



From **California Kid** to  
**KING** of  
**CALIFORNIA**

The fighting pride of Sacramento relaxes atop his mixed martial arts empire.

By Danny Acosta

PHOTO LANDRY MAJOR



Urijah works the heavy bag at his gym, Ultimate Fitness, in Sacramento California.

PHOTO LANDRY MAJOR

**Urijah Faber is a natural born world-shaker.**

The former World Extreme Cagefighting Featherweight Champion catches sun on a bushy downtown Sacramento street, sitting on a wood stool in front of the epicenter of his empire—Ultimate Fitness gym. His real-life *Entourage* passes by with friendly reminders as he hangs out before his next training session. They've turned the "whirlwind" of the last three years into a breeze for the five-time champ, allowing him to be the WEC's star and not worry about anything else. Seriously, Faber hasn't personally paid a bill since arriving in millions of homes on the Versus network.

Like it's always been, Faber's superhero cleft chin, on-demand smile, and laid back attitude find him the center of attention. But that doesn't mean he lacks hustle. He is the full-time leader of Team Alpha Male. That entails owning a second gym and an apparel company named after his fight squad—not to mention blitzing press appearances. He works to the bone like his underlings, but ultimately his job is toughest because when he punches the clock, he gets punched in the face.

"In all honesty, I believe 100% this is what I was born to do," says the fighter billed as the most dominant featherweight of all-time.

He pauses to say hello to teammate Kyacey Uscola's newborn. "Let me see the baby!" he exclaims in the general direction of the mother. Without ever breaking small talk or ignoring the baby, he manages to greet elders, pro fighters, and young kids as they walk past him into the gym.



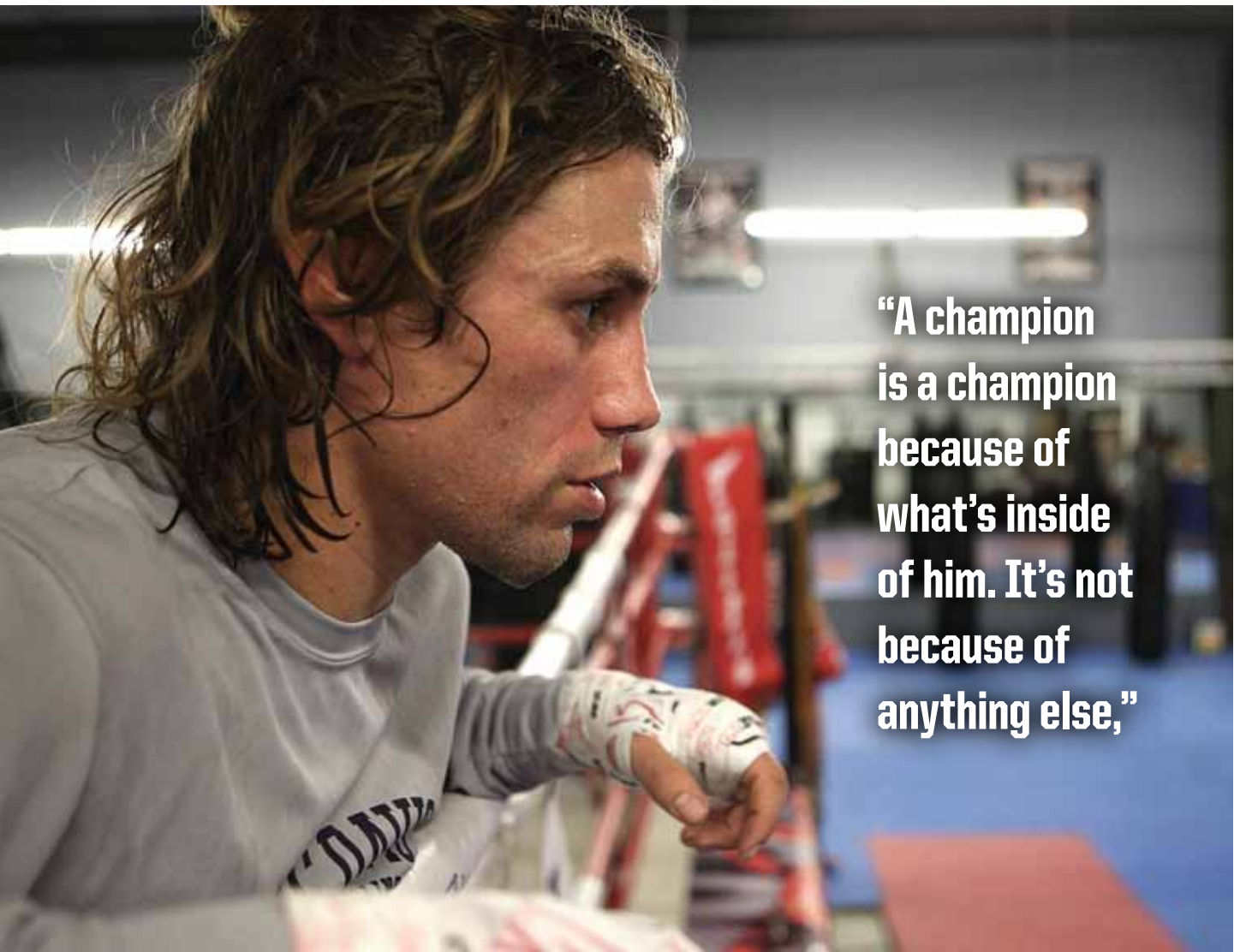
Fighters prepare for a grueling workout.

