



“Shorty’s” Big Impact

Jose “Shorty” Torres is set to leave a huge impact on the MMA world, and his community

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSE TORRES

Jose “Shorty” Torres is interviewed after winning the Titan FC Flyweight Championship on Aug. 5th.

By **JORDAN NOVACK**
JORDAN.NOVACK@GMAIL.COM

With mixed martial arts having been in the cultural eye for the past 20 years, the sport has seen a remarkable evolution over such a short period of time.

Where MMA used to be more spectacle than sport, as in the early days it would be battles between people trained in completely different forms of the martial arts, in 2016 MMA is now a full fledged sport. Now, one must possess the mastery in multiple disciplines of the martial arts if they have any hope to be competitive.

This diversification of the sport has created a whole new generation of athlete that are prepared to take the MMA world by storm. At the forefront of this generation is flyweight Jose “Shorty” Torres. Regarded by many as the greatest amateur in the history of mixed martial arts.

Despite his seemingly limitless potential, Shorty had a long path to get to this point. Growing up in a rough neighborhood in South West Chicago, Torres didn’t have many people to look up to in his youth.

“I didn’t have the best role models growing up,” Torres explained. “But luckily I made good choices and whatever mistakes I had I learned from to make myself stronger.”

One of the most impactful decisions Torres would make in his youth would be pursuing karate. A high-energy kid since birth, Torres would channel his excess energy into every single sport through high school, but his first passion would come when he started karate at age four.

“My very first sport was karate, and I immediately fell in love,” Torres explained with a sudden sense of joy coming over his voice. “I wound up earning my black belt in karate when I was 12, and it was one of the proudest moments of my life.”

At a mere 5’4” 125 pounds and a smile perpetually on his face, Torres doesn’t strike many as a fighter upon first impression. As a matter of fact, athletes Torres’ size didn’t have a weight class to fight in until about 10 years ago, when the now defunct World Extreme Cagefighting (WEC) created the first Bantamweight division in the sports history.

It was a chance sighting of WEC legend Urijah Faber on TV that would first bring Torres’ attention to MMA.

“The first role model in MMA I had was Urijah Faber,” Torres said. “Back in the day when I was 16 and still trying to find myself as a person, I was trying to get into shape for wrestling and kept seeing commercials with Urijah Faber on Action network where they used to show WEC events talking about him being a champion. [Faber] was the trademark guy for the WEC at the time.”

After hearing all of the hype in the commer-

cials, Torres decided to check out the WEC for himself and was instantly hooked.

“In an era dominated by Matt Hughes, Chuck Lidell, and other massive guys, Urijah was the first one I saw and thought ‘Hey! This guy is my size! This is awesome!’” Torres remarked. “From that point I looked up Anthony Pettis, Joseph Benavidez, and the other WEC guys and immediately realized that MMA was what I wanted to do with my life.”

With a newfound sense of inspiration instilled in him, a 16-year-old Torres would first enroll at the Combat-Do gym in Cicero, where he still trains today. Torres credits Combat-Do for setting him down the path he is currently on.

“[Joining Combat-Do] really changed my life around and made me fall in love with this sport,” Torres said. “I was involved with gangs and drugs, and really didn’t have the best role models, so if it wasn’t for Combat-Do and the sport of MMA I might still be in the streets of Chicago today.”

Under the tutelage of legendary trainer Bob Schirmer, Torres would begin assembling the Swiss army knife skill set he implements today. Despite his passion coming into the sport, Torres would lose his first fight as an amateur.

“I went into that first fight over confident, thinking I was the coolest guy ever and on top of the world, and losing made me realize that I needed to practice because I wasn’t the best kid in the world,” Torres said. “My coach also echoed to me that I wasn’t going to turn pro until I had 20 amateur bouts under my belt, even if they were 20 losses, so I knew it was time to get to work.”

Torres would respond to the loss, and going on to win his final 25 amateur bouts consecutively, including consecutive Amateur World Championship tournament titles. However success wouldn’t just find Torres in the cage, as he would also excel in the classroom.

“I ended up doing really well in junior college, pulling my grades way up from where there were in high school, and was also named a wrestling All-American,” Torres explained. “I ended up doing well enough in school that I would earn a full scholarship to McKendree University, and my coach changed my goal from not turning pro until I fought 20 times, to not turning pro until I earned my degree.”

