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MMA

BEYOND BLOWS

Directed by Selim Derkaoui & Simon Maisonobe
Produced by Temps Noir, La Sueur & Arte France

52'

SUMMARY

In just a few years, MMA has transformed from a fringe sport into a global phenomenon, defined by its spectacular fights. It gained explosive popularity on social media. Now a cultural and economic powerhouse, it attracts millions of participants, global stars, and massive investments. This documentary explores the sporting, social, and cultural reasons behind its rise and tries to understand what its success says about our era.

A symbolic object that has become mythical, an octagon-shaped cage; organizations all over the world and huge amounts of money involved; millions of members and thousands of venues; spectacular images of bloody fights, knockouts and submissions that attract millions of viewers around the world; fighters who have become world-renowned stars. In just a few years, Mixed Martial Arts has become THE sports and cultural phenomenon of our recent times. How did it go from being a little-known sport to being a mainstream, popular and global phenomenon? Why has MMA captured the world's attention like no other combat sport?



NARRATIVE DESIGN

Born in the United States in 1993, MMA has turned into – just in the space of a few years – a global phenomenon. Though it was initially a little-known sport, it conquered the world, boosted by the tremendous success of the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship), a US organization that has gained dominance. Today, MMA events draw thousands of people to massive venues, generate millions of dollars and help create new international leagues. Far from being just a brutal physical activity, MMA has turned into a comprehensive sport that mixes boxing, wrestling, ju-jitsu and other martial arts in a highly regulated yet violent setting.

This success is also due to a strong social dimension: many UFC fighters are from underprivileged families and see MMA as a way to climb the social ladder and gain recognition. It is a fascinating sport because of its physical intensity, unpredictability, and ability to reflect both the conflicts and hopes of our time. Beyond all the show, MMA questions our relationship with violence, social success, and body image. It also reveals the political influence of certain celebrities in the community and the growing impact such a culture has on contemporary societies, not just in France or in the US.

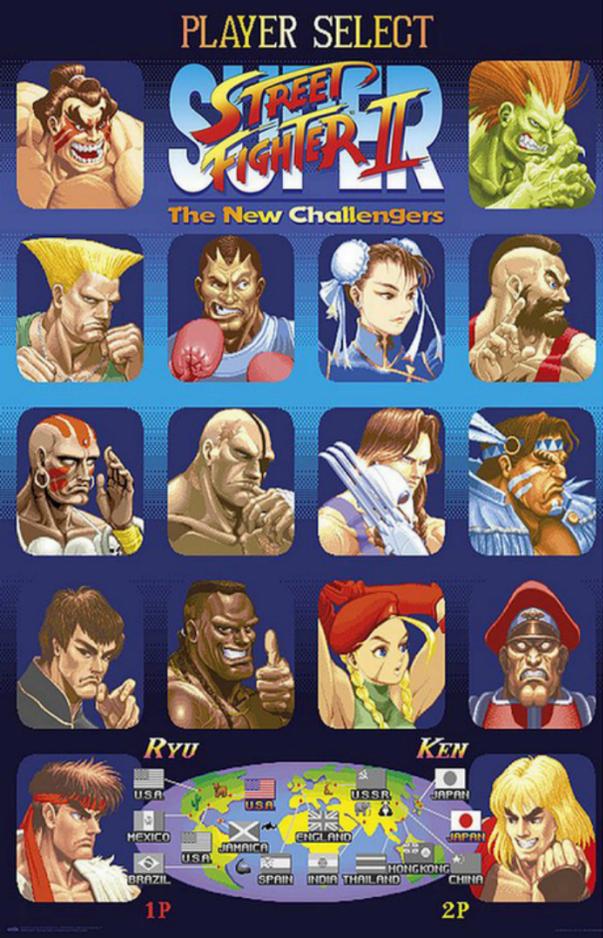




DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

MMA is a sport that is inextricably linked to a fighter's public image. Its global success has been fueled by a powerful visual imagination, one that was inherited from action movies, video games, and 1980s and 1990s manga culture. Films and manga franchises like *Bloodsport*, *Dragon Ball*, and *Mortal Kombat* created a global combat culture, influencing entire generations and paving the symbolic way for the emergence of MMA and the UFC. The sport quickly capitalized on the use of technological and media tools to build its reputation: reality shows, viral videos and embedded video formats, social media.

The sight of violence, blood, and transgression, and this image of social redemption, have become essential vectors of its global popularity. The fighters themselves, beyond their athletic performances, must now master the art of communication, build themselves a persona, and provide visual entertainment. This awareness of one's public image extends outside the cage: it is about telling stories, embodying narratives, often marked by this idea of someone who was able to rise from a working-class background and gain global recognition. MMA has evolved into an arena where physical and symbolic battles collide—a space where the struggles and aspirations of young people play out.



PARTICIPANTS



Georges Saint-Pierre
Former UFC champion



Cyril Gane
UFC fighter



Manon Fiorot
UFC fighter



Cyrille Diabaté
One of the first to promote
MMA in France



GregMMA
YouTuber & MMA fighter



Francis Ngannou
Former UFC champion who currently
competes in the PFL

PARTICIPANTS



Daniel Woirin

MMA coach who trains UFC champions



Djihene Abdellilah

Former MMA fighter, she is also a coach



Bertrand Amoussou

One of the key actors behind the legislation that led to MMA being officially recognized in France



Lucie Bertaud

Former MMA fighter & journalist



Guillaume & Rust (La Sueur)

Passionate journalists



Matthieu Quidu

Sociologist & MMA practitioner

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