

The Fighting Irish

I always believed that during the worst of conflicts, you needed to rise above the clutter. I attended Duncan's breakfast after I was fired, and I was going to continue interacting with the Hunters despite our differences regarding the minister, until I was told otherwise. At no time did he ever say "...or else", but I knew our rapport was severely damaged by that idiot. Duncan was loyal to a fault, but I was going to work past it if that was in any way possible. The first thing I was going to do was fulfill my previous commitment to Lynne to give Audre's excess computers to the schools she was working with. My second approach was to take the ultimate avenue to Duncan's heart. It came to me in a flash, and it has turned out to be one of the turning points in my life.

Having always been a fight fan, I was mesmerized by the Ultimate Fighting Championships when they were first broadcast in 1993. Pitting all forms of martial artists against each other in what came to be known as mixed-martial arts or MMA, Ultimate Fighting was nothing short of an epiphany to me and many others. My father had followed a family tradition by learning how to box at an early age. His Uncle, Tim Fogarty, had been one of Ireland's leading heavyweights in the 1910s. Tim served as a private in the Irish Guards of the British Army and fought seven bouts around the British Isles and even in India, with his match against the great Delaney setting an Irish record for attendance in Templemore Tipperary. Dad later made the family proud in WWII by becoming the Armed Services undefeated Middleweight Boxing Champion during two tours of duty in the Pacific theater.

After leaving the Marines at the end of the war, Dad became a boxing instructor as he worked his way through college on the GI Bill. One of my earliest memories was being taught by him how to box as a kid, and I eventually got pretty good at it. I captained a boxing club during High School and was at one time trained by one of my father's friends, a former professional boxer who later became my High School chemistry teacher and the Boy's Club summer camp supervisor. Initially impressed, my dad even arranged for me to meet former Heavy Weight Champion Jack Dempsey at his restaurant in Time's Square. I was big for my age and experienced enough to start knocking kids out, a talent that quickly earned me the respect of my peers. That was important, as I elected to play soccer instead of football in school. Lacking speed and agility, but making up for it with strength and determination, I had always found myself getting assigned as a

lineman, a position I hated. I may have ended up just a fullback in soccer, but at least I would get to run around rather than just lunge and grunt on a football field.

Soccer at that point in time, however, was considered a sissy's game, while playing for the football team was a very big deal. The football players would sneer at us as we suited up together in the locker-room, and on more than a few occasions I invited some of the supposed tough guys to put on some gloves and try their hand sparring with a sissy like me. It would always end with me punching them out. I remember losing only one match in my life, to a guy that danced around like Ali to my Sonny Liston style. He barely laid a glove on me, but I looked awkward, which I was. Ironically, his older brother was the two-time state wrestling champion, and I had never lost a match wrestling in High School. Because boxing and wrestling were held during the same season, I had to choose one or the other and I chose boxing. The brother, Patsy, was the most intimidating figure in our High School, and will admit I avoided wrestling him. I also noticed that he never asked me for a match, wrestling or boxing. Despite my one loss, I had a good record and was getting encouraged to consider possibly fighting in the Golden Gloves. It became the start of the end between my father and me.

He was adamant against my boxing, correctly noting that I was more determined than dexterous and stronger than I was slick. He knew I would eventually lose, and was unrelenting in telling me to play baseball, golf or tennis, all sports that I hated. He especially liked baseball and tennis. My Dad had played semi-professional baseball himself, and he knew it was potentially a lucrative livelihood. Tennis became his sport of choice later in life to stay in shape, and while I was in High School, he used to lure me into matches by letting me drive his car to and from the court. It was an OK activity, but mostly I just wanted to slam the tennis ball through the fence, a technique that did not help me win too many games. Tensions escalated between us as I continued to get bigger and soon, I was strong enough to believe I could take care of myself. Having worked part-time since I was eleven as a caddy and newspaper delivery boy, I had my own bank account and after buying my first car I became uncontrollably independent. Brought up during the depression and disciplined by nature, my attitude did not go over well with my father. We almost came to blows on a number of occasions, and it became increasingly obvious our little house did not have enough room for both of us.

