

Story and photos by Bill Curry

The Cult of

KIMBO



The cult of Kimbo Slice is the purest example of successful viral marketing in MMA history. His staged bare-knuckle backyard brawls have been downloaded and forwarded all over the globe, making him a worldwide sensation. But is he for real?

was unavailable for autographs to anyone, including eight-year-old boys, because according to his main blocker and top assistant, "The man be focusing on the weigh-in at hand!"

Meanwhile, **Anderson Silva**, current UFC middleweight champ, **Ricco Rodriguez**, former UFC heavyweight champ, **Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira**, current UFC heavyweight champ, the great **Yves Edwards**, and future great **Antonio "Bigfoot" Silva** sat calmly poolside at the Coral Gables Holiday Inn, chatting with anyone who cared to come up to them without any apparent fuss or muss, and with no security detail in sight. While they had all showed up well in advance of the scheduled weigh-ins, the MMA legends with well over 130 fights



The cult of Kimbo has blown into a full-scale religion. It was Showtime's EliteXC who passed the collection plate to a sold-out South Florida arena and came up with a gold infusion for Kimbo's high-priest MMA producers when they matched him against a fading Tank Abbott.

Fitting the role of prophet to a "T," Kimbo looked like a mystic warrior of biblical proportions who could hold up King Solomon's temple (and King Solomon himself!) without breaking a sweat. Surrounding himself with a huge

number of bodyguards that would put any gangsta' rapper to shame, Kimbo looked more like a modern-day Chaka Zulu with his devotees taking themselves so seriously that you had to wonder if they, like King Chaka's followers, would be willing to jump off a cliff to prove their loyalty! Perhaps the only difference between the two is that King Chaka didn't have a part-time job as a security guard.

The Weighs Ins

At the weigh-in before the fight, King Kimbo



between them were forced to wait for the arrival of the tardy King Kimbo.

As his bigger-than-life poster stared menacingly out from on-stage at the awaiting fans and fighters, King Kimbo huddled in a dark corner of the bar area surrounded by his entourage. Like Elvis awaiting the chance to fling off his sequined cape in Vegas, Kimbo finally mustered all his strength to make his dramatic entrance. After an eternity of huddled prayer by him and his minions, King Kimbo sloughed off his street apparel and stepped onto the digital scale of his pre-coronation.

Tank Abbot had been sitting with his girlfriend and got up to go to the scale. But she chided the mighty one, "David, give me your sunglasses or you will lose them up there." Tank obediently complied. As the two appeared together Tank was cool and Kimbo was fierce. Tank was indifferent and King Kimbo was just...different. After the required face-off for the cameras Kimbo's posse shouted to Tank as he walked off, "You gonna get some!" Tank didn't even break stride, perhaps still focusing on not losing his shades.

The Warm Ups

Backstage just before the match, former MMA fighter and Tank-trainer David Herrera was saying that Kimbo had no idea what was coming for him. Tank had trained hard for this fight, Herrera maintained, and was going to charge around the cage during the introductions, get his heart rate up to around 170 beats-per-minute, and come at Kimbo fully amped, with short uppercuts, at the sound of the bell. Once Kimbo started moving backwards Tank would be able to land a knockout blow and end the match. Honestly, as great plans go, it sounded like a great one.

Tank entered the cage first and walked back and forth rather than "charged" back and forth, and if his pulse got even as high as 70 beats per minute it would have been a shock. Almost as if on cue (actually it was on cue) the crowd reached under their seats and produced pre-placed signs with "Gold's Gym" emblazoned on one side and "Kick Ass Kimbo" on the other. In small print running across the bottom of each sign were the instructions, "Hold up this card to show Kimbo your support as he enters the ring." If that isn't a spontaneous outpouring of public support then I don't know what is. Meanwhile, poor Tank was left with nary a pom-pom to signal his arrival. He wasn't wearing his sunglasses into the ring so maybe he had lost them after all.

