

ROYCE GRACIE

KICKING ASS!

MEET THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP'S MOST STORIED WARRIOR.



UFC HALL OF FAME ROYCE GRACIE will long be idolized as an unstoppable fighting machine. Raised to win, he is the son of Hélio Gracie and nephew of Carlos Gracie, the legendary innovators of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Royce earned his blue belt in the martial arts discipline at the tender age of 16 and later moved from Rio de Janeiro to California at the urging of his brother Rorion Gracie. Royce went on to represent the family in the "Gracie Challenge"—an open invitational challenge where any boxer, wrestler or martial artist could engage Royce in a no-holds-barred, no-time-limit battle. This eventually transformed into what is now known as the wildly popular Ultimate Fighting Championship. Royce remains the promotion's most victorious combatant and is said to be worth millions. The man, myth and legend stopped by HUSTLER for an exclusive chat about his brilliant career, autographing babies and his kickass action figure.

HUSTLER: How does it feel to have your own action figure?

ROYCE GRACIE: That I made it! That now my kids now know who I am. Before now they knew that I teach Gracie Jiu-Jitsu and that I trav-

el all over the world to prepare for fights and that I'm on TV fighting. But for them, none of that is a big deal. My two oldest are starting to realize a little bit who Dad is. But to the younger ones, I'm still just Dad. Having an action figure changes that. It makes me a superhero in my own house. *(Laughs.)*

Are the proportions right?

I'm very happy. I told the guy designing it to add a little muscle, and he did.

A lot of people credit you and your brother Rorion as the pioneers of mixed martial arts. Do you agree with them?

In America, yes. But to the world, my father [Hélio Gracie] is the one who started the whole thing. He is the one who opened doors for the entire family. I'm just a vehicle of my father's work. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Rorion is the one who set up the very first UFC event in November 1993, and I was chosen to represent the family. I was the chosen one, let's say.

How young were you when you started martial arts training?

With my family, as soon as you start walking, you start fighting. To my kids at home, getting in a fight is no big deal. Training in jiu-jitsu—kicking, punching and grappling while rolling around in a gi—is natural. We have mats at home. That's how my brothers and I grew up with my father. It's the same way with my kids.

What do you think you'd be doing now if you hadn't gotten into martial arts?

I am patient, and I am stubborn. So anything I would have done I would be the best. I have that kind of conviction and that kind of discipline to go ahead and do it. Anything. You tell me what is impossible, and I will prove you wrong.

Along those lines, you're known for bringing down much bigger guys. What's the trick?

First, you have to know what to do. If you don't know how to fight, then you have no business inside the Octagon. Second [is] endurance. You can have a very fast car sitting in your front yard, but if you don't have gas, you're not going anywhere. Power comes third. The secret is to use those three things in that sequence. You've got to know what you're doing, have a lot of endurance and then use power. You can't just use power against somebody bigger and stronger than you. Like my father always said: "Give me the right leverage, and I'll lift the world." It's as simple as that.

Let's go back to your fighting days. What goes through your head right before a bout?

Nothing. I'm usually asleep. An hour before the fight I'm sleeping in the locker room with the lights off. My brother has to come over and touch me very nicely. He whispers to me, "Brother, can you please wake up? Can you get up please? We have a fight to do." He wakes me up, they turn the lights on, I stretch and say, "All right, what do you guys want me to do? Point me in the right direction."

Where does that calm come from?

Knowing what to do. It all becomes about knowledge. Like speaking a language. If you speak Portuguese, you'll go to Brazil and be very comfortable. If you don't, you'll be confused and get in trouble. The calmness comes from the training. At training camp you win the fight—long before the day of the fight. The right strategy is a science.

So what percentage is preparation when it comes to winning?

It's 100%. You've got to be ready to peak

one day of the year. You can't overtrain or undertrain.

What do you consider your greatest fight?

My greatest fight is raising my four kids. *(Laughs.)*

How about inside the Octagon?

Oh man, I'd say the first UFC event. Three fights in one night with no gloves and no weight division. No time limits. Nobody knew what was going to happen. The second UFC [tournament] was great also. Not just one fight, but four fights in one night. Again no gloves, no weight division or time limit. No rules. Everything goes. The only thing that wasn't allowed was eye-gouging.