I ended up leaving home right after I graduated from High School. It took all of my attention to hold down a job to pay for my rent and education, but after a long interlude away from fighting, I decided to pick up Karate when I was a junior at the University of Connecticut. Having boxed and played soccer, I figured I would be good at Karate and that was the case, with one exception. I took Tae Kwon Do from a third-degree black belt who thought he was pretty cool. Karate was all the rage then and he was a hot shit. If you did not kowtow to him, he would make an example of you, and I always turned out to be his favorite target. One of the biggest problems I had was that Karate is very choreographed and I did not like that. I am good at fighting people or at least punching a bag or something, but I am not good at fighting imaginary adversaries. My girlfriend at the time was a Rockette and Karate lessons reminded me of her dance classes. I was not into all of the discipline it required, and I especially did not respect Tae Kwon Do's style of punching.

Now punching was something I knew well, and I considered myself good at it. I had learned since childhood that you turned your body into a punch and punched through your opponent. In karate you do not turn your body. Instead, you countered the forward force of your punch by moving your opposing fist in a sharp backward motion, effecting short swift punches while keeping your shoulders square. It made absolutely no sense to me, and in the heat of Karate's choreographed fights or by the time we actually started sparring, I would instantly revert to a boxing style of punching, much to the displeasure of my "master". It finally got to the point where he would attempt to make an example of me by proving that the swift multitudes of karate punches were superior to the slower, sweeping boxer's style. During one especially heated sparring session he tried to turn it on at me and I ended up throwing an obviously lethal punch at him, pulling back only at the last moment. He went off in a rage and we decided to have it out once and for all. I was itching for a fight myself, and we squared off and went at it. Dispensing with any kicking, we just threw ourselves at each other with punches. I am proud to say that I knocked the asshole out cold. He was on the floor doing the eye roll and nearly swallowing his tongue, a convulsion that completely freaked me out the first time I ever knocked someone out. I thought I had killed the guy, but he eventually came to his senses. By this point in my life, I had seen the effect more than a few times and had no worries that he would regain his composure, if not his self esteem. I blew against the top of my fist like blowing smoke out of a gun barrel and smirked. I guess that was intended to signify my graduation from his class. I doubt he was listening to me while getting attended to by the other students, but I do

remember offering to teach him how to box, just so long as he remembered to refer to me as “master”. I never went back.

That was the last time I ever fought with anyone for real until one time in Kansas City. Three druggies tried to rob me on the street, but after I squared off to fight them, they turned and ran. OK, there were a couple of road rage incidents as well. One was especially humorous in that after all the usual ranting and obscene finger gestures, we stopped at a light and the guy I had been tailgating jumped out of his car and started heading over to my truck. Not wanting to get stuck inside, I quickly jumped out and confronted him. He took one look up at me, then turned and ran back to his car, locking the door. The funny point was when my girlfriend, Teri, ran up to him while he was still trapped at the light and motioned for him to open his window so she could speak to him. In a move out of the three stooges, she then reaches through his window while pointing to his name tag that was sewn onto his work shirt and when he looked down at his chest to where she was motioning, she slapped him in his face. He got so nervous that he pulled away from the light while it was still red, only to get immediately pulled over by a cop who was sitting nearby. We laughed hysterically as the light changed and we drove past him. What a loser, someone who should never have started a fight he was not prepared to finish.

Suffice it to say I was never the type to get picked on. I attended the Woodstock Festival the summer I graduated High School and as my college graduation neared, flower power had taken a firm hold on society and all you needed was love. I stayed in shape, however, but other than punching a bag, which I could rhythmically machine gun with the best of them, I considered fighting something to watch on TV rather than do myself anymore. Years later while I lived in Scottsdale, I used to go to a gym where Alexis Arguello and Sugar Ray Leonard trained, but the thought to suit up myself and get back in the ring never crossed my mind. In an ironic coincidence, my ex’s forensic accountant turned out to be Sugar Ray Robinson’s former business manager. After the trial and her refusal to pay him, which was typical of her, he shared with me some of his best fight stories and a tape of Ray’s fights. He even provided the court with an affidavit on my behalf in my attempt to get a re-trial, knowing full well the judge’s decision was ridiculous, but the court declined to consider his evidence that the ruling defied the facts he had uncovered during his employment by her.