The Entrance

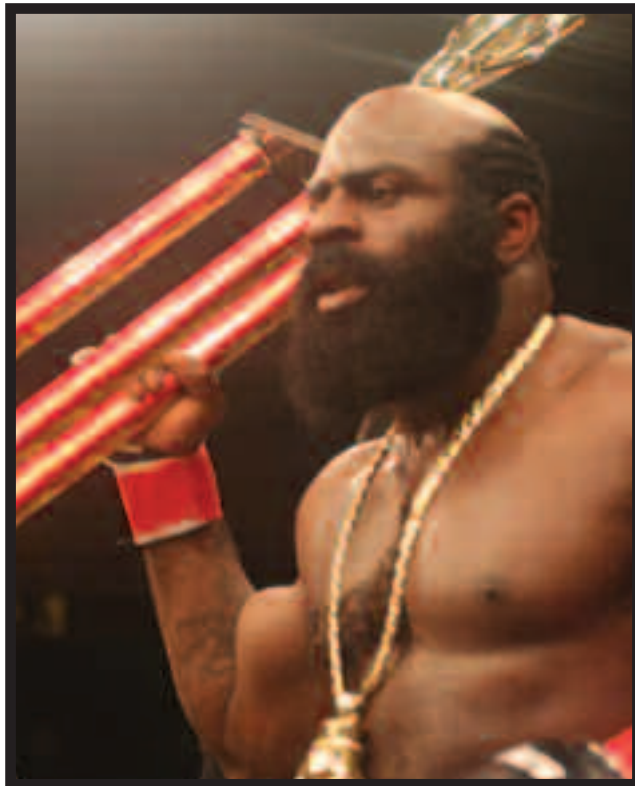
As Kimbo solemnly marched ever-so-slowly down the ramp, he looked to the heavens above and the crane camera captured his rapturous face for all to see. Meanwhile, on cue

and exactly according to the instructions on the little signs, the crowd went wild, waving their "Kick Ass Kimbo" signs and hoping perhaps to get caught on camera.

David Ferguson (aka Kimbo Slice) then peeled down and stepped into the cage. With his massive bald head buffed to a sheen of a Spartan shield and his gnarly beard perfectly coiffed, he stalked a calm and even indifferent Tank Abbott, pacing back and forth and matching Tank's resting heart-rate warm-up routine. Kimbo never let his eyes move off Tank, like a lion eyeing a tasty gazelle on the African plains.

The Fight

When the bell rang the roar of the crowd drowned out even Kimbo's posse. As the fight got underway, the final outcome was glaringly



evident in about four seconds of wild swinging by Tank and a few disciplined connections from Kimbo. Tank quickly "tanked" and lay with his head pinned to the floor. Kimbo treated the once-feared fighter like a schoolboy does a disobedient pet. For his part, Tank took his punishment like a man. He got back up, took some more thumping, and lay down again. It was over for Tank in just 46 seconds. In those same 46 seconds Kimbo's road to mass adulation and instant celebrity had begun.

The Aftermath

Tank sat on a stool the required time deemed necessary by the ever-vigilant Florida State Athletic Commission to ensure no damage had occurred, then stood up and took out his mouthpiece. He smiled ever so grandly at someone ringside and walked solo out the open gate, through the frenzied crowd, to his waiting girlfriend backstage – all without a

mark on his face. It was a perfect 60 second payday for Tank and a perfect outcome for Showtime and their carefully crafted signs which had urged Kimbo to victory. Judging from the reaction of the crowd, Showtime and EliteXC seem to have a money messiah on their hands in the form of one Kimbo Slice. His legitimacy is not even an issue – to them.

The manufactured hype surrounding Kimbo before the match was truly astounding. In a supposed neutral promotion where the best man is supposed to win under equal conditions, Kimbo was crowned before the coronation. Conversely, I have never seen a fighter so forlorn, deserted, and solitary as Tank Abbot as he awaited his call to leave the backstage area for the cage.

The Spectacle

While the spectacle of Kimbo celebrating in the ring afterwards with his homeboys and superstar trainer Bas Rutten was to be expected, what was somewhat disturbing was Kimbo being presented a trophy the size of an Easter Island megalith. Why the trophy? I thought you got a trophy this size for winning the K-1 championship by beating three guys in a single night after a year of brutal qualifying tournaments; or maybe for winning the Mundials by submitting multiple opponents over three days. But there King Kimbo stood, a single victory having given him an Olympic-sized trophy and apparently made him an instant legend. It was indeed an epic piece of marketing and public relations by Showtime, even though it had very little to do with the essence of MMA or the essence of a true sporting competition. Their motto seems to be, "If you give him a trophy, people will come." And perhaps they will. If "Stone Cold" Steve Austin can be made into a star then why not Kimbo Slice?

The Future of King Kimbo

Putting on my own mantle of holiness to match the reverence shown to King Kimbo on this night by Showtime, I prophesize that King Kimbo will get whole regions of acolytes from the 305 area code, the ones he kept sign-flashing to via the TV cameras during his pre-fight antics, to be his bodyguards. He will have MMA princesses marching into the arena before him throwing flowers on the floor as he walks to the cage. His next hand-picked opponent will get knocked out as quickly as Mr. Tank Abbott. His next trophy will be so large it will have to be delivered into the cage by a forklift. As all this happens as it inevitably will, the true MMA fans around the world will have to suffer in silence until King Kimbo (that's Mr. Slice to you) either proves himself good or bad by fighting a genuine opponent in an unbiased environment without the pre-placed signs. Until then, all you can really say is that we seem to be seeing the second coming of "Stone Cold."