

After coaching opposite Antonio Nogueira on Season 8 of *The Ultimate Fighter* reality-TV show, **Frank Mir** now faces him in the cage at UFC 92 on Dec. 27.

FRANK BEING FRANK

Before the fight, Mir sat down with **M&F** to discuss the worst part about his motorcycle accident, the best part about fighting and everything in between

BY JON FINKEL

PHOTOS BY PAVEL YTHJALL

FRANK MIR

BIRTHDATE: May 24, 1979

HEIGHT: 6'2½"

WEIGHT: 255 pounds

BIRTHPLACE & CURRENT

RESIDENCE: Las Vegas

RECORD: 11-3

NEXT FIGHT: UFC 92
vs. Antonio Nogueira on
Dec. 27



FRANK MIR IS AS HANDY WITH A PUNCHLINE AS HE IS WITH A PUNCH.

Yes, he's tough. And yes, he's a great fighter. But at the start of our photo shoot, he's more George Carlin than George Foreman. "I'm not cut like a bodybuilder," he jokes. "I have thick abs — so thick you can't see them." *Badum-ching!* When our photographer asks him to make his fight face for a portrait, he objects: "My fight face isn't appealing because I'm very calm before I hit someone. I'm not angry when I fight." So when does he get angry? "When I look at my wife's credit card bill," he says, laughing. *Thank you. Thank you. Don't forget to tip your waitress...*

Affable isn't a word you expect to use when describing someone whose profession is inflicting pain, but that's exactly what Mir is. And here's why: "I don't associate fighting with liking or disliking someone," he explains. "My dad taught me karate when I was 4 years old. He was the first guy to break my ribs. He was also the first guy to knock me out, but we were just training. I love him so much."

It's at this moment that we should back up, because we're not doing this interview and photo shoot at the Comedy Store or the Laugh Factory. We're at Striking Unlimited in Las Vegas, one of the elite mixed martial arts training centers in the world. So while the shoot brings to mind a Rodney Dangerfield bit, there are

men grimacing in agony all around us as they train for upcoming fights. In fact, when we first arrived, the gym seemed like the last place you'd be having a few laughs.

When we first opened the door, the room had the feel of a just-scrubbed torture chamber. Hand mitts were lying in a row ringside like scalpels lined up for surgery. The heavy bags hung still, the wrestling mats were shiny and the whole room smelled like a disinfectant that lost its battle against blood and sweat long ago. The gym was empty. But it was full, full of fight promotion posters, newspaper clippings and signed pictures of men who make a living breaking the will of other men. Most of the pictures, of course, were of Mir.



There's Mir with Brock Lesnar in the promotional poster for their fight (which the former won in 1½ minutes). There's Mir on the cover of *Real Fighter* magazine. There he is again with his arm around Ken Hahn, the owner of Striking Unlimited. And here he is now, explaining to our photographer why photo shoots go about as well with his fight training as an origami class.

For someone who could kick your ass, Frank Mir has a very laid-back personality



MIR VS. NOGUEIRA

WHAT: UFC 92: Mir vs. Nogueira

WHEN: Dec. 27, 2008

WHERE: MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas, Nevada

FOR: The UFC interim heavyweight championship

ON THE WEB: ufc.com

"Sorry I keep forgetting to keep my head up for the picture," he says. "It just goes against all of my instincts. I've been training so long I naturally tuck my chin. Keeping my chin up for the camera is fine; do it in a fight and it's lights out."



"I guess I can just take it." That or his skull is made of the same material they use for black boxes in airplanes. Either way, the man has strong bones. "When I spar with people for kicking drills, I need to wear double shin pads," he says. "Otherwise, they

In the interest of full disclosure, however, Mir has never actually been put to sleep. Not from a kick, not from a punch, not even from his motorcycle accident in 2004 that broke his femur, tore all the ligaments in his knee and kept him out of the UFC for two years, forcing him to vacate his heavyweight title. "The worst part about the crash was that I puked and I couldn't get my helmet off," Mir says, laughing. "My brother thought I was dead, but I just thought I had a dead leg. I didn't even pass out."



Mir tells this story the way someone might tell you about the time he almost twisted his ankle on a patch of ice. Pain, like all things, is relative, and Mir seems to have a supernatural ability to withstand it.

