



WALK THIS WAY

Two men enter, but one man is usually more entertaining.

BY T.R.FOLEY // PHOTOS BY SUSUMU NAGAO

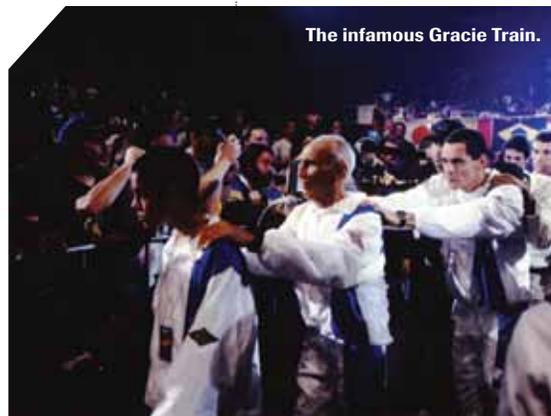
Jason Mayhem Miller's entrance to Dream 9 where he fought Ronaldo Souza. The fight ended with an NC due to a cut from an illegal kick.

Readers who've seen *FIGHT!* contributor and Strikeforce middleweight Jason "Mayhem" Miller enter an arena may find themselves confused by how half-dressed women, blaring music, and exploding pyrotechnics can help you prepare for a fight. These and other brazen expressions of self-aggrandizement might irk the Matt Hughes fan, but Miller is simply offering the newest version of combat entrances tethered together by expressions historically aimed at pre-fight reassurance.

To deal with the psychological pressure of fighting for cash in front of thousands of fans, many fighters resort to repetitive, ritualized behavior. Premier among them: their introduction to fans. For Mayhem, it's being ensconced in the glow of fireworks and mobbed by Hello Kitty models, while for Royce Gracie, it was the Gracie Train, something he's said gave him the "strength of all my family."

Family is a large part of recent fighters' entrances. For the Gracies, and many others in the combat arts, family consists of sparring partners, coaches, and trainers—not just blood relatives. According to professor

Dr. Suzanne Lease, who specializes in the study of masculinity in culture, the mixture of influences among closest advisors (wrestling, striking, and grappling coaches) helps explain why clearly delineated entrances like the Gracie Train



The infamous Gracie Train.

EAST MEETS WEST

› **Sumo Wrestling:** The Dohyo-iri is one of the more captivating combat entrances. While it may look as though it's just men the size of water buffalo trotting around in diapers and ornate waist tapestry, the ceremony pays respects to the gods and the opponents. Every competitor enters the area by rank, circles up, claps their hands, raises their arms (to show they have no weapons), and stomps the ground. Yokozunas—the grand champions of sumo—enter as solo artists, make the famous stomp of the dirt to expel bad spirits, and proceed to bow.

› **Muay Thai:** The Wai Khru Ram Muay traditional pre-fight celebration is performed by both competitors. Both men are charged with thanking their teachers and apologizing to the king for the brutality of their fight. The fighters then dance to show their ability to undertake the moves needed for combat. American Folkstyle Wrestling: Dim the house lights and cue Journey's Only the Young. Since the release of *Vision Quest* in 1986, high school wrestling teams have been repeating this formula. For collegiate wrestling competitions, there might not be a more drab entrance, as pre-competition hyping isn't practiced, but a handshake between opponents before the match is still required.

› **English Boxing:** These entrances run the gamut from Muhammad Ali coming out to the Star Wars theme music in 1977 to Floyd Mayweather Jr. wearing a sombrero while 50 Cent rapped next to him for his fight with Oscar de la Hoya in 2007. Most boxers rely on an amoeba-like arrangement of cohorts to escort them into the ring. Some are trainers—while others like Don King—are promoters, making sure to get face time on television.

have morphed into a conflation of cultures and ideals, some in direct conflict with each other.

“There are more Eastern rituals of bowing to the crowd and opponents, and more Western ideals of hugging and kissing among men with a certain bond,” says Dr. Lease. “Some traditions emphasize restraint, others toughness and status.”

The East/West hybrid of influences and ideals is now as mixed and the martial arts it represents. A ring entrance by Kenny Florian can contain several

effusive displays of emotion toward friends and teammates (traditionally Western), but end with a bow of respect (traditionally Eastern)—just like the hybrid of him using a Muay Thai clinch to set up dirty English boxing.

The individualization of a fighter’s entrances will continue to vary greatly depending on his influences. Fighters are charged with finding the unique potion—models, music, entourage—capable of providing them the confidence to be locked in a cage with a man paid to make you bleed. **E**

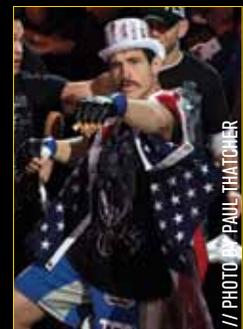


Genki Sudo enters to xxxx xxxx
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ENTER-taining

> Kazushi Sakuraba:

For his fight against Kevin Randleman at the 2003 Pride GP, “The Gracie Hunter” entered the arena dressed as Super Mario against a backdrop of the video game, while wearing a shirt that said simply “WATER.”



// PHOTO BY PAUL THATCHER

> Tom Lawlor:

At UFC 113, Lawlor paid homage to MMA great Dan Severn by dying his hair black and donning an adult-actor mustache and man panties. If that wasn’t enough, “The Filthy Mauler” then reincarnated Apollo Creed from Rocky IV and entered the Octagon to a rousing rendition of Living in America by James Brown.

> Genki Sudo:

At K-1 World Max 2002, Sudo entered the arena wearing a white plastic mask and a Kentucky Fried Chicken bucket on his head. While breaking out robot-like dance moves, he released a level that sent a column of smoke from the top of his head.