

Short Stories of Possible Interest

By

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I had a backlog of articles that have been spread out over the last several months, so I really haven't had an opportunity to write about a subject that is near and dear to my heart, so let me begin this article by covering this topic first. If you have been following my articles for any period of time, you probably already know that my oldest son, Nick, and I are quite wrapped up in the sport of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). I was involved in BJJ for quite some time myself in the '90s when the sport was in its infancy here in the US, and happily my son decided to follow in my footsteps as it has given us a significant common interest.

BJJ has gained popularity as one of the basic fighting styles displayed in the Ultimate Fighting Challenge (UFC) that many of you have probably seen on TV. BJJ is a form of submission wrestling with chokeholds and joint locks. In the traditional sport, competitors wear a heavy knit uniform called a Gi, but there are also competitions where slick skin tight shirts and trunks are worn, and these are called No-Gi competitions. Competitors are ranked by their belt colors, which include: white, blue, purple, brown, and black respectively. Purple through brown belts are considered to be advanced belts. Promotions are based on in-school experience and tournament success, but belt promotions are generally two to three years apart.

Nick has been wrestling against adults since he was 13 years of age. He became a blue belt on his 16th birthday, and is currently a purple belt at the age of 19, which is extremely young to hold this ranking. Nick also took up wrestling in his senior year of high school where he had a record of 26-4 and he went on to wrestle during his first year of junior college before the program was discontinued. He has held the 194-pound Arizona State BJJ Championship title as blue belt and purple belt and he has also held the Arizona State No-Gi BJJ championship title.

In early November, I was scheduled to speak at the California State Racing Pigeon Convention in Stockton, California, and it happened that the World No-Gi BJJ Championships were being held in Los Angeles, California the very next day, which also happened to be my birthday. As with the Pan American BJJ tournament where competitors wear the traditional Gi, the World No-Gi BJJ Championships attract the very best competitors in the world today. Ordinarily, Nick participates in the Pan American BJJ Tournament, but because of his wrestling background, he has also been branching out into No-Gi BJJ. Between the tournament, travel, and my vacation time, these trips

are pretty expensive and with a bad tournament draw you can be on your way home in less than five minutes. However, Nick had won his last two state tournaments and he had been rolling really well since receiving his purple a couple of months earlier, so he wanted to give the World's a try.

While the sport is big in Arizona, it is nowhere near as big as it is in many other states and countries throughout the world, and while many are eligible to compete, most would prefer to avoid the embarrassment of being humiliated by the top competitors in the world. Therefore, the list of competitors remained short and distinguished and included a two time world champion, a former world champion, the Canadian champion, and several state champions to name a few. Given the level of competition, it was very hard to determine where Nick fit into the picture, especially since he had only been a purple belt for a couple of months and most of these guys were three-year purple belts that were ready to be promoted to brown belt.

Although Nick was destroying his first competitor on points, he made a serious mistake and got caught in what is known as a Triangle, which is a serious chokehold that will almost always result in a submission by the competitor caught in the move or the competitor caught in the move passing out in less than 10 seconds. To be honest, when I saw him get caught up in this move, I was pretty sure we would be on our way up to visit Ed Lorenz in the next couple of minutes, but after about a minute of fighting through the move a very red faced Nick somehow popped out of the hold and he went on to win the match. However, in his effort to escape the move, Nick did severely strain his neck.

Ultimately, Nick made his way into the world championship finals by beating a very tough former world champion 2-0 on a take down. Because of the neck strain, Nick was forced to play defense during this match, so he was very fortunate to have gotten the takedown at the start of the match.

In the World No-Gi BJJ Championship finals, he met the two-time world champion, Brazilian, Lucas Rocha, and ultimately lost the match 2-0 on a bizarre scramble that momentarily could have gone either way as they were both off balance. Later, in a crowd of 5,000, Lucas Rocha sought Nick out to congratulate him on what he called an extremely tough match. Lucas is a great competitor and class act and he will likely one day be atop the black belt division as well. Congratulations to Nick on taking the silver medal in the World No-Gi BJJ Championships!

