



Options: [Print](#) | [Email](#) | [close window](#)

Shamrock Returns with Domination of Baroni

Saturday, June 23, 2007

Josh Gross

SAN JOSE, Calif., Jun 22 -- [Frank Juarez Shamrock \(Pictures\)](#) will party in the Silicon Valley tonight like it was 1999.

For the first time since stepping away from the Ultimate Fighting Championship, Shamrock reminded old fans what he had and introduced himself to a new generation by sparking memories and planting in minds that he was, in fact, once considered the best mixed martial artist on the planet.

Fighting more like the 26-year-old that stopped [Tito Ortiz \(Pictures\)](#) in Sept. '99 than the 34-year-old who came into his fight at the HP Pavilion off a terrible performance against [Renzo Gracie \(Pictures\)](#), Shamrock dominated before choking the loud [Phil Baroni \(Pictures\)](#) unconscious four minutes into the second period.

"To kick Baroni's ass with one leg and no cardio training was quite a feat," said Shamrock, who revealed after the fight that he tore both the ACL and MCL in his left knee while training at Team Quest in Temecula, Calif. just two weeks ago.'

Despite the severe injury, Shamrock said he never considered backing out of the anticipated fight, which drew 10,375 fans to the downtown arena.

"They could have wheeled me out in a wheelchair and I would have got up and fought," he said.

Countering off what Shamrock called an "achingly slow" Baroni jab, the adopted brother of [Ken Shamrock \(Pictures\)](#) connected with a bevy of lefts and rights that met their mark more than they missed.

"Baroni has an incredible chin," said Shamrock, now 22-8-1. "I could feel his chin on my knuckles, that's how hard I was hitting the guy and that he didn't go down in the first round was absolutely extraordinary."

One shot did drop the "New York Bad Ass," who in promotion leading up to the EliteXC middleweight title fight laid a brutal and at times hilarious verbal barrage that prompted promoter Gary Shaw to suggest if the 185-pounders fought liked they talked, fans would be in for the fight of the century.

Well, Shamrock-Baroni wasn't quite the fight of the century, but it was an entertaining clash that, if nothing else, helped quiet doubters who felt the former UFC champion had thrown his legacy out the window by fighting just four times against limited opposition since giving up the belt.

"I'm going to win them all back," Shamrock said of his detractors. "People just forget because they see what's shiny and pretty on TV, but they forget about the artists and how hard it is."

Better than his up-and-down 10-8-0 record would suggest, Baroni was easily the stiffest test Shamrock faced in years. The veteran middleweight slugger came out firing off the opening bell, buzzing wild strikes past Shamrock's head.

The two exchanged several times, with Shamrock gaining the advantage as the opening round played out. By the end of the first, Shamrock said his legs were "shot," his lungs were "burning" and he knew he was just about done -- odd considering of all his strengths, cardio always sat atop the list.

He might have been winded because of the beating he put on Baroni, which could have easily elicited a 10-8 round had referee Steve Mazzagatti not deducted a point after Shamrock illegally struck the back of his opponent's head twice.

Baroni, who said he blew out his groin in the beginning of the fight, rallied at the start of second period, yet a tired-looking Shamrock evidently had no problem absorbing power shots.

Having taken the best that Baroni could offer, Shamrock returned in kind, blasting away with a right and a left. The "New York Bad Ass" failed in his last-ditch effort to stay in the fight when Shamrock stopped a takedown attempt at his legs.

Shamrock secured back-control before the fight-ending choke. With Baroni on top of him unconscious,

Shamrock shoved the local fighter away while the crowd roared.

"I'm definitely disappointed in myself but after this great war tonight I definitely have a lot of respect for [Frank Shamrock \(Pictures\)](#)," said Baroni.

While Shamrock showed tonight that he could still be a very good fighter, he also reminded us that despite coming back and saying he's a full-time mixed martial artist, he's not terribly interested in facing the top competitors in the sport unless there's a lot of money to be made - which ironically is why he left the sport in the first place.

"I've been in this a long time," he said. "I fought a guy with one knee tonight. I jeopardized my entire career to do this match for everybody tonight, including myself. Was that smart? I don't really know. Should I continue to do that against people that don't really have a name and aren't going to sell pay-per-view and bring wealth to my family? I don't know. The odds are probably not."

