

TAMING THE BEAST

Want to talk responsibility? Marty Morgan is the primary influence on the world's most powerful and complicated fighter—Brock Lesnar.

BY T.R. FOLEY // PHOTOS COURTESY DEATHCLUTCH.COM

Morgan is not a sports psychologist, he doesn't coddle Lesnar, and he doesn't speak for him in public. Morgan's job is training Lesnar by improving his fitness, strengthening his toughness, finding weaknesses in the opposition, and giving the UFC Heavyweight Champion's 300 pounds of fast-twitch muscle fiber a gameplan to maul his opponent. The rest is just execution.

Lesnar first met his future coach in 1997 when he was wrestling for Bismarck State College alongside Morgan's University of Minnesota in a small pre-season tournament in Fargo, ND. The bald-headed and goateed assistant coach was sold by the sophomore's size and athleticism. "He was just pummeling people," says Morgan.

As an assistant coach at the University of Minnesota, Morgan's territory was training the team's upper-weights, and there was no one better to spread his kingdom of dominance than the buzz-cut kid who, even in his early twenties, was equal parts rhinoceros and Rambo. At the end of his tenure at the Bismarck community college, Lesnar joined Morgan at the University of Minnesota.

Those who know college wrestling would argue that Morgan was the best wrestling coach in all of Division I. He wrangled the nation's best recruits and had them in peak condition for the NCAA Championships. After his successes (see "Morgan in a Minute"), the Morgan name became omnipresent in discussions of premium head coaching positions. Some people thought he stayed in Minneapolis for 16 years because he was loyal to head coach J. Robinson, who'd been his coach in college. Regardless, Morgan never became a head coach. In 2008, however, when Lesnar was shopping for a coach to head his MMA training, Morgan was sitting atop a one-man list.





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“Marty was the only person that could guide my training,” says Lesnar. “To be able to have the best wrestling coach around—who knows me better than anybody—in the gym everyday, overseeing my development...are you kidding me?” That brief courtship has led to the duo enjoying sadistic, Morgan-led, wrestling-inspired training sessions at the Death Clutch Gym in Rochester, Minn.

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While Morgan helped make Lesnar a champion at Minnesota, Lesnar’s loyalty to Morgan isn’t just explained by success on the mat—plenty of college coaches would find themselves steering MMA gyms if it were that simple. The hiring is best explained when held against the backdrop of the former WWE star’s tumultuous relationship with the potion of fame.

For years, Lesnar puddle-jumped across the country as a showman for the WWE, but when he retired suddenly, the result was an unhappy Lesnar and an even unhappier fan base—to say nothing of the WWE. It doesn't take a Freud to recognize that Lesnar wanted someone in his corner who was unquestionably committed to his training and disinterested in guiding or mooching off his publicity.

Enter Morgan. Of course, the other refrain is that Lesnar's emotional outbursts in response to negative fans and inquisitive reporters were troubling, and Morgan quieted that tendency in Lesnar. Maybe. But Morgan understood that Lesnar couldn't be made to



change his behavior (who's going to enforce it?), rather, Morgan's job was to make sure the champ was knocking people unconscious. Morgan learned the best way to lead wasn't to interfere or question, but simply to lead.


"He goes into the cage the way he is feeling, sometimes that's angry and sometimes it's not," says Morgan. "I'm just getting him ready for his opponents." The champ has responded.

"Wanna know what kid of guy Marty is?" queries Lesnar. "When I was in the hospital and didn't know if I was going to survive, let alone ever fight again, Marty was there by my bedside the entire time, for two weeks." This is something Lesnar seems certain that few other people in the MMA world would have done for him.

Morgan's commitment to his long time understudy is compelling, and if his come-from-behind victory against Shane Carwin is any example, it's also inspiring. The duo is poised to dominate the heavyweight division for years to come.

"We are taking this one fight at a time," says Morgan. Next for Lesnar is Cain Velasquez, a Division I, All-American wrestler from Arizona State University and the best wrestler Lesnar's ever faced in the cage. The strategy? Morgan won't say outright, but he's confident and—as always—prepared.

"Velasquez is talented, but we are gonna have a gameplan and be in the right frame of mind," says Morgan. "When the bell rings, Brock's going to be ready to scrap. Guaranteed."

All that's left now is the execution. 

MORGAN IN A MINUTE

- › 1991 NCAA Championship Wrestling Champion at 177 pounds for University of Minnesota
- › 39-0 record as a senior
- › Three-time All-American
- › Member of two U.S. World Teams
- › 16-year assistant coach at University of Minnesota
- › 1999 Assistant Coach of the Year
- › Three-time NCAA Team Champions
- › Coached: Brock Lesnar (NCAA Champ), Tim Hartung (2x NCAA Champ), Cole Konrad (2x NCAA Champ), Damion Hahn (2x NCAA Champ), Garret Lowney (Olympic bronze medalist), Shelton Benjamin (2x All-American)

