

LIFE CAN'T BEAT

THE MONSTER

By Kevin Randleman
Interview by RJ Clifford





In October 1996, Mark Coleman won the UFC 11 eight-man tourney without competing in the finals. But for fans attending the live event, it would be the first time Kevin Randleman would enter the Octagon, though it was nothing more than a friendly grappling match against longtime friend and training partner Coleman.

Randleman was an Ohio State University wrestling champion, a three-time All American and former UFC heavyweight champion among other titles, who cut his teeth in MMA by fighting in the old-fashioned vale tudo events in Brazil. Coming off a submission loss to Mauricio Rua at Pride's debut USA show, Randleman is recovering from surgeries aplenty, but one thing is certain, nothing can hold back "The Monster" from competition and life in general. Just after the New Year, MMA WORLD-WIDE gave Randleman the opportunity to tell his inspiring story...in his own words.

I had surgery after my last fight. I've had 10 surgeries in 14 months. One of them almost killed me, and then I got a bad infection. I had a knee injury after that fight with Shogun. There was one injury during the fight. You probably saw the pictures that I had a bandage on my right shoulder. That shoulder was still infected. I'm on an IV, and have been on one, plus antibiotics for seven to eight months..

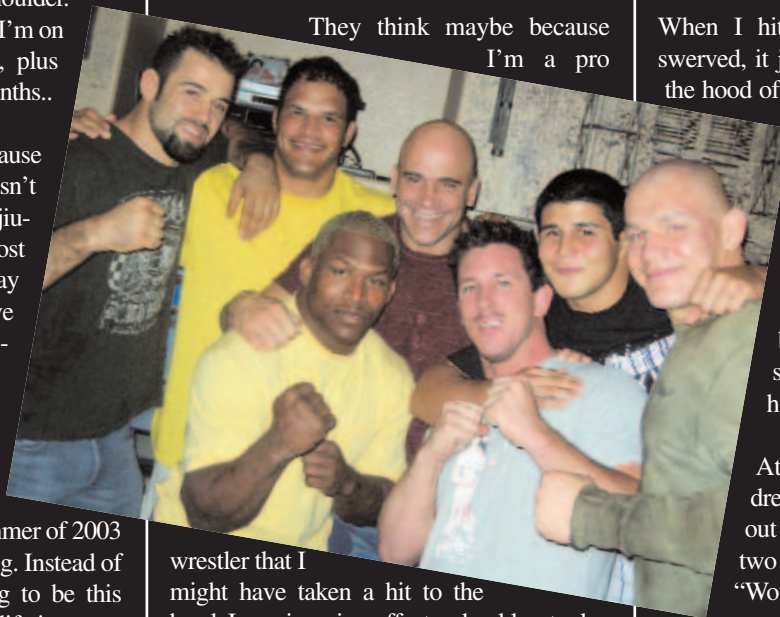
It was hard for me to train because every time I started to train, I wasn't able to wrestle on the mat with jiu-jitsu. No excuse for the loss. I lost to the better opponent that day (Shogun). I was too aggressive and overzealous, and he caught me.

But the problems with my shoulder come nowhere close to the car accident that almost killed me. It was back in the summer of 2003 and it kind of changed everything. Instead of being all angry and then trying to be this tough guy, you know, it put my life into perspective. Anyone that can't take a positive out of a negative is living blind.

It all started when I was doing pro wrestling and training in Japan. In the summer of 2003, I was over there for two weeks and it was so hot and humid. We were on the bus traveling around Tokyo, Japan and we'd practice all day, wrestle that night and then go to sleep. I went there weighing about 227 pounds and came home weighing 205. After all the traveling, I went to my favorite place to eat,

Waffle House, about 12:00 in the morning to read my newspapers. I was in Japan about two weeks and a lot of papers built up (I love reading newspapers). When I left the Waffle House, I was driving and had a seizure. I never had a seizure in my life.

They think maybe because I'm a pro



wrestler that I might have taken a hit to the head. I was jumping off a turnbuckles, took a couple of shots to the head; they think my body was too relaxed when I got home since I had no worries about working to make sure the show got off without a hitch. While I was driving my SUV, I went into a seizure and didn't even realize it. I was driving up the highway. There were a couple of cars driving and they said I just flew by them and hit the backend of a truck.

When I woke up, the engine block was sitting in my lap. All I could think was I could-

n't turn my head all the way to the right because my hood cut all the way through my cab and it stopped at my head. That was a really scary situation for me. It was the first time I had been in a car accident with that kind of severity.

When I hit the back of him the truck swerved, it just tore up my SUV. It flipped the hood of my car and cut my cab off and landed at my head, the corner of the right side of my cranium got grooved out. I guess that's why my mom says I have a hard head. The hood hit me in the head and I was unconscious. My engine block was pushed into the back-seat along with me in to the hatchback of my SUV.

