

TITLE: "MMA MANTLE PASSES BUT NOT THE MEANS"
EVENT: UFC 60: HUGHES VS GRACIE
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An historic Mixed Martial Arts event took place Saturday night as reigning welterweight champion, Matt Hughes faced and overwhelmed legendary no-holds-barred fighter and first UFC champion, Royce Gracie in "Ultimate Fighting Championship 60" at the Staples Center.

After initially exchanging a series of strikes and kicks, Hughes forced the grappling issue by driving Gracie into the fence from where both men struggled for position. As the action moved back toward the center of the Octagon, Hughes ducked a roundhouse elbow while closing the distance to take Gracie's back and force a takedown.

Once on the mat it was Hughes dominating Gracie with a series of maneuvers to establish side control where he began delivering strikes to Gracie's ribs and head, eventually threatening to submit the Brazilian first by an arm bar and then a rear choke.

After initially defending himself well, the 39 year old Gracie was ultimately undone as Hughes cemented his rear mount position with full hooks and began delivering a relentless barrage of strikes to the back and side of Gracie's head causing referee John McCarthy to stop the contest at 4:39 of the first round.

Prior to the fight the question on the minds of Mixed Martial Arts fans around the world was, could pure Jiu Jitsu technique alone still overcome every other fighting style and natural advantage including size, weight and strength as Gracie had repeatedly demonstrated in his early years in the UFC and later in competitions around the globe.

It seemed there wasn't a better opponent on the planet to test that question than Hughes who is the most dominant fighter in UFC history and famous for both his tremendous strength and his commitment to cross-training in multiple styles of fighting, including wrestling and boxing. In fact, Hughes had personally been stating that this event was an opportunity to reveal how much the sport had evolved and now required a multi-disciplined approach to be successful.

The irony is that in the end it was clear that Hughes' dedication to other fighting styles didn't matter because what ultimately won the day for him was nothing less than his use of Jiu Jitsu ... the very style of fighting that Gracie had introduced and used to literally turn the martial arts world upside down, changing forever the perception of what truly is the most effective means of self-defense.

Proof of Gracie's ability to neutralize any kicking and striking attack was that before the fight Hughes had said he intended to deny Gracie the opportunity to employ his greatest strengths as a grappler by forcing the action to stay on its feet. However, as he would later acknowledge in the post-fight press conference, within the first minutes of the fight Hughes realized there was no way he was going to penetrate the stand-up skills of Gracie, which forced him to abandon his strategy and try taking the fight to the ground.

By his ability to establish and maintain such classic positions as the front and rear mounts, knee in the stomach and side control as well as attempting various submission finishing moves like the arm bar, Kamura and rear choke, Hughes repeatedly demonstrated trademark techniques that have made Jiu Jitsu the most crucial discipline for athletes daring to venture into the realm of full-contact reality fighting.

Amazingly, it is the very fact that Hughes won in this way that pays Gracie and his entire family of pioneering Jiu Jitsu fighters their greatest imaginable compliment, even in the face of such a loss.

That's because when Gracie's family began their self-acknowledged crusade over seventy years ago to dispel the endless stream of invincibility myths from other forms of exotic martial arts, their goal was not to prove that their family members could beat up everybody else in the world. It was simply to prove that there was no other form of self-defense in existence that could enable a slightly built person to defeat a much stronger opponent of any size and weight fighting hand-to-hand in virtually any imaginable way.

From the time Gracie's brother Rorion created the Ultimate Fighting Championship contest in 1993 competitors of every size and style across the globe, including the 6-foot, 8-inch, 490-pound Grand Sumo Champion, Akibono (whom Gracie at 180 pounds conquered in a record 2 minutes and 13 seconds) have tried unsuccessfully to prove their family wrong.

While fans and practitioners continue debating the possible implications of the outcome of Saturday's historic event, two things remain certain. After 13 years the mixed martial arts world has yet to introduce a more effective style of fighting than Jiu Jitsu and it continues to owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to Royce Gracie.