**STAR POWER**

Two particular fans signaled to Faber his legacy as The California Kid. The first occurred when—18 years after he had his first kiss to *Under the Bridge* by the Red Hot Chili Peppers—rock legend Anthony Kiedis complimented Faber on his fighting ability.

The second? Summoning his best gravel voice, Faber reveals one of the first moments he felt like a superstar: "Hey," said Don Frye to Faber at a 2006 King of the Cage, "I'm honored to fight with The California Kid."





**“A champion is a champion because of what’s inside of him. It’s not because of anything else,”**

If it wasn’t surprisingly warm in this otherwise dreary Northern California week, Faber would have driven the short way home. Instead, “The California Kid” demonstrates why he’s a king around here. An “Alpha Male” is a well-rounded guy, explains Faber, who started writing Alpha Male on his fight wear in 2004. He is personable, resourceful, badass, and yes, a bit cocky. So whether he’s handling personal matters or the full-time profession of greeting people, the Isla Vista-born fighter strives to represent himself well.

Like these three guys who wander straight out of the 18 to 35-year-old male demographic and onto the sidewalk just in front of Ultimate Fitness. They shout a request for photos and autographs 15 feet away as to not interrupt their hometown hero.

“Cruise on over homies,” says Faber. He introduces himself like they don’t

know he’s king of the jungle. “Urijah,” he says with a “what’s up?” nod.

One of the fans doesn’t play it as cool as the others. He repeats in amazement, “Sactown’s finest! This is Sactown’s finest right here!”

Faber gathers the trio, “I’ll take a picture of all three of us and we’ll put it on my Twitter.” The overzealous one reveals he got kicked out of Arco Arena for fighting in the stands minutes before “The California Kid” scored a third-round rear-naked choke over world-ranked Raphael Assuncao. “That sucks!” acknowledges Faber.

They walk off, promising Faber that the belt is coming back to The Capital City on April 24 when Faber clashes newly-minted champion Jose Aldo at Arco Arena for the 145-pound crown.

Having notched a three-year, 13-fight winning streak en route to becoming one of MMA’s biggest stars, Faber deems

titles and stats characterizing champions as misguided.

“A champion is a champion because of what’s inside of him. It’s not because of anything else,” he says. “I’m just out here fighting and having a good time. My life is awesome dude. I hang out with all my buddies all day. I live in California. I travel around and watch fights for free, which is what I would be paying to do otherwise.”

Standing 5’6” tall with clean good looks, the only reason fighting isn’t the perfect occupation for the 30-year-old is because he doesn’t look like the lion. But actually, it’s part of his draw: he wears the sheep’s clothing and transforms into the superior beast inside the cage.

The trick for Faber is looking like a star and fighting like a star but being his own Lebowsky-like self when it’s time to meet fans. Only a few prizefighters

have this “it” factor of taking fortune in stride, appearing at the top of the world but with feet firmly on the ground.

The crazy part is that a warrior with a bankable personality like Faber seemed destined to go unnoticed. For three years, he’d toss fighters across the local cages as if he was disgusted with them and punched like they paid him per strike. And he did it all with swagger. Despite his budding star and increased exposure for mixed martial arts post-2005’s Bonnar-Griffin boom, sub-lightweight fighters were seen as unmarketable.

That’s when the Ultimate Fighting Championship parent company, Zuffa, purchased his WFA contract in late 2006. Faber kept the belt he claimed from Cole Escovedo at WEC 19 and rode a promotional wave starting in January 2007.

Faber went on to defend his WEC 145-pound crown a record five times, joining an elite club with UFC icons Matt Hughes, Tito Ortiz, and Anderson Silva. The first time he fought in a major venue, a record WEC audience witnessed Faber retain his crown from inaugural UFC Lightweight Champion Jens Pulver in a dominant 25-minute display at Arco Arena in Sacramento in June 2008.

He dropped the belt five months later to American Top Team’s Mike Thomas Brown in Florida. Back at Arco Arena a year later, another WEC record crowd backed their hometown hero as Faber challenged Brown’s featherweight throne.

“My right hand is done!” Faber told Muay Thai coach Thonglor Armatsena, a.k.a. “Master Thong,” between rounds one and two.

“Shut up! Shut up! You a champion!” yelled back Master Thong, slapping the spot on Faber’s chest where his heart frantically lub-dubbed with adrenaline.

