA for 20 hours a week, but I just couldn't after getting the contract."

And what about the other requirements to appease the fans? "There's appearances, but I don't mind," says Herman. "I knew what I was getting into. Plus, I don't have to drive a forklift in the rain anymore."

Some fighters have made their living from fringe jobs you never knew existed—and never wanted to know about. The occupation of choice for many fighters is working the door of various watering holes. The flexible hours of a bouncer fits the lifestyle of someone who needs ample time to train during the day while earning money at night. The opportunity to use their skills when the occasional patron gets unruly is an added bonus. Mike Swick, Ed Herman and Keith Jardine, to name only a few, are graduates of Patrick Swayze's Cooler University. Jardine even tried his hand at impersonating Dog the Bounty Hunter for a month, chasing down criminals into the wee hours of the morning.

"It was crazy," says Jardine. "We'd get a tip in the middle of the night and have to roll on some guy's house. It was too unpredictable to train and keep that job."

Before winning the 2003 Abu Dhabi grappling championship, Dean Lister worked a variety of jobs

## THE BEST DAY JOB IN MMA

Many hardcore MMA fans think that a lifestyle of full-time training and marquee fights in the Octagon would be a dream come true. But Drew "The Master" Fickett, who has fought in the Octagon no less than seven times, once held the

occupation that most red-blooded men would kill for: male stripper. "It wasn't bad work," Fickett confesses with a laugh. "I actually wanted to be a bartender, but this strip bar I went into wasn't hiring. I ended up stripping instead until I got on my feet." And when was that? "Three years later," he laughs. From the pay to the

perks, Fickett's career in show business sounds tough to beat. "The money wasn't bad, but the women who took care of me were better," he says. "And I always had time to train."

Drew Fickett is no stranger to full-contact endeavors. He has since traded in his G-string, cuffs and bow tie for shorts and gloves.



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## THE WORST DAY JOB IN MMA

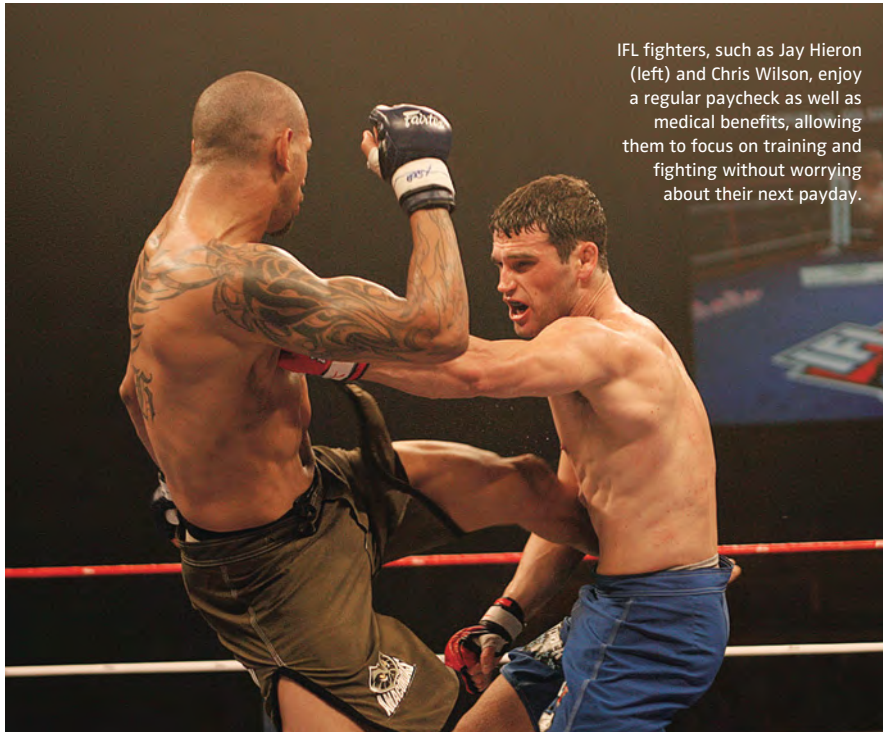
If Wes Sims seems conspicuously happy pursuing his living in the cage, there is a reason. Much like former UFC Welterweight Champion Matt Hughes, Sims was raised on a farm. But it's a safe bet that the backbreaking labor on the Hughes

spread was more desirable than the role Sims played growing up in rural Ohio. "I had the job of all jobs, brother," Sims announces as if he were about to float a beer fart in a bank line. "How do I put this? I had to manually manipulate horses for reproductive purposes on my dad's farm." Translation: Sims job was to masturbate frenzied horses in order to