After a long interlude, the light bulb really went on when I first saw Ultimate Fighting. Here were people using boxing, wrestling, jiu-jitsu, and karate all together in a fight. Rather than be governed by rules derived from one discipline or another, there were virtually no rules, and any discipline could participate. Wow, it was wild, and it advanced the understanding of hand to hand combat more in ten years than it had progressed in the prior thousand years. I was glued to the screen realizing how frustrated I had been growing up, not being able to do what they now had made a sport of and imagining how good I would have been at it had I been given the chance. I still have not gotten over its impact. I have been deeply involved in the sport since I first set eyes upon it, and a lot has to do with getting back on Duncan's good side.

As an avid watcher of the sport's maturation, I became a huge fan of its most charismatic star, Severn nemesis and two-time UFC Super Fight Champion, Ken Shamrock. Ken had been a hero in Japan when Ultimate Fighting first started, and he was there from day one. As the first ever Japanese promoted "King of Pancrase", the original Greek Olympic sport that combined boxing and wrestling, Ken was not only the epitome of MMA, he also had the appearance of a Greek hero. Hercules or Achilles to be specific, with a bodybuilder's physique and an indomitable warrior's spirit, he tore through his opponents with skill and ferocity. Now enshrined as one of the first two members of the Ultimate Fighting Hall of Fame, Ken became so popular that he was drawing huge pay-per-view audiences for his every match, up until the rug was pulled out from under the sport in 1996. The fact that the UFC was catching on like wildfire did not go unnoticed by the entrenched boxing establishment. Ken was beginning to realize audiences that only De La Hoya could draw, and it was not a welcomed change to many. Suddenly an undercurrent of slander started sliding out to the sporting community calling it "human cock-fighting", and that it needed to be banned or civilization would crumble.

The only thing crumbling was boxing and as a practitioner of both sports, each is brutal in its own way, but both reflect man's historic fascination with hand-to-hand combat. The difference is that MMA employs a lot more techniques and positions, and it is therefore much more interesting to watch or participate in. But rumors and innuendo, combined with boxing's control over venues and broadcasters had its effect, and by 1997 the UFC was all but out of business. Broadcasters were refusing to play it, papers would not cover it, and stars like Ken were forced to leave the sport to find a way to

make a living somewhere else. In Ken's case, his popularity propelled him into professional wrestling where he quickly became a star. Introducing UFC and Pancrase style moves to the traditional pro-wrestling crowd was bringing him rave reviews and an entirely new fan base. He was soon the "King of the Ring", "World Tag-Team Champion" with Big Boss Man, and then Ken "defeated" X-Pac to become the "World Wrestling Federation's Intercontinental Champion". All the while, however, he was in his heart a real fighter, and still committed to rejoining the UFC as soon as it became possible for him to make enough money to take care of his family.

It was during a UFC match that involved a member of Ken's fighting academy, "The Lion's Den", when I first heard it mentioned that he had just moved from Northern California to San Diego. I almost jumped out of my seat. The UFC match I was watching was being held at an out of the way arena and playing to a much smaller broadcast audience, but I was one of the few to get it given that I was on a satellite system and able to pick up the signal. Ken was still in the WWF but had taken time off to heal from some injuries and was training the other fighters in his academy, all of whom seemed at the time to be invincible. I used to bring VHS tapes I recorded of Ken's fights to the pharmaceutical company I ran, to play for the employees at lunch time and it became quite a ritual. Now here I was a year later, and Ken had moved to San Diego. I was quite amazed and started thinking about stopping over to meet with him. He was a big star, and I did not want to come off as a gawker, so I put the thought to the back of my mind until one day when I was standing outside our bankruptcy courtroom waiting for one of our status sessions to start. I was reading the case docket schedule and came upon the name "Kenneth Wayne Shamrock vs. Pancration Promotions". I was very surprised to read his name on the sheet, but knew it had to be him.