At this time, I thought I was dreaming. I'm looking to the left out the window and I'm looking at two guys running. And I'm like, "Wow, this is a funny dream!" It wasn't a dream; it was real. The guys broke the back window and I kind of came to and grabbed them, and one guy said, "No dude, I'm trying to save you." They looked back at the truck and I could take my hand and touch the backend of the truck. It had pushed me and my front seat into the back seat and the hatchback.

My girl had been driving the car earlier and I never pushed my seat back so my legs were trapped underneath the engine block. I pushed up a little bit with my forearm to



I was wearing a white traditional Japanese outfit, but when they got back to me, I was red; covered in blood because of the head trauma. Plus, my arms were cut and burnt from pushing the engine block. They came back and I

October 2005.

Both lungs were infected, but the one lung on my right side was the worst. I was in the hospital for two months with them trying to figure out what was wrong with me. The doctor said we are going to have to take your lung. I told him, "If you don't take it, then I'm going to die anyway, so I will only get one lung. Try and fix it, scrape it or whatever." They went in and just scraped off my lungs. It's like when you're playing basketball and you skin your knee. The scab was growing on top of my lung. It collapsed and one thing led to another. After they cleaned my lungs out, I had a foot-long gash on my back with two holes in my shoulder from surgeries.

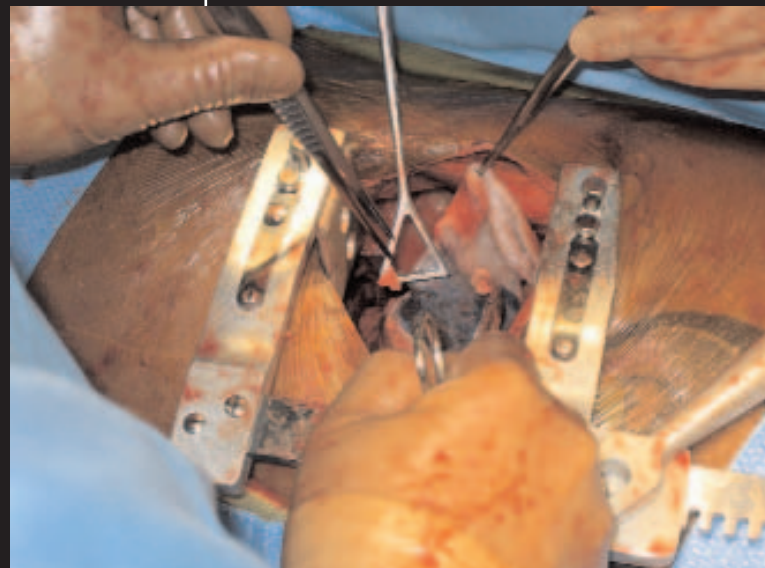
move the engine a little bit. I moved it and smelt gas, and there were sparks. I got out of the car and ran away from it. I had to get like 230 stitches in my head and my head swelled up. I called Mark Coleman from the hospital; I should have been dead from that accident.

I was lucky you know. When we train hard, I guess you know how to get over trauma like that. I'm standing way back away from the car because, like I said, the gasoline leaked out the back and thank God it wasn't a full tank. I never put gas in the car. So there was very minimal spillage. The paramedics got there and the police got there and ran up to the car thinking there was going to be someone in my truck underneath us. They realized we were standing in the back, so they ran back to me and said, "Are you hurt?"



showed them my head and my head definitely was cut into my brain because it was visible. I took my hand off my head so they tackled me into the roadside ditch to immobilize me and took me to the hospital. That was one of the scariest things; it was by far the scariest.

Last year I had a fungus growing on my lungs. I was traveling abroad to Brazil and they figured I caught a bug which was pollen from a certain flower. When we were in Vegas, it's the stuff in the air. When I first lived in Vegas, I lived in the suburbs. They were still building things, so when I got contracted in Brazil, I moved out to Vegas and the climate was just like Brazil. It was hot, so whatever it was, it made it grow again. I guess it was already doing that and from broken ribs and what not from training, I punctured my lungs and the blood from that was filling up my chest cavity. I'm in great shape and when I was fighting Shogun, I was in the best shape. It was cardio, cardio and I felt strong, but like a year ago, two years ago, I couldn't run more than a mile without my chest hurting.