Torres would take his time in the McKendree classrooms seriously, as he saw the opportunity to get a degree as something to fall back on in case MMA didn’t pan out. Torres would go on to graduate with a Bachelor’s Degree in Leadership and Sports and Exercise Science. With his degree now in hand, Torres would finally pursue his dream to be a professional fighter.

Torres’ beginnings as a pro would benefit from being in the right place at the right time. A sparring session with veteran Alejandro Soto would bring Torres to the attention of Titan FC president Jeff Aronson, and eventually lead to Torres signing a four-fight contract with the promotion.

With his contract secured Torres would now prepare for his debut bout, as he was set to square off with fellow professional debutant Travis Taylor on just two weeks notice. Despite their equal professional experience, at 5’9” Taylor came into the bout with a sizeable height and reach advantage.

Instead of enjoying the excitement of his first fight, Torres describes a feeling of fear throughout the build up.

“This was one of the most terrifying moments of my life, and it was all because of the hype being assigned to me,” Torres explained. “I view myself as an ordinary average guy, so when all of the media started hyping me and my accomplishments, it made me think about how if I lost all the hype would disappear, and just put extra pressure on myself.”

Much like a diamond, Torres would shine under the pressure. He would go on to secure a first round submission over Taylor in just two minutes and nine seconds with his trademarked Shorty Lock, earning him a debut victory.

In his second professional fight Torres would take on Reynaldo Duarte, a veteran of 16 professional fights. With the increased experience across the cage, Torres would face the real first challenge of young career, beating Duarte in a decision.

“[Duarte] was bloody, bruised, but would not stop coming at me man, he never stopped moving,” Torres described. “It was great to get my first five minutes in, and my first full 15 minute fight in.”

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**— JOSE “SHORTY” TORRES
TITAN FC FLYWEIGHT CHAMPION**

Now two fights and two victories into his professional career, an unparalleled opportunity would present itself to Torres: a title fight. With Titan’s Flyweight Champion Tim Elliot set to vacate the throne, Torres would take the chance at the vacant title, calling out Abdiel Velazquez.

Despite his professional life reaching never before seen highs, Torres would encounter many

hardships on the road to his title fight.

“The day before I left for my training camp, my brother was near fatally stabbed in Chicago,” Torres said. “When I said goodbye to him he was sedated and attached to machines, so I never got to actually say good bye to him.”

Additionally for the first time in his career Torres would also deal with a fighter attempting to intimidate him.

“I had never gone against someone who acted like that before a fight, even as an amateur,” Torres said. “It really caught me off guard, especially when I went to go shake his hand at the weigh-ins and he just wasn’t having it. But all that did was motivate me even more.”

Prior to fight day, Torres would get a surprise visit from his brother, who had flown to Florida from the hospital to corner his brother. When the time to fight finally came, Torres would be ready.

With his brother watching on, Torres would knock Velazquez out in the second round to earn his first professional title.

“Having [my brother] be there for me really meant the world for me. I won the belt for him that day,” Torres explained. “Plus to realize I had earned my first title for a legitimate professional promotion in under a year was an incredible feeling.”

Torres talent and success has drawn attention from all around the MMA community. Throughout his career, Torres has been a sparring partner for former UFC champions and title contenders such as BJ Penn, TJ Dillashaw, Joseph Benavidez, Frankie Edgar and Khabib Nurmagomedov.

Torres credits training with fighters of the highest caliber for his confidence in the cage.

“When I go into a very serious training camp, and compare my training partners to my opponent, my training partners are all at a higher level,” Torres detailed. “All my opponents have been incredible fighters, but if I can hold my own against my sparring partners I know I will be able to do well against anybody.”

At just 24 years old, Torres is well on his way to leaving his mark on MMA history. With several anonymous UFC sources confirming the promotions interest in Torres they sky is the limit for his potential. However Torres ultimate goal is to be remembered for what he does outside of the cage as opposed to what he does in it.

“I’m not looking for championships, or glory, or praise, I’m looking to be a hero to someone like Urijah Faber was to me growing up,” Torres said. “Having created my own path to get to this point, I want to show everyone that it is possible to follow your dreams, and just be a role model to people in my community.”