

NICK RING

By
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U.S. Auditions Winner Still On Track for PRIDE Debut

Almost one year has passed now since Canadian middleweight fighter Nick Ring received word that his dream of one day competing for the PRIDE Fighting Championships was now that much closer. Ring, a Muay Thai kickboxer instructor out of Calgary, Alberta, was notified last January that he had been chosen as one of the four winners of the PRIDE U.S. Auditions held on November 20th in Los Angeles, California.

The 26-year-old fighter was understandably excited when his Brazilian jiu-jitsu instructor Brian Bird gave him the good news.

"I found out when Brian called me late one night," Ring explains. "Right away I thought something was up, he told me that I had made it, that my name was on the Abu Dhabi site as one of the winners, I ran upstairs to the computer to see for myself. I was blown away, I was ecstatic!"

The trip to the U.C.L.A. campus, where the U.S. Auditions were held, was one traveling expense Ring was more than willing to incur; an opportunity to showcase his skills he knew might not come around again.

"I went down on my own expense," Ring tells FCF. "It was a window of opportunity that I didn't want to miss. I've always dreamt about fighting for PRIDE so I wasn't going to miss it. I mean there were a lot of guys from California, but there were also guys like me who flew in, some flew in from Florida, even South Korea and England. Everyone was pretty excited."

The PRIDE U.S. Auditions was an event designed by the Japanese fight promotion to evaluate the fighting skills of applicants hoping to secure a contract with the world's largest MMA event. For those fighters who had yet to garner mainstream attention within the MMA world, the U.S. Auditions indeed provided a rare opportunity to demonstrate their skills for a panel of six PRIDE judges.

"The goal was to find up-and-coming fighters from North America who can eventually fight in PRIDE and Bushido," Dream Stage Entertainment Vice-President Yukino Kanda explains. "We were trying to look for many different aspects of fighting - grappling, punching, kicking and personality as well."

Ring recalls the day's events.

"They broke us up into groups of six of our own weight class. They made us do some sparring, kickboxing, as well as grappling. We got to go with two partners per session. I don't really follow all the faces of MMA or anything, I recognized a few fighters, I grappled with Marcos Avellan for one session, but I didn't really know many people who were competing. Quinton Jackson was there, so was Carlos Newton, but they were just watching."

According to Kanda, the panel of judges was rather impressed with Ring's stand-up skills. Ring, an experienced kickboxer, began training in Muay Thai over a decade ago, an interest in fighting that was kindled by a certain martial arts classic film starring Jean-Claude Van Damme.

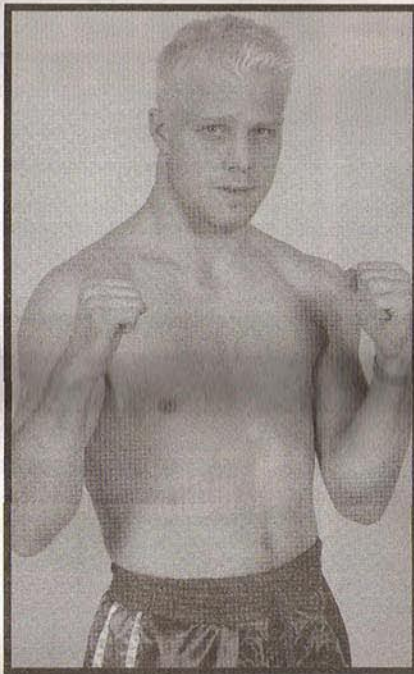
"I began kickboxing training at fifteen years old and my inspiration was *Bloodsport* baby! I taped it off the T.V. and I used to watch it everyday after school," says Ring. "I didn't know anything at the time, but it looked like kickboxing to me and after a little bit of begging my mom, she let me start training."

Over the next decade Ring would go on to win various kickboxing titles, including North American, Canadian and Intercontinental Championships. This extensive experience in the striking art did not go unno-

ticed at the U.S. auditions.

"Nick Ring is a really good Muay Thai fighter," Kanda says. "The judges felt that he has to work on his ground skills, but that he could be a very successful fighter in PRIDE."