I thought it was quite a coincidence, after all of his fights that I had watched to find him here in bankruptcy court, just like me. He never showed up in court that day as his case was continued, but I thought it was time to do a little checking into his filing and possibly pay him a visit. I found out that Pancration Promotions was a promoter that had sued him for defaulting on a contract to fight in Japan after he joined the WWF. It appeared that they had won a judgment when he did not defend himself in court, and as a result, he was forced to file bankruptcy to attempt to overturn a huge monetary decision rendered in abstention. One thing led to another, but I never acted upon it in part because I felt stupid to just show up, and another because his

business was his own and who was I to make comment on it. It was shortly after my disagreement with Duncan that I read in the paper that the Lion's Den was hosting an open house at their new facility in Chula Vista and that the public was welcome to attend. That was enough for me. Knowing that Duncan was as rabid a fight fan as I was, and to add icing to the cake his sons were huge professional wrestling fans, the time had come to bring it all together. I called up the Hunter house and let Lynn know the situation. It did not take much to get their youngest son, Sam, psyched up to attend and soon word about going got back to Duncan. Lynn called back to let me know that all of them wanted to attend.

To lay a little groundwork I called the Lion's Den and ended up speaking with Ken's wife, Tina. I had seen Tina on TV attending his fights, and stepping into the octagon shaped cage to congratulate Ken whenever he won. A couple times it was very memorable, and they had even been featured on a television news magazine program produced by ABC. The reporter visited Ken's facility in Northern California before they moved south. Deeming him "The World's Most Dangerous Man", the program profiled Ken and showed him preparing for a fight. The nickname stuck and the show gave me an insight into what a good guy he appeared to be, both while taking care of business or when taking care of his family. Tina worked at the Lion's Den while Ken was traveling around the country with the WWF.

I paid their facility a visit to know how to get there and to introduce myself. Tina was very nice, although slightly preoccupied with getting the place fixed up in time for the open house. Tina was originally from San Diego and the Shamrock's moved back to Chula Vista to be closer to her family because Ken spent so much time on the road. Her aunt was helping out behind the counter and her father, Robert, was attending to some of the construction that was underway. It turned out that Robert was a former Air Force enlisted man, who was spending as much time at a golf course as he could. I told Robert that I could probably be helpful to both causes, one by setting him up with one of my business partners from the pharmaceutical company, an Orthopedic Physician, to play golf at the San Diego Country Club, and the other by introducing him to the Chairman of the Armed Services Procurement Subcommittee. We seemed to get along as well as could be hoped for, so I promised to return to their open house with both Duncan and Dr. Tasto in tow.

Jim Tasto is a great guy. At the time he was not only the President of the American Society of Orthopedic Surgeons, he was an adjunct physician for the US Olympic Training Facility in Chula Vista. Jim appreciated athletes and was especially intrigued to meet Ken, so he readily agreed to join us. In another of those funny coincidences, unbeknownst to me, it turned out that Jim was Sam's physician and highly respected by the Hunter family. The big day arrived and my girlfriend Loraine, her daughter Shannon, and I drove to the Hunter household. Loraine and Shannon had watched Ken fight a couple of times and had even seen him wrestle in the WWF. On one memorable occasion Ken was matched against Dan "the Beast" Severn in the first ever UFC "Superfight". Dan is an especially formidable opponent, having at that time won more than seventy world fighting titles, including being the reigning UFC Heavyweight Champion. He was taller and at 275 lbs, much heavier than Ken. We were exhausted by anticipation by the time the fight started and ecstatic when Ken quickly won by choking Dan into submission. Dan would later get his revenge, but at the time it was one of the most exciting fights we had ever seen, and all three of us were very much looking forward to meeting Ken in person.

Attendance from Alpine was a sell-out as Duncan, Lynne, Duncan Jr., and Sam were all ready and waiting to meet "the World's Most Dangerous Man." We had to take two vehicles to carry us all there. Jim met us at the Lion's Den and shortly thereafter we were inside making introductions to Tina and Robert. Tina was pleased to see all of us and escorted us to the back of the training area so we could meet Ken away from the general public that had gathered in a crowd out front. Ken could not have been more cordial. Due to his apparent congeniality, we quickly became comfortable speaking with him. He even laughed when we told him he seemed smaller in real-life compared to the huge superhero he appeared to be on TV. Being not particularly tall, but decidedly muscular and ruggedly handsome, albeit with a nose that had encountered many an immovable object, he had been told that many times before and took no offence. Most surprising and endearing of all was his personality. He could not have been more polite, accommodating, and respectful, willingly engaging in conversations, posing for photographs, and signing autographs. He had a wry sense of humor and good naturedly joked about his injuries and golf game. Briefly a Marine before the Corps discovered that he had once broken his neck in High School, causing his immediate honorable discharge, he was impressed that Duncan would visit and was such a fan of his. Even Dr. Tasto got into the act, talking to Ken about his physical ailments and spending some time with

Ken's brother, Robbie Kilpatrick, who was wearing a shoulder cast from a training injury.