The other middleweight title on the line tonight saw Chute Boxe's [Murilo Rua \(Pictures\)](#) win in his first fight on American soil, stopping New Mexico's [Joey Villasenor \(Pictures\)](#) 65 seconds of round two to capture the vacation middleweight EliteXC belt.

The opening frame was competitive as the title-hungry fighters went at each other. Villasenor (23-6-0) took an early edge with a heavy left hook that wobbled the Brazilian, but "Ninja" recovered nicely.

"He caught me off guard with a hard shot," said Rua (14-7-1), whose larger brother Shogun Rua helped corner him tonight. "But I recovered and was able to recuperate. Once I recouped, I felt comfortable in there."

The Brazilian went after Villasenor on the canvas, and really took control after establishing position on the side.

At the start of the second "Ninja" landed a heavy knee to the midsection before landing a straight right hand that put the Greg Jackson-trained middleweight down.

"I thought I had him, then I lost it and don't know why," said a dejected Villasenor. "Even when I had him dazed I couldn't finish him."

Rua rushed in to finish the contest, which he did to capture the vacant EliteXC middleweight title.

As MMA continues to proliferate around North America, some fans have complained that the sport's fighters are little more than tattooed, goateed clones. For that crowd there's [Cung Le \(Pictures\)](#), a Vietnamese middleweight who's as comfortable throwing kicking combinations punctuated by a crescent kick as he is tossing your dime-store jab-cross combination.

For just over two full rounds, Le battered [Tony Fryklund \(Pictures\)](#) around the cage with beautiful kicking sequences that seemed like they were ripped from *Ong Bak*. Le (4-0-0) was impressive against the veteran Fryklund, who dropped to 14-9-0.

The end came mercifully when Le unleashed a right hook that dropped Fryklund on the spot.

"The plan was to catch him with both hands, but when that didn't happen I wanted to get him on the ground. But since I didn't have confidence in my ground game, you saw what happened.

Lightweight [Josh Thomson \(Pictures\)](#) had an easy time with Texan [Nick Gonzalez \(Pictures\)](#). The San Jose lightweight (12-2-0) struck to set up a takedown, which he did easily. Thomson, 28, quickly secured back-control and worked to finish by rear-naked choke, which he did at 1:42 of the first.

"Twenty-five guys turned me down for this fight," said Thomson. "No one wanted to take me on and [Gonzalez, 11-5-0] was the one who stood up."

Some 30 pounds above his optimum fighting weight, K-1 veteran [Carter Williams \(Pictures\)](#) entered the cage a decided underdog in the eyes of the HP Pavilion crowd.

Standing across from Williams was [Paul Buentello \(Pictures\)](#), a popular heavyweight like Thomson and Le out of San Jose's American Kickboxing Academy.

Most expected the heavy-hitters to exchange strikes in the center of the cage, but Williams surprised Buentello by looking for an early takedown.

Williams' reluctance to strike put a damper on much of the opening frame, which was fought largely in the clinch, where Buentello used his dirty boxing to take the period.

Though Buentello landed two uppercuts, his favorite strike, in the opening five minutes, he failed to hurt the 27-year-old veteran of 49 kickboxing bouts.

That changed as action move to round two.

Buentello, 33, landed a stiff jab before two uppercuts met their mark. Williams collapsed to the canvas, clutching his left eye as referee Steve Mazzagatti moved into to protect him just 10 seconds into the period.

"I set him up with jabs and uppercuts and I thought he was bluffing when he hit the floor," said Buentello, who pushed his record to 23-9-0.

One week ago Edson Berto had no designs on stepping into the cage against [Victor Valenzuela \(Pictures\)](#). With the arrest of [Charles Bennett \(Pictures\)](#) promoters were left scrambling to find a suitable replacement. Berto, who made his EliteXC debut on Showtime in February, smartly avoided engaging on the feet with the lightweight as "Joe Boxer" and quickly put the contest on the floor.

Berto (10-3-1) went after Valenzeula's Achilles before transitioning nicely into an inside heel hook, which put enough pressure on the Californian's knee and ankle that he tapped out of the fight just 47 seconds after the opening bell.

"I had no clue what to expect," said Valenzuela, 5-2-2. "I thought for sure we were going to throw punches. I'm not very happy."

Berto returns to the cage on July 28.

In the evening's final bout, Cage Rage British welterweight champion [Paul Daley \(Pictures\)](#) scored a second round TKO victory over UFC and K-1 veteran [Duane Ludwig \(Pictures\)](#).

