

REFEREE'S CALL:

Marc Ratner, One Of A Kind

by Nelson "DOC" Hamilton

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If you're a sports fan, then you know how much time and effort professional sports teams put into pre-season free agency signings. Getting the right player at the right time is frequently the difference between winning a championship or a mediocre season.

Every team in every sport looks to sign an "impact player". That one guy whose talents everyone respects and covets. Well, just incase you missed it; just such a signing was announced on March 24, 2006, and it rocked the boxing, kickboxing and mixed martial arts world; "MARC RATNER SIGNS WITH THE UFC".

Of all the recent free agency signings, none was bigger than this one. We're talking about a man who has served the Nevada State Athletic Commission (NSAC) since 1984, the last thirteen years as its Executive Director. A man widely considered to be the paradigm by which all other directors are measured. A man credited with successfully running the day-to-day operation of the most successful state athletic commission in North America.

Ratner's signing provides the UFC with instant credibility and respect. Not only does he have a wealth of knowledge about the combat sports, he has executive experience in dealing with promoters, fighters, lawyers, commissioners, and staff. "I don't know of another Marc Ratner walking around. He's been a fantastic leader for the commission and he will be missed something terribly," stated Skip Avansino, NSAC Chairman.

Marc's last day with the Commission was May 13, 2006. On May 15, 2006 he assumed the position of "Vice President of Government and Regulatory Affairs". If I understand his title correctly, it sounds as though the UFC has signed its much needed point-man for dealing with those state athletic commissions across the USA that have been slow to embrace MMA. To me, it sounds like perfect fit, given that he is an excellent diplomat with an

unflappable demeanor. One thing is for sure, when Marc calls, commissions will take that call.

Now, least you think that Marc has no life outside of his work, let me open your eyes. For many years he has been a football Line Judge for the Mountain West Conference. He was good enough to be assigned to work the 2000 Independence Bowl, the 2003 Hawaii Bowl, and the 2006 Cotton Bowl featuring Alabama and Texas Tech.

In addition to his football accomplishments, he is the official timekeeper at the UNLV basketball games, and, a commissioner of the Southern Nevada Officials Association. For his work as a high school and Mountain West Conference Official, he was inducted into the Southern Nevada Sports Hall of Fame on June 17, 2005.

As if being the best executive director in the business and a sports hall of fame inductee are not enough, Marc is also considered to be one of the truly likeable and self-effacing people in the business. Having personally endured autocratic state athletic executive directors, from California to New Jersey, I can personally attest to the fact that Marc has taken the road less traveled.

Despite having had a staff of three, he regularly picked up the phone without being told who's on the line. If you called him and left a message, he returned your call. He attended almost every press conference, was at ringside for virtually every fight, and, conducted almost every weigh-in, with his back to the cameras. Unlike some state directors who feel that it is their birthright to be in every picture taken during an event, Marc believes that the athletes are the stars of the show.

In the words of the noted jurist and boxing referee Mills Lane, "Marc Ratner has respect. I've never heard anybody talk disrespectfully about him. Even people, who don't like him, respect him. And I haven't met many people who don't like him."

In closing, Marc's hiring by the UFC both pleases me and makes me happy. It pleases me because it re-affirms my belief that a job well done is its own reward. And, it makes me happy when I see good things happen to good people, because that reaffirms my belief in the almighty. Good Luck Marc!