A 16-man tournament and nobody knew what was going to happen. I was confident and knew what to do, but the question was "Could I last that long? Four fights? What if I got cut on the first fight?" Also, fighting Sakuraba [a Japanese MMA competitor] for

an hour and 45 minutes. Fighting Akebono [a Hawaiian sumo wrestler], who was 6 feet 8 inches tall and weighed 490 pounds. That was great, being able to beat such a guy. I've had some tough fights. I think my name is printed in the UFC history books in big gold letters. It's hard to pick just one fight.

Have you ever had an easy fight?

Akebono! On the way to the staging of the event I turned to my corner team and said, "I can beat him in under five minutes." My brother Rorion slapped me on the back of the head and said, "Don't put time on it!" Psychologically he was saying if I put a time on it, and I didn't beat him in the five minutes, I would fall apart. When my brother looked the other way, I whispered to my crew again, "I'm sure I'm going to beat Akebono in under five minutes." Turned out it was under three minutes actually.

Was there anyone you didn't want to fight?



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The fine folks at Jakks Pacific have given us five autographed Royce Gracie action figures to give away. For your chance to win one, just fill out the form below (or a photocopy, or put your name, home address, e-mail address, signature and survey choices on a postcard) and send it to **Royce Gracie Giveaway, c/o HUSTLER, 8484 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 900, Beverly Hills, CA 90211** or e-mail info to HUSTLER@LFP.com.

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PHOTO CREDIT

ROYCE GRACIE

No. That's why people and the other fighters respected me. The promoters never had a problem with me. I never chose my opponents. I never set any rules. Didn't matter how big, fast or strong the guy was. They would switch opponents at the last minute, and even though it would mess with my strategy, I still fought. Let's do it! I didn't back down. I never backed down from a fight.

What's the worst injury you ever sustained?

Oh, man, I had my heart broken once by this girl. Took me a long time to recover. *(Laughs.)* Instead of asking me a general question, get specific. *(Laughs.)*

What was your worst injury inside the Octagon?

From fighting Sakuraba I got a partial tear in the ligament and tendon of my foot with a crack on the shin from a kick. So we had to throw the towel in on that fight. I sat down after six rounds of 16 and told my corner guys, "I can get up, but I can't walk anymore. My foot is done. Tell me what to do." By coincidence, my wife is a podiatrist—a foot and ankle specialist—so it all worked out.

Have you ever had to fight a drunk guy in public who wanted to prove you're not that tough?

I never had a fight on the street, but I would never walk away from one either. I know how to place and position myself so the stuff doesn't happen. But guys have come up to me looking to fight, and I cut the distance fast. They know from my tone of voice and the way that I shut down that I mean business. They either back down or they're going to lose their teeth. People feel it. My face shuts down, and you can read on my forehead: "Don't F with me!" It's written in bold, with blinking lights going around.

What do you think about big-screen tough guys like Steven Seagal and Jean-Claude Van Damme?

They are martial artists, not fighters. There's a difference. I think it's good. People like martial arts movies. Look at Jackie Chan. I'm a big fan of Jackie Chan. My kids love him, but he's not a fighter. He's a martial artist and an entertainer.



Do you have any desire to go into acting?

Yes and no. I would like to do it, but at the same time I'm not an actor. There has to be a role where I can play myself. I can't act, man. Come on!

Are there UFC groupies and crazy fans?

Yeah, there are, but most of the time when fans come up to me—both guys and girls too—they get scared. I have such a presence that they say, "I have so many questions, but I can't think of one right now. Wow, it's really you!" Yeah, I'm human and not that big.

The craziest thing I can think of is when I was teaching a seminar in Australia, and this guy comes over during the break asking if I can sign something for his wife. The wife walks over, and she's carrying a baby. I think, *He's going to ask me to sign the baby!* *(Laughs.)* He turns to his wife and says, "Honey, give me the baby." I'm thinking, *Should I sign their baby?* Then the wife turns around and pulls her pants down for me to sign her panties. I thought, *Are you kidding me?* I look at the husband, and he's like, "No, man. It's okay. Go ahead." I didn't touch her, of course. I just signed my name. At least I didn't have to sign the baby. *(Laughs.)*