Pyle impressive in undercard victory

[Mike Pyle \(Pictures\)](#) scored his second win at 170 pounds under the EliteXC promotional banner, decisioning tough but undersized [Aaron Wetherspoon \(Pictures\)](#) after three competitive rounds.

Pyle, now 14-4-1, was forced to work hard in the early going as a stout Wetherspoon, who made a name for himself in King of the Cage, made takedowns nearly impossible. Even when Pyle managed to get it to the canvas, Wetherspoon played a good defensive guard game before returning to his feet.

The shorter Wetherspoon had trouble finding the proper range to land strikes, and he was forced into mostly single-strike attacks. While Pyle joked that he was lucky to wear a "really strong mouthpiece" after one particular Wetherspoon right hand, most of the fight belonged to the Tennessee-born welterweight.

By the third Wetherspoon's nose was bloodied as Pyle found his range with punches to the head and kicks to the legs.

"I didn't throw enough punches," Wetherspoon said. "The plan going in was to keep busy. I didn't let my fists fly. I didn't throw enough punches or follow with combinations. I'm very disappointed."

When Wetherspoon did throw punches they were wide and sloppy, allowing Pyle to counter by getting on the inside. In the clinch again Pyle successfully put Wetherspoon on the canvas, and from half-guard he trapped his stout foe's right arm, landing punches and elbows until the final bell sounded.

"I've watched him before and I knew he was a really strong kid with the desire to be a fighter," said Pyle.

Judges at ringside scored it unanimously for the 31-year-old Pyle; both Marcos Rosales and Nelson Hamilton saw it 30-27, while Richard Bertrand posted the odd number of 29-27, calling it even after two and making the third 10-8 in favor of the winner.

"I feel great," said Pyle, who had [Randy Couture \(Pictures\)](#) and [Forrest Griffin \(Pictures\)](#) in his corner. "I won that fight -- that's the most important thing. I trained really hard. I expected a three-round fight and I got it."

[Nikk Covert \(Pictures\)](#) opened his bout with [Nik Theotikos \(Pictures\)](#) with a kick to the midsection instead of a touch of gloves. Chants of "f--- him up" poured from on high, as Theotikos' supporters cheered for him.

The undefeated middleweight responded by blasting Covert with punches, ending his night by knockout at just 1:17 of the first. Medical personnel attended to Covert, who was unresponsive as a cervical brace was placed around his neck and he was strapped to a stretcher.

"I thought he was OK," said Theotikos, "but I know I got him good with the last shot."

Covert was taken to a local hospital and was described as "responsive."

[Luke Stewart \(Pictures\)](#) impressed against veteran [Jason Von Flue \(Pictures\)](#), taking the 175-pound fight by referee stoppage at 2:17 of the third round.

Stewart (3-0-0) controlled the first two periods on the canvas using his Brazilian jiu-jitsu game. When the fighters did exchange on the feet neither showed much power.

To start the third period Stewart jumped on the John Hackleman-trained fighter's back while they stood. Stewart put in one hook before sinking the second, at which point he forced Von Flue (12-8-1) face first to the canvas.

Stewart pounded away before Von Flue rolled to face him. Referee [Herb Dean \(Pictures\)](#) watched as Stewart unloaded fight-ending punches from the mount, and as the crowd began calling for an end he saved Von Flue.

"I was a little surprised the referee didn't stop it," said Stewart. "I kept waiting for him to stop it, but Jason was a tough guy. It was definitely a big challenge and I'm very happy with the way I performed."

Local Arena Football Leaguer [Rex Richards \(Pictures\)](#) fired a series of arm punches, including a right hand that hurt [Ray Seraille \(Pictures\)](#) early in their heavyweight tilt. Stepping into the cage at 305 pounds, Richards (4-0-0) plowed through the 265 pounds Seraille (6-8-0) for the finish just 34 seconds after the opening bell.

Bantamweight [Chris Cariaso \(Pictures\)](#) (4-0-0) out-pointed [Anthony Figueroa \(Pictures\)](#) (2-1-0) to capture a unanimous decision after three, three-minute rounds (30-27 twice, 29-28).

[Seth Kleinbeck \(Pictures\)](#) (7-3-0), a 33-year-old physician from Stuttgart, Ark., finished [Sam Spengler \(Pictures\)](#) (6-3-0) at 2:55 of the second, pounding out the finish on the floor.

Copyright © 2008, Sherdog.com - All rights reserved.
Saturday, September 27, 2008

