

## **REFEREE'S CALL**

### **MMA-101: The Genesis**

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Anyone involved in the sport of mixed martial arts (MMA) is well aware of its explosive growth and popularity over the past couple of years. Promotions for the UFC, PrideFC, and IFL can be viewed weekly on both basic cable and network television. PPV television and live gates are setting records throughout North America. So much so, that even cable television heavyweights Showtime and HBO have decided to get in on the action.

MMA's new found popularity translates into hundreds of thousands of new fans. These fans, although appreciative of the excitement and competition that MMA has to offer, know little if anything about its history and evolution. If you are one of these new fans or know someone who is, pay attention to this column because, Ultimate Grappling presents MMA-101.

#### ***Genesis:***

Despite pronouncements to the contrary by its detractors, MMA is not a bastard sport! It has both an ancient and modern lineage. A brief synopsis follows.

Wrestling was introduced into the Olympics in 708 B.C. and boxing in 688 B.C. In time, controversy arose as to who was a better fighter, the boxer or wrestler. This controversy gave rise to pankration, which means "all strength" or "all power," being introduced into the Olympics in 648 B.C. For all practical purposes, most martial arts historians will agree that Pankration, the third combative sport of the ancient Olympics, was the first MMA style competition.

A combatant's objectives in pankration were to knockout the opponent or make him submit. Fighters were permitted to use any type of hand, foot, knee, and elbow strike as well as joint locks and choke holds. They wore no gloves; there were no time limits, no rounds, and no weight classes. The fight ended when a contestant was submitted or physically unable to continue. Eye gouging and biting were the only two illegal techniques.

Possibly the most famous pankrationist was Dioxippus. Not only was his reputation in battle legendary to the point that no one would fight him, but, he is reported to have been a friend of Alexander the Great. Some historians believe that through his training of both the Greek and Roman armies, pankration spread throughout Europe and eventually made its way over the Himalayas with Alexander's army.

Throughout the ensuing centuries, in every culture, in every place, men engaged in combat sport fighting, giving rise to an ever expanding body of martial arts knowledge. In 1886, Jigoro Kano, a jujitsu practitioner, developed a code of conduct and a practical system of martial arts practice, which he termed judo. Judo became so widely popular that it was integrated into the Japanese public school system.

In 1904, Kano sent his best student, Mitsuyo Maeda, to the United States on a goodwill judo/jujitsu tour at the request of then President, Theodore Roosevelt. Subsequently, Maeda toured the Americas, reportedly competing in over a thousand challenge matches without losing.

Mr. Maeda immigrated to Brazil in 1915. There he was befriended by a politician, Gasto Gracie. In exchange for helping him secure a consulate position, Maeda agreed to teach judo/jujitsu to Gracie's son, Carlos. Carlos studied with Maeda until he formed his own school in 1925.

Carlos taught his friends and four brothers. His youngest brother, Helio, was frail and slim of stature. With time and practice, Helio realized that much of what he learned required more strength than he possessed. Through trial and error, he began changing and adapting his techniques accordingly. Subsequently, these changes gave birth to Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, which emphasized groundwork and submission techniques as opposed to the throwing techniques associated with judo.

As the Gracie name and style of jiu-jitsu became popular in Brazil, numerous challenges were issued in an attempt to discredit both. Over the next three decades, Helio became famous as he defended his style in numerous matches. Since most of the challenges employed arm and leg strikes as well as groundwork, the matches were termed "Vale Tudo", which in Portuguese means, "anything goes." Usually, these matches had no time limit, no weight

classes, and winning could only be accomplished via submission, choke-out, knockout, or the corner throwing in the towel.

In 1978, Helio's eldest son, Rorion, immigrated to the U.S.A. and began teaching Gracie Jiu-jitsu, a name he coined and trademarked. In an attempt to get widespread exposure for his art, Rorion teamed with advertising specialist, Art Davie, and Semaphore Entertainment Group, to establish the War of the Worlds (W.O.W) promotional group.

*To Be Continued...*

## ***THE EVOLUTION CONTINUES***

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