

Pele has an insider's perspective on why fighters get inked. Pele's own tattoos aren't meant for intimidation, but to reflect his pure Samoan heritage, his personal history and his self-esteem. "Every time I get a new tattoo, it makes me feel confident and good about myself," he says.

The 340-pound gentle giant plies his trade in Las Vegas as co-owner of Bad Apple Tattoo Company. Pele, who was featured on the reality TV show "Inked," has applied his artistic touch on such fighters as Joe

Stevenson, Tim Sylvia, Kendall Groves, Phil Baroni, and even referee John McCarthy. Pele recognizes the warrior mentality as a common motivation for many of his peers.

"I used to tattoo Phil Baroni before his fights. He would come up to me before every fight and ask me to hit him up," says Pele. "He'd be like, 'Yeah. I'm going to war. I'm going into battle.' His vision and my vision of getting inked are different. But it's cool. Everybody has a different perspective on tattooing. A lot of these guys look at their tattoo

"Take a guy who's all tatted up and crazy-looking, and put him next to a guy with no tattoos. You might think the tattooed guy is tougher or whatever, but that's not necessarily the case when whatever goes down, goes down."



why i'm inked:
Kevin Randleman

I got my lion eyes tattoo in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1998. Several things inspired them. I'm a Leo. One of my uncles had eyes tattooed on his back, and the last time I saw him, I saw the eyes on his back. I was looking through a magazine about the rain forest while I was in Brazil, and I saw a picture of a lion getting ready to pounce on some deer off in the distance. All you could see of the lion was his face peering through high grass. You could say that with the eyes I'm always watching my own back.

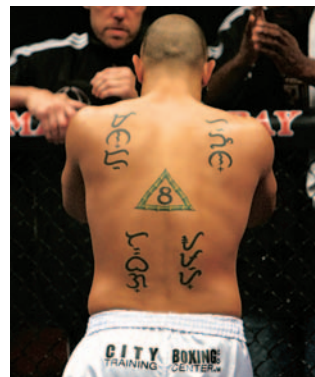
Some people see a tattoo and think, *Whoa, he's a badass*. But a tattoo is just ink on your body. Tattoos don't always symbolize badass. Sometimes tattoos just are just messages for people not to forget where they were, where they're at, and where they want to go.

I definitely feel that need to get a tattoo again. I want to get one that will remind me when I look in the mirror that I've been through some hard stuff and that I'm still ticking. My tattoos will take on even more meaning when people see me putting leather in people's faces again.



why i'm not:
Stephan Bonnar

My question is, why does everyone else have tattoos? You look at tattoos as a way to be different and express your individuality, but I'm doing that by not having one. Honestly, no matter what I'd get, sooner or later I'm going to think it looks stupid. But on some people they look cool. My favorite is Aleksander Emelianenko's. He's got what looks to be the Grim Reaper holding a baby. That tattoo is enough to intimidate you. If I were ever to get a tattoo, I'd get one on my head. If you get sick of it, you just grow a little hair and it's invisible. If you want to look crazy and mean, you just shave your head and there it is.



why i'm inked:
Brandon Vera

The lettering on my back is an ancient Filipino script. It's what people used to write in before the Spanish invaded the Philippines. It reflects my heritage, which is half-Filipino and half-Italian, so it keeps me close to my roots.

The lettering spells out the four elements: earth, wind, water and fire. They symbolize that no matter how big you get or how good you are, Mother Nature will still kick your ass. It keeps me levelheaded. I also have a triangle in the middle of my back with the number eight in the center. The triangle is because most things happen in threes: I train three times a day; I just signed a three-fight deal with the UFC. My favorite number is eight.

The tattoos are a reminder of who I am and where I came from. They keep me grounded and keep my mind focused. I didn't get them to look intimidating. It's more about representing my culture and where I'm from. I like tattoos, as long as you get them because they mean something to you. A tattoo needs to be more than just a cool picture.