"Your hands are cold, Wes!" says a lucky stallion from the Sims family farm, who helped the heavyweight develop a different type of rear naked choke.

collect their semen for the use of breeding. "It was awful," he says. "I love my parents, but as soon as I made enough money to move to Columbus and get my own apartment, I was done with that!"





IFL fighters, such as Jay Hieron (left) and Chris Wilson, enjoy a regular paycheck as well as medical benefits, allowing them to focus on training and fighting without worrying about their next payday.

## TEAM PLAYERS

"You know what it takes to sell real estate? It takes brass balls to sell real estate," said Alec Baldwin during his epic rant in the movie "Glengarry Glen Ross." He easily could have been talking about MMA rather than selling parcels of land in Florida. While some fighters are exhilarated by the elusive hunt for the big-show payday, others feel like a teetering Willy Loman, and would rather have security and stability. The latter might try their hands at landing a contract with the IFL.

"[It's] the best thing going for young fighters," Monte Cox says. "They get a salary, medical coverage and other benefits that the UFC can't offer."

From an individual perspective, the IFL has shown legitimate staying power, partially because it keeps their fighters happy. "The IFL takes care of

us better than any other organization," Seattle Tiger Sharks welterweight Brad Blackburn contends. "I'll stick with them."

But the IFL also has drawbacks, like a ban on individual sponsors and the undesirable potential of being on a losing team despite individual wins. Plus, fighters could be missing out on a bigger payday. "If the UFC, with their big checkbook, comes calling, they're stuck in a subpar contract that they can't get out of," says fighter and King of the Cage commentator Erik Apple.

So is the IFL the way of the future? Anacondas coach Bas Rutten thinks so. "I read recently that the three biggest MMA organizations in the world are the UFC, Pride and the IFL in that order, which blew my mind. I couldn't believe it. It's huge and getting bigger."

including "baby-stroller stacker" at Sea World in San Diego, Calif. "Until one day a stroller dumped baby spit on my new shirt," he says, disgustedly. "That's when I decided to give it up."

Thanks to Dennis Hallman's dad, IFL welterweight Brad Blackburn drove a septic truck for Hallman's company for two years. His memory of that time was predictable. "It was a s---tty job," says Blackburn, who eventually found better employment as a bank loan officer.

**T**he entrepreneurial spirit occasionally rises from the ranks to help MMA athletes carve out a decent living. Young and hungry, Strikeforce fighter Casey Olson started his own line of fight gear called Underdog after sliding lettuce wraps onto the tables of hungry patrons as a waiter while earning a bachelor's degree from Fresno State. "I actually manage the restaurant now," Olson says, "but only until I can fight full-time or the clothing line takes off."

Former UFC middleweight contender Nate Quarry has made real estate his full-time career. "I always collected things when I was a kid, like coins and stuff, so when I got older I kept doing it with houses," he explains. "I figure it's one of the limited assets in the world that will always be in demand." Quarry owns and manages several properties in the Portland and Las Vegas areas and frequently flips them for a profit. Will we see The Rock on Home and Garden TV pulling up carpet to find an antique hardwood floor underneath anytime soon? "I enjoy it, so you might," he says.

**B**alancing a schedule of work-train-work-train may not be ideal for a fighter, but for now the rat race is a necessary evil. Until purses and endorsements achieve parity with other major-league sports, Pride fantasies and Octagon dreams will continue to turn wrenches and clear tables in order to carve out enough gym time to be a contender. Just as every journey has a starting point, every MMA dream is spawned behind the wheel of a truck, in an office cubicle or on a rural family farm as a young lad straps on an industrial-sized latex glove.

As the next great champion sets out to see the Wonderful Wizard of Zuffa and fight in the Emerald City of the MGM Grand, he has to ask himself if he has the courage to quit his day job, sleep on couches, eat canned tuna and maybe even perform a lap dance or two. There's no place like the Octagon. 🥊