Taking things a little out of order, I mentioned earlier that I also spoke at the California State Racing Pigeon Convention just prior to Nick's tournament. We arrived on a Thursday in Sacramento, California, and drove to Auburn, California to see my long-time close friend and pigeon fancier, Ed Shimkowski, whom I first met back in the early 1970's when he lived several blocks away from where I grew up as a kid. Although we talk on the phone about once a month, I seem to only get to see him in person about once every 10 years, so it was great to see him again. It was also great to see Ed and my son hit it off so well, as it was the first time that they had ever met.

After visiting Ed for a couple of hours, we drove down to the site of the convention, which was being held in Stockton, California. Unfortunately, Nick had to spend most of the time in his room starving himself down to make weight for his tournament, so his involvement in the convention was limited other than I introduced him during one of my two speeches.

You know, there are very few people that are geared to run a convention like this, and this particular convention proved to be more difficult than most in that through a bizarre series of events, its location was moved several times prior to the convention. Ultimately, the hotel finally chosen really didn't live up to many of their promises, as I got to witness first hand, and this didn't make things any easier. Finally, the convention is predicated on a race, which was ultimately had to be postponed due to weather conditions. As a result of the postponement, my speech was moved up from Saturday to Friday, and then because of an auction that went too long, several people did not get to see the speech in its entirety or at all, and I wound up giving it again on Saturday anyway. There were just so many changes that everyone had to be as flexible as possible, but a good time was had by all.

As a credit to the people from the area, let me mention something and maybe everyone should take note. This was the first convention that I have ever been to where the local clubs were not griping about members of their own club or other clubs in the area. In fact, the locals got along amazingly well, and I think this made the convention a much more enjoyable convention for everyone! It is disheartening to hear fancier complain to outsiders about fanciers that the outsiders don't even know. These conventions should be a nice opportunity for each of us to share a sport that we all have in common, and not an opportunity to air dirty laundry.

I don't want to leave anyone out as I do not know all of the people involved in organizing this event, but the three organizers that I had dealings with, Virginia Camacho, Randy Blackwood, and Karen Silveria, were excellent to work with and they did a very good job with a very difficult convention. I understand that they will be doing it next year as well, so I would say that next year's convention is in good hands.

I twice met up with my friend Dave Shewmaker, and as he is also involved in running an inbreeding program, we always have a great deal to talk about. The second meeting occurred on the originally scheduled day of the race when we were sitting around talking at the race loft. When the race was canceled, I looked over at Dave and asked him how long he thought it would be before Randy asked me to speak that day instead of the next. Dave thought a moment, and said well maybe a half hour. I bet it would be 20 minutes, but in about 10 minutes a rather bewildered Randy came running up to ask if I could speak in an hour, which was cutting it pretty close since we were all approximately 20 minutes away from the hotel.

Years back when I first started speaking, I might have pulled out a gun and shot myself over something like this, but everything involving pigeons seems to work this way, so you eventually learn to roll with the punches. I know that Dave thought this whole thing

was pretty funny, but I no loner had time to sit there and let him laugh at me, so I said my goodbyes and jumped in the car. Ultimately, my speech on the mechanics of eyesign went very well. In fact, when we got down to the end of that speech, there was still time before the scheduled banquet, so I talked to a slightly smaller group about inbreeding techniques. That portion of the speech was a good experience for me because I have been working on a related speech on the subject, and it gave me an opportunity to see which portions would be hard to explain should I later go to a more expanded version.

The banquet was very well done with a few guest speakers and lots of door prizes. My luck held out, however, and as usual I won nothing. One of the door prizes was a big copper pig that was about a foot and a half tall. I put most of my tickets into that cup in an effort to win it for Mrs. Book. When I told everyone at the table that I was trying to win the big pig for my wife, someone asked, "Does she collect pigs?" (It is possible that they might have been thinking of me as the first pig in her collection.) I said, "No, she doesn't collect pigs, but I know she would hate a gift like that and then I would have something to write about."