We departed, promising to stay in touch to set up some golfing and to invite Ken to one of Duncan's political gatherings. I told Ken and Tina that I had a good friend who had just funded the arena football league and given that he was also a black belt, I would make arrangements to bring him by to look into some of their business plans. Ken told me he had decided to leave the WWF when his contract expired and would be getting back into fighting once his injuries healed. As part of that plan, they had a strong interest in building up and possibly franchising the Lion's Den Academy. Ken was also unsure as to with whom he was going to fight, the UFC or Japan's Pride Fighting Championships, and he harbored some thoughts about starting a fighting league of his own. I could not have been more pleased with how things had transpired and with how courteous and open-minded Ken seemed to be to my overtures. He appeared impressed with the company I was keeping and figured that I might be of some assistance in helping him with some of his plans. Little did he know that the feeling was mutual and like a lot of symbiotic situations, there was good to be gained by both of us. I could not have imagined that our visit would be the start of a close friendship that has endured and remains strong to this day.

I am now writing this in 2007, fourteen years after the first UFC broadcast. Today is Thursday and on Saturday, I will watch an acquaintance of mine fight for the light-heavyweight title. Ken and I were at Rampage's first ever fight, and this weekend was now finally his chance to commence his reign as World Champion. As crazy as it seems for someone fifty-five years old, last September I participated in an MMA seminar conducted by a former three-time King of Pancrase and former Ultimate Fighting Heavyweight Champion, Bas Rutten. Ken and Bas had two title fights in Japan against each other, with Ken easily winning both. My prospects were not nearly so dominant, but a nicer and more fun guy than Bas is hard to find. I have also sparred a couple of times over the past two years with one more former UFC Heavyweight Champion and one of only four members of their Hall of Fame, Dan Severn, the very same man Ken had two epic battles with. Dan is another great guy, but inflicting pain is what he gets paid to do and he is very good at it. I definitely need to get in better shape before he comes back to town for our third session!

Another promise I made to Ken when we first met was to see if I could work with Duncan to help Ultimate Fighting gain an audience with Senator John Mc Cain, Chairman of the Commerce Committee. As Chairman, Mc Cain oversaw professional sports. The Senator was a boxer while in the Naval Academy and was well recognized as a life-long fight fan. Mc Cain's opinion carried a lot of weight with the individual state athletic commissions, and it was important to get him back on-board. It was the Senator who had written letters to the sports commissions of all fifty states in 1996 to ban Ultimate Fighting and Ken was less than optimistic. He had already gone toe to toe with Mc Cain on the Larry King Show when momentum started to build behind the Senator's efforts to get the UFC shutdown. In his typical style, Larry King was prodding the Senator for his take on Ultimate Fighting, and Mc Cain described how he thought it was unnecessarily brutal, akin to "human cockfighting". Ken replied by asking Mc Cain if he had ever seen a UFC match, since it appeared to him that he did not know what he was talking about, because in-fact the matches tend to be less injurious to the fighters due to the submission techniques employed. Apparently, the question caught the Senator off guard as he had to admit that he had never watched an event live and was in fact just repeating what others had shown him on selected video clips.

Ken is very articulate, and he quickly capitalized on Mc Cain's admission by informing him that he should do his homework before speaking derogatorily about a sport he knew nothing about. In typical Mc Cain fashion, the Senator was not particularly pleased to be admonished on national TV by a fighter and he made as much known to Ken. Ken felt that he had won the battle but lost the chance to positively impress the Senator, and was now concerned that Mc Cain would want nothing more to do with him. I believed that the Senator would take a liking to the sport the more learned about it and that we should give it a shot, especially with Duncan and possibly Duke's help. Like Duncan, Duke was a fanatical fight fan. He liked every form of fighting, be it in the air, on land, over water, or in the halls of congress itself and I had no doubt that he could easily be enlisted to our cause.