November came around and I was getting feverish. I was getting fevers of about 104 for two weeks straight and we couldn't understand what it was. After a month of trial and error, the doctors realized I had something wrong with my lungs. At first, they thought they were going to have to take one of my lungs because they thought it was damaged. I had my shoulder surgery in

For two months, I had to sleep on the couch or on the chair sitting up and slept very little. They had me on pain medication and all the antibiotics were making my immune system weak, so the lung infection made the shoulder worse. A month later after the lung surgery, they came back and said I had a shoulder infection. They had to go in there and dig all that stuff out, and they thought it was all the way gone. I got back into training soon

after. I was running and feeling good, and then I started seeing a lump on my right shoulder. I was training with some kickboxers and a guy kicked me in my shoulder. I didn't think twice about it.

I went home and fell asleep. When I woke up, I was taken to the hospital. I was training and it was the craziest thing. It was just one thing after another, but what I took out of it was I just kept sitting there looking at the people with my friends. They came and saw



me in the hospital because I was so bad I almost died, but if it wouldn't have been that, I was so strong, training all those years that I was big. I was 225 pounds at the time of my illness. They finally took me to the hospital and did my surgery. I lost all my weight, down to 198 and too weak to do anything.

What I took from that is every day is a blessing. I've been trying to give back ever since. I've been working with underprivileged kids in Vegas and I want to keep working with those kids more. I just love giving back. A lot of people have gone out of their way to help me become a more successful person. I have a heck of a story, the things I went through as a kid. I look around at some of these 4H Clubs and orphanages and I see kids that are just like me. I see these kids sitting in back and I say, "Hey you, come up and talk to me." It's the one little kid sitting in back that I want to get up and talk, and have him come out of his shell a little bit more.

I don't know who said it best, but someone said, "What doesn't kill you will make you stronger." You got to take care of your family. It doesn't matter if I got ten dollars in my pocket, if someone in my family needs money, I'm going to give it to them because I got a house, a refrigerator stocked full of food and I'm able to make money. Yeah, I used to go out of my way to help everybody else solve their problems.

For me to get through all of it, I just got to remember that I was a kid, and how did I get through all of that? I just worked harder, plus I lost myself in my job, and my job when I was younger was to be a great student and go to college. So that's what my goal was. My goal right now is to get back and train every day, and get back to the same way that I was.

I love training twice a day and I love getting that third one in at night. I have a job that affords me the best thing in the world and that is, to stay in shape.

You just meet a lot of people along the way and I believe you can take something from everything and everyone. I want all kids to understand that you can do everything you want. Everyone says that good things will come back to you.

Have you seen the movie *Pay It Forward*? It's one of the greatest movies I have ever seen, and from that, if I ever get a chance to do something for someone, I'll do it. Anytime I can make someone smile, I'll do it. I realized I had a bigger obligation to the people than me just being a fighter. You know, it's like we're all ambassadors to this sport. This sport was growing up and I feel I'm one of those guys who made this sport. I sure can give anyone a run for their money as far as the heart.

You know, it's funny because everyone's lives run parallel to each other. Sometimes you get to intersect with another person's life. I've always done everything for myself. When I was sick, I kept myself in the house and took care of myself. I met a girl, Elizabeth Broglia, and for some strange reason, through all the good and all the bad, she loved me from day one. During all the injuries, all the hospital stays, everything, she never left my side. I got to say this, Ricco Rodriguez is the one who introduced me to Elizabeth, and I'm thankful for that. I owe him my life and my happiness.

She hates when I tell this story, but I'm in the hospital with a foot-long gash on my back and two big cuts on my arms. I can't move or go to the bathroom. I was trying to go to the bathroom to take a dump and couldn't make it in time. The nurse came and Elizabeth came in . . . and I went on myself. She stood there and looked at me and she wanted to cry, but she knew for me, she had to be tough.

She's the one person, not my kids, not my mother, not my father, not 9/11, that made me feel that I got to get back and get strong again. She put work on hold. She put her life on hold to take care of me every day. If I needed to be wiped, she wiped me. She at least came to my house to visit me, even when MMA wasn't in season, not even knowing if I was going to make it. I couldn't talk to no one because if I spoke, it made my lungs hurt.

It was hard, but what am I going to do? Just sit back and go crawl into a bar and die? Hell no! That's another thing, that's why I'm "The Monster." Not to pop my own head, but adversity is the thing I live for every day. And she's the reason I still want to fight.

She's the reason why I'm a strong per-



son. You got to have someone strong in your corner and everyone is strong in my corner right now. I left a lot of people that were not right for me. Back in Ohio, I had Mark Coleman and we worked great together, and we're still going to be working great together in the future. Sometimes you got to take a step forward and move away to understand where you're heading.

God bless you, for most God bless our church because without Christ, we couldn't have this life. A lot of people take it for granted, but I don't. And for those fallen heroes and soldiers, my hat's off to you. I pray every day for your families and your well being. Just try to help somebody out when you get the opportunity. It feels so good. ●

To learn more about Kevin Randleman, check out his official website at www.kevinrandleman.com