Ring acknowledges that his jiu-jitsu game needs improvement, skills he has been working to better now for a couple of years. Ring currently trains his ground fighting game with brown belt instructor Brian Bird under the Roy Harris Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu organization, training that began in 2001 when Ring decided he wanted to try MMA.



"The whole time I was kickboxing I was curious about MMA because when your only kickboxing, you're somewhat limited in fights," says Ring, "I really wanted to try a no-holds-barred fight, so I started grappling a little bit. Now I really want to move up. I enter grappling tournaments as often as I can and I'm getting better."

Ring's training with Bird is focused out of BDB Martial Arts in Calgary, a school that has put together an impressive fight team over the last couple of years in a fairly short amount of time.

"We've got some good guys here," Ring says of his teammates, "a real good core of fighters that helps me out. Brad Cardinal, John Louro, everyone here helps me get better."

For a city that has only recently begun holding MMA events, the news that Ring had in fact won the PRIDE auditions was not only a huge boost for BDB Martial Arts, but the entire Calgary MMA community.

"You don't think of Calgary as a MMA hub, there's not a lot of big name fighters out of Calgary yet," Ring says, "so no one believed that I was going to get picked, but when I did, everyone was really happy for me big time."

Currently, Ring's MMA record stands at 5-0, a record

that includes a victory over Bill "the Butcher" Mahood in 2002. Most recently, Ring put his jiu-jitsu skills to work when he submitted Kimo Wolfel at Superbrawl 41 by rear naked choke.

"It was a funny night," Ring recalls, "the whole crowd was booing me. It's kind of fun being the bad guy. He caught me with a really nice left hook and the crowd was going crazy, but when I got him with the choke they were really upset, calling me names, yelling 'go home mainland.' It was hilarious, I was happy to get the win."

For Ring, the Superbrawl victory was yet another needed win for his record, a record now being closely monitored by the PRIDE organization. For the four finalists - Tyrone Glover, Karl James "KJ" Noons, Jake Draves as well as Ring, each fight they enter is of paramount importance, as the Japanese promotion utilizes them to determine whether or not their chosen four are indeed ready for an official PRIDE fight.

"They are not at the Bushido or PRIDE level yet," Kanda comments of the four protégés, "but we are watching their fights, and watching how they are doing. We are hoping to have them fight for us soon."

The PRIDE organization now puts together the four finalist's upcoming fights and pays for the traveling expenses involved. In addition, PRIDE paid for a two-month training stint at AMC Pankration in Kirkland, Washington with legendary MMA instructor, Matt Hume.

"They also took care of my training for a short period after the tryout," Ring explains. "They sent me down to Seattle to train with Matt Hume for a couple months. Training at AMC Pankration was a good experience. I learned a lot when I was down there and I feel I am stronger for it."

Nick Ring's next test will come at Superbrawl 42 when he takes on Eastsidaz fighter Mike Malone. According to Kanda, a similar opportunity with PRIDE for other hopefuls like Ring might not develop for some time - there are no current plans for more U.S. auditions until some of the current finalists begin competing at official PRIDE events.

Regardless, Ring's successful audition for PRIDE was not based on the Calgary native's hardened fighting skills alone. With personality being one of the components judges were also evaluating, Ring apparently scored numerous points in this category as well, and was also awarded the "Best Looking Fighter Award" out of the 150-person field.

"Each fighter had a minute to make a presentation and talk in front of the camera," Kanda says. "He won best looking fighter. Nick Ring is very good looking, he'll appeal to the girls."

For Ring, the award was an unexpected but nice surprise and he'll take it nonetheless, confident in the fact that he knows his successful audition was not only based on his appearance.

"Well, I guess I'm the best looking fighter," he responds laughing. "No, but obviously it's not a sport about looks, they liked my skills too and I know that, but hey, if an in's an in, I'll take it."

As the year Ring was announced as one of the illustrious four nears its end, he continues to remain confident and optimistic that his PRIDE debut will eventually come.

"I just want to do my best at my upcoming fight, and then we'll see. Maybe a fight with DEEP, I don't know. I'm not sure what they [PRIDE] have planned, so I'm just thinking about my next fight." ☺