At the banquet, I sat with several very nice fanciers from the Orange Belt Concourse. Upon sitting down at the table, I was introduced to a fancier by the name of Rick Barker. He looked at me for a moment and then said, "So you're the Book, huh," in kind of an unhappy tone. I thought good, I am making friends already. Then his friends started encouraging him to tell his story. It seems that he grades show pigeons all over the world, and this past summer he was to judge a show in Norway. Shortly after he got there, he was busy looking at show pigeons, when a contingent of Danes confronted him and asked if he was the American judge that was supposed to judge this show. A little confused, he acknowledged that he was. Lined up and facing him in a half circle, one of the Danes said, "Then, of course, you know 'The Book' right?" Perplexed, Rick asked, "Is that a person?" To which the Dane responded, "Of course he is a person, he is 'The Book' and everyone knows 'The Book'. How is it possible that could you be from America and not know 'The Book'?"

Rick responded by saying, "Well, America is a big place, and I have never heard of the Book." Then Rick said they all started talking excitedly amongst themselves, and eventually the one fancier said, "What kind of judge can you possible be if you don't know 'The Book'?" and at that point they all turned their back on him and walked off. Pretty soon the entire show was abuzz with the fact that Rick didn't know "The Book".

Then Rick said to me, "Now that I have met you, maybe I can regain my respect and dignity with the Europeans." At this point one of the other fanciers at the table, Tim Brandon, said that this was a true story because they have had to listen many times since his return from Norway.

Given that there isn't much room left in this article, let me finish up with another similar story. Because our feed sources in Tucson are not very good, and because I have always fed my breeders Royal Leach, I have been driving a hundred miles to Phoenix to get my feed from the Mesa Feed Barn. Because this is a long drive, I always call first and talk to

the owner, Tom, before I make the drive. Since I only go once every several months, it is unlikely that he would remember me except for my catchy name “The Book”, so now I just introduce myself that way and he always remembers right away. Go figure! I am not sure that I have ever seen him in person, as he is never there on Saturday when I pick the feed up, but he always leaves the bill attached to the top of the feed sacks I am supposed to pick up.

When I arrived on this particular Saturday the store was very busy and there were two employees working that I didn't know. I pulled the bill that Tom had attached to the feed off the top sack and took it up to the cash register so that the guy could ring it up, and as part of the process I was hoping that I could get him to help me load the 20 sacks of feed into the truck. For some reason the guy was having trouble ringing up my bill and while he was working on that, a crowd started to form at the cash register also waiting to be rung up. Noticing the pigeon on my sweatshirt, one of the customers asked me if I had racing pigeons. It turned out he had show birds, but that we had several mutual acquaintances in the Phoenix area. This went on for about ten minutes and by this time there were about 30 people standing there waiting to be rung up.

Finally, the second employee came in behind the counter and the first employee explained the problem with my bill. The second employee took over and rang it up. Then, in kind of a quiet voice, he appeared to say to the guy I had been talking to, “You are already loaded”, so the guy next to me said thanks. At this point I said, “I am going to need some help loading also.” He looked at me and said almost indignantly, “I said you are already loaded.” Everyone in the place was looking at me like I had two heads. However, I was confused how he knew which truck to load the feed sacks into, so I asked him this question. Looking at me in an authoritative way he said, “You're ‘The Book’, right? Everyone knows ‘The Book’.” I could sort of tell that everyone didn't include the other 29 people that were now gawking at me like I was from Mars, and not one of them stepped forward to ask for my autograph, so not only did they not know me, but apparently they didn't care to know me either. What else could I say? So, I walked out to my truck and there were the 20 sacks of feed that I had ordered, neatly stacked in the back.

My good friend from Southern California, Steve Baldwin (pronounced Baalldwin in a condescending tone), and I love to share stories like this with the famous Marty Ladin because they drive him crazy, so when I got in my truck, I called Baalldwin and told him the story. After thinking for a few minutes, he had to mess up the whole story by asking, “Doesn't your license plate say ‘The Book’? The owner must have told this guy that you were coming and he must have seen you pull in.” It is a sad day when Baalldwin figures something out faster than me, but obviously, this made sense. Still it was a great story so I told him to tell Marty anyway and to leave out the part about the license plate. That Baalldwin can be such an ego deflator sometimes!

Until next time!

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