



Make way for “The Underdog”

Former Fresno State wrestler turned cage fighter has found his calling

By Josh Spooner

The Collegian

Casey “The Underdog” Olson is one of the few people who can say they start their workday walking down a metal ramp into a giant caged octagon, with music blaring through loudspeakers and adrenaline flowing.

The former Fresno State wrestler is on his way to making a name for himself in the mixed martial arts arena, better known to many as ultimate fighting or cage fighting.

Olson is scheduled to fight Bobby “The Kid” Sanchez in a mixed martial arts match-up Oct. 7 at the Save Mart Center.

People often wonder why a 5-foot, 8-inch collegiate wrestler like Olson who weighs only 160 pounds would want to try cage fighting. Going from a form of competition with strict rules to a sport with next to no rules confounds many of “The Underdog’s” fans.

Olson said he always loved the intense training of wrestling and joining the cage fighting circuit was a natural.

“The training is similar to wrestling but it takes it to the next level,” Olson said.

Olson typically works out six days a week, at least two or three times a day. His workouts consist of running at least two miles a day and extensive weight training. In addition to the basic training

any other athlete would do, Olson also works on stand-up sparring, hitting target mitts, punching the heavy bag and Jui-jitsu.

Although Olson has a long history in wrestling, he couldn’t lean on his experience in his former sport to succeed in the cage. To become a successful fighter now, a competitor needs skills in all forms of fighting.

Olson had to expand his knowledge and learn stand-up fighting skills like striking and kicking. He also had to learn submission holds and grappling techniques not always used in wrestling.

“I was never a stand-up fighter,” Olson said. “I [have]changed my fighting style completely.”

Thomas Fragoza, a former teammate, said Olson is a great wrestler with good stand-up skills.

“When I see him fight, I look forward to him taking down his opponent and pounding him, because that is the wrestling style,” he said.

Olson insists that he’s not a good fighter, but he’s just a good competitor.

“There are so many better fighters and wrestlers out there,” Olson said.



“But I know how to perform. I may not always win but I know how to compete.”

Olson fights under the nickname “The Underdog” for a reason. He feels like he has always been fighting from the bottom up, in his personal life, in sports and in everything else he has done.

“I overcome obstacles. That is what an underdog is,” Olson said.

His slogan — *always underestimated* — is Olson’s perception of himself.

“Underdogs always do what is unexpected of them,” he said.

Dennis DeLiddo, Olson’s former college wrestling coach at Fresno State, agrees.

“He had to work harder than others [with jobs outside of school], and was still able to succeed,” DeLiddo said.

Former teammate Fragoza said, “the nickname definitely fits.”

Fragoza said Olson is one of the smaller fighters in his weight class, and that as he moves up in the rankings he will seem like an even smaller fighter.

DeLiddo doesn’t think Olson’s size will matter.

“He hangs good in his weight,” DeLiddo said. “He trains well, he is focused and he is really good with takedowns.”

“Many people question how did I do what I did [as a small fighter], and it is because I know how to prepare [and how] to compete,” Olson said.

Olson was able to start fighting through his connections. He met Chuck “The Iceman” Liddell, an already established Ultimate Fighting Championship fighter, through an old high school friend of Olson’s, Antonio Banuelos.

Banuelos and Olson faced each other on the high school wrestling mat as opponents. Banuelos was a Clovis West senior and Olson was a Clovis High junior, and even though Olson lost to Banuelos by one point in their match, they became close friends.

Staying friends after high school, Banuelos became Olson’s outlet to the fighting world, which led him to meet Liddell about five years ago.

Banuelos had met Liddell after he had quit wrestling, and moved down to San Luis Obispo, through two friends that were already training with Liddell, and who were already somewhat established in the fighting world.

As Olson got to know “The Iceman” better, and witnessed the training the fighters went through, he was persuaded by Liddell to try it out himself.

Once he did, Olson was hooked.

Banuelos said Olson has a competitive edge inside him that comes from wrestling and spills over into his fighting.

“He likes to win and compete,” Banuelos said. His great wrestling ability makes Olson a standout fighter, he said, “and not only is he good in the ring, but he is also good with the crowd.

“He is in the perfect weight class to definitely make a name for himself as a fighter, which he is already doing,” Banuelos said. “Not many beginning fighters can bring out the crowd like he does.”

Olson trains with fighters from different institutions, many of which he credits for his success so far in the sport. In addition to Liddell, who Olson considers his mentor, Olson also trains with Josh Koscheck, a current Ultimate Fighting [Championship] competitor. Among Olson’s training facilities are: The American Kickboxing Academy in San Jose, the Pacific Martial Arts facility in Fresno, The Pit fighting facility and fight team in San Luis Obispo.

Olson is looking forward to his upcoming fight with Sanchez at the Save Mart Center.

“Fresno is where everything started for from wrestling on ... so to be able to fight here in front of friends and family is a blessing and is a dream come true.”

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