"I once took 80 punches to the head in a fight and didn't pass out," he adds.

get hurt." He shrugs off this last statement because when you boil it down, that's what he's here for: to condition his body to hurt people. If you want to make an omelet, you've got to break for two years, forcing him to vacate his heavyweight title. "The worst part about the crash was that I puked and I couldn't get my helmet off," Mir says, laughing. "My brother thought I was dead, but I just thought I had a dead leg. I didn't even pass out."

on Season 8 of Spike TV's *The Ultimate Fighter*. "Now that my leg's fully healed, I feel great heading into this fight," Mir says. "I mean, when I fight all the best guys, I can strike with them and if we go to the ground, I own them. I can take anyone on the mat, so I feel good. The thing I still need to work on is my wrestling, but it's coming along fine."

And the man in charge of making sure it comes along fine is Hahn. Hahn is currently on the receiving end of a series of vintage Mir kicks, each one lifting him off the ground. When it's done, Hahn rubs his sore forearm and watches his fighter stretch, marveling at his flexibility.

"He has big legs and a thick trunk," Hahn



Ever wonder what a fighter sees right before receiving a kick from Mir? Here, take a look

says. "But he has the flexibility of a smaller man."

"I've always been naturally flexible," Mir adds. "But we have improved on it a ton. Watch." He lies on his back and puts his legs up on the cage. They form a wide V, but then he slowly starts lowering each leg, link by link, until he's almost doing the splits. It looks like a training scene from a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie. As Mir lies there, stretching, Hahn continues about what makes his fighter so unique.

"His flexibility enhances his quickness, which makes his jiu-jitsu movements fast, like a smaller fighter," Hahn says. "So are his upright movements. His speed is so deceptive. We throw the kitchen sink at him when he trains, and he can take it all."

The "kitchen sink" in this case is a sparring regimen known as Shark Tank Drills. As the name suggests, these drills simulate being in the middle of a feeding frenzy, but instead of being attacked by great whites or hammerheads, Mir has to confront different fight disciplines back to back to back. Also, each guy he wrestles is completely fresh, while Mir gets to rest only a minute between rounds.

This frenetic pace of training is designed to keep him on his toes. One minute he's sparring with a 120-pound



jiu-jitsu champion, the next he's toe-to-toe with a 250-pound grappler.

"Earlier, people thought his conditioning was an issue," Hahn says. "But it was all mental. We couldn't tackle that problem by focusing on just that issue. Instead of just having him run more, we made the whole workout harder. We also turned the clock around. He never knows when the workouts will be done. We'll go for 2-3 hours at high intensity, and when it's over, he has gotten in cardio and training."

Mir is grateful this approach is working because he doesn't like to run, he

doesn't like lifting weights and cardio machines bore him. As he poses for another picture, he continues his list of dislikes. "I don't like diets, either. I'm not a fitness model," he says, sounding like the Charles Barkley of the UFC. "I'm a fighter."

For a guy who grew up in a dojo rather than a daycare center, would you expect any other response? All of which brings us back to his fight against Nogueira. With the added notoriety brought on by the success of *The Ultimate Fighter*, it would be understandable if the pressure crept into his mind a little bit while training, but it doesn't.



"I don't fight for other people, I fight for me. So there's no pressure because I don't put any on myself."

How about nerves? "We're all a little nervous before a fight," Mir says. "Everyone is. When I fought Lesnar, I shook his hand before the fight and it was a little sweaty, so I knew he might be nervous. I remember thinking, *You're nervous? Look what I gotta look at!*"

He laughs and once again the photo shoot feels like open mic night at The Improv. At least we know if Mir's jab isn't working against Nogueira, he can take him down with a joke. **M&F >>**



PG. 166: TOP LEFT, CENTER: BY J. HEDGES, © ZUFFA, LLC

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FRANK MIR'S DAILY TRAINING

TWO WORKOUTS A DAY

Morning: Technique

Work on mistakes from sparring the night before, conditioning

Evening: Sparring

Rotate days: one day jiu-jitsu, one day striking

Warm-Up

5x5-minute rounds of shadow-boxing using the whole cage, dynamic stretching (full body)

Plyometrics Workout

4x25 Jump Squat

3x30 Sumo Squat

3x30 Mountain Climber

3x30 Sprawl and Jump (push-up position to standing position and jump)

Striking Workout

5x5-minute rounds (rotate pad drills with sparring drills every round)

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Go behind the scenes with Frank Mir as he trains for his upcoming fight with Nogueira at muscleandfitness.com/videos

