

◆ UFC INTERVIEW

ONE ROUND WITH GEORGES ST-PIERRE

◆ By David Lee

UFC welterweight champion Georges St-Pierre, simply known as GSP to his fans, isn't much on material things. In fact, he keeps his championship belt in his closet. As one of the most celebrated champions in mixed martial arts today, the 27-year-old fighter is all about, as he says, fighting for the name.

He also is building his name in the collectibles industry, with cards already released in two products within one year, including the new Topps UFC Round 1 set. In combination with our review of the first UFC-licensed card product, we caught up with GSP to talk about his rise to the top of the fastest-growing sport in America, and to get his opinion on mixed martial arts entering the trading card world.

BSCM: Take us through your martial arts background and how it brought you to the UFC.

Georges St-Pierre: "I started martial arts when I was 7 years old. My dad used to teach me. I went to a school and competed a lot when I was young. I had a problem at school growing up. I was picked on by older teenagers. I [took martial arts] to defend myself. I started to compete professionally when I was 19. After that, I did very well and was recruited by the UFC."

BSCM: What made you want to become a professional fighter?

GSP: "Growing up, I was a big fan of Jean-Claude Van Damme and 'Bloodsport.' I always wanted to be champion in some sort

of martial arts. The UFC is the ultimate proving ground."

BSCM: Are MMA fighters best professional athletes in the world today?

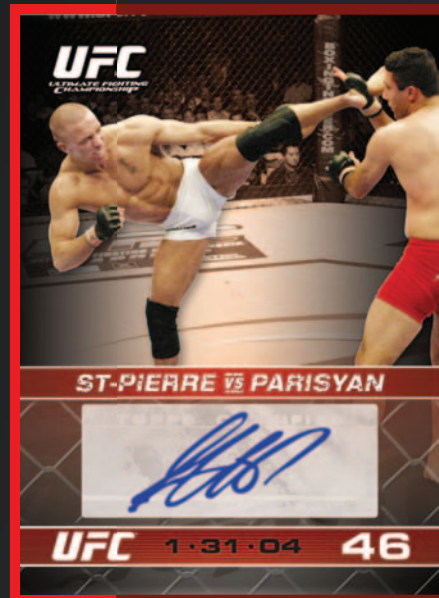
GSP: "I don't know about that. I respect every athlete in every sport. It demands a lot of sacrifice to be on top. What we do, it's like a triathlon of combat sports. It's not only judo, it's not only wrestling, it's not only boxing — it's all mixed together."

BSCM: What sets you apart from other fighters?

GSP: "I'm not the best at something — I'm not the best striker, I'm not the best grappler — but I can do pretty much everything very well. And I always come very prepared for a fight."

BSCM: You are regarded as one of the most athletic fighters in MMA. Is your athleticism something that you realized early in your career that would be a big asset for you?

GSP: "I train in different disciplines. I train in boxing, and some of my training partners are former world champions. I train with pure wrestlers, and some of my training partners rank at the top in the world. I go to Brazil and train with jiu-jitsu guys who are world champions. I train in all areas of the game and with the best guys in every single discipline. I think that's what makes me improve more than someone who only trains with the same team all the time."



BSCM: What's more satisfying: winning a championship for the first time, or defending it multiple times?

GSP: "Every time is something different. When I won it for the first time, it was great because it was something I didn't have. But now I don't fight for the belt. I fight for the name. I want to keep challenging myself. I want to make a legacy. I don't want to fight for the belt. I need to fight for the name — fight for the challenge that the guy in front of me will give me. I want to fight the best."

BSCM: What are your goals at this point in your career?

GSP: "I want to take the fight that will give me the most challenge. The fight that people want to see, the one that the people say, 'Hey, is Georges good enough to do this? Is Georges going to be able to step over this obstacle?' That's what drives me in the sport right now. It can be somebody in my weight class, somebody in a higher weight class. That's what I like about it — just keep challenging myself."

BSCM: What sports teams and players did you follow growing up, and did you ever collect sports cards of them?

GSP: "The Edmonton Oilers, and my favorite player was Wayne Gretzky. I had some [cards], but it was my dad who bought them for me."

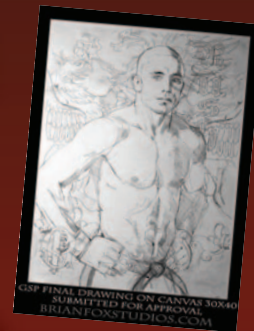
BSCM: What are your thoughts on the Topps-UFC partnership?

Where to Get More GSP

Georges St-Pierre has already appeared in the Donruss Americana II Ring Kings set, with his autographed cards selling for \$50-\$100.

GSP teamed with artist Brian Fox to create limited edition giclées (pictured below) that were unveiled at UFC 94. The artwork is available at St-Pierre's website, GSPFightClub.com, or BrianFoxStudios.com.

The GSP camp also plans to launch a signature bandanas fashioned after the ones he wears in his entrance to the Octagon.



GSP: "I think it's something good for the fans. You can have a souvenir of the fighter. It's a plus."

BSCM: What Topps cards have you seen of yourself, and do you plan on collecting them?

GSP: "I saw the one where I was fighting Karo Parisyan. It was my first fight in the UFC. It's very nice. I haven't seen any of the other ones. I don't really collect them, but I enjoy when someone shows it to me."

BSCM: Are you a willing autograph signer?

GSP: "I never refuse a picture or an autograph signing for fans. It's because of them that we can do this job."

BSCM: What fighters did you look up to before you got to the UFC?

GSP: "Royce Gracie was my all-time favorite. I just came back from Denver and one of my friends gave me an autograph picture with a message saying, 'To the champ, GSP, fight a good fight!' It's something that I put on my wall."

BSCM: Do you keep some of the equipment that you've worn throughout your fighting career?

GSP: "No, I don't really keep it. As a matter of fact, the funny thing is, my belt is in my closet. For me, the most important thing is the souvenir that I keep of the moment. That's something that no one will ever be able to steal from me. The belt and other things are only material."

BSCM: Are there enough up-and-coming fighters to grow the sport and licensed collectibles like the Topps product?

GSP: "Oh, yeah. It's getting more and more popular. I think it's the fastest-growing sport, and it's just the beginning."

BSCM: You just beat B.J. Penn, who is the UFC lightweight champion. So what's next for you?

GSP: "Thiago Alves is the No. 1 contender. He is a great challenge for me."



Photo: Josh Hedges/UFC