“I wasn’t trying to quit, I was just trying to tell you!” Faber recalls with a laugh. The language barrier—Master Thong speaks little English—rarely scrambles their wavelength. 12,682 fans shook Arco Arena to encourage their champion.

“Fuck it,” he said, jumping back into the fight.

They got their money’s worth with Faber exceeding speed limits for the remaining 20 minutes of the contest against a bulldozing Brown, despite acquiring a second broken hand. Faber doesn’t think during a fight. He creates and reacts to situations, but with damaged artillery, he could never fire off a kill shot, and dropped a unanimous decision to Brown.

The performance further endeared Faber to fans and critics, reminding viewers he’s a rare breed who disregards safety to dramatize a fight, something he’s done his entire career.

“I’m the guy that will go the extra mile,” says Faber, “because I’ve always been a hard working cat.”

### Blue-Collar Royalty

Urijah Faber’s physique and fighting skills could serve as motivational posters; however, it might be easier to just listen to Faber for pure inspiration.

“If you don’t like the direction of the river, don’t jump in,” says Faber, rattling off affirmations like he’s giving a presentation. “People who can’t stand drugs turn to reality. There’s only two things you have to do in life, you have to die and you have to live, until you die, the rest is up to you.”

He discloses yesterday’s frantic schedule as a prime example of a typical Urijah Faber day. One friend asked if he could speak to his old high school wrestling team. Faber doesn’t like to say no. Someone else asked if he could speak to at-risk kids.

Urijah squares off against one of the most dangerous featherweights in the world, former WEC Champion, Mike Brown.

PHOTO PAUL THATCHER



Sure, bring them by the gym. “Don’t commit,” said his handlers, because missing dinner with sponsors would be a disaster. And all the while, he has to live the life of an athlete: eating right, training multiple times a day, and resting properly.

“I’m an extreme optimist, and the other thing is I’m not a huge planner,” says Faber, who simply trusts he’ll accomplish everything he needs like he did yesterday, without burning anyone in the process. He maximizes his time without worrying about the stresses of a non-stop day, a tactic he learned early on.

From a divorced family, he learned management skills at a young age, investing time in two households, school, and athletics. In elementary school, he filmed commercials and did runway work for kids’ products thanks to his mom’s gig at a modeling agency. In high school, he added odd jobs and a personal life to his hectic schedule while picking up all-league status as a cornerback. In college, he ditched football to become a Division I wrestler (walk-on at University of California-Davis), bus boy, wrestling coach, student, and standout campus personality.

“I would feel horrible if I just had one thing to do all the time,” he adds, noting his desire to acquire James Brown’s “hardest working man” title for mixed martial arts.

**“I like to exemplify—even in my losses—a positive attitude. Life is good. As long as you’re living, you have a second chance.”**

It’s no wonder his teachers all dubbed him a natural leader. But it’s easy to have a bright-eyed view of the world with a brand new black Mercedes E350.

“This is a hard time right now,” says Faber, aware of California and its capital’s hurting economy. “I’ve been where I’ve had nothing. I’ve been where I’ve been on the verge of having stuff. And where I am now, where I’m a little bit better off financially. I understand the different struggles. I feel like my attitude the whole time has been one of happiness and having gratitude.

“I like to exemplify—even in my losses—a positive attitude. Life is good. As long as you’re living, you have a second chance. Enjoy life.”

Faber relates that he could dwell on his parents’ divorce or his father being an alcoholic or domestic disputes at his mom’s house involving her new boyfriend. That’s completely opposite of his style though. In Faber’s mind, those life-changing instances weigh only as much—if not less—than the smaller, finer moments.

“My dad used to take that motor home, he’d be working construction, he’d park it at a pond in the summer time, and me and my brother would fish all day while he was doing construction,” reminisces Faber, the first in his immediate family to graduate from

college or own a new car. “Then he’d come back home, clean the fish, cook the fish, go to my mom’s house the next day. Of course, it’s not perfect, but it’s all relative. Life was great for me.”

His parents weren’t at all of his games and he didn’t mind because they were working their asses off. He was just happy they supported him. The result? Faber’s confidence is borderline clinical.

Even when he repeated kindergarten, his self-esteem was unwavering. He threw punches at the mirror and thought he was the baddest little dude on the planet. That never changed. In his mind, every day is Urijah Faber day.

Fighting hard enough through life, local ranks, and the WEC, Faber was recently honored with an official Urijah Faber Day at Arco Arena by his favorite sports franchise: the Sacramento Kings. He couldn’t afford to go to games growing up. He vaguely remembers attending one or two. Faber remarks that it’s surreal he’s in a position now where he receives free tickets any time he desires, although he hardly has time to attend.

“It’s been interesting for me. I haven’t ever thought *I want to be famous* or *I want to do this* or *I want to do that*,” he says, “I just kind of went with the flow and this is where I ended up.”

Flow could help explain Faber’s success. It’s the positive energy he puts into the universe, an integral component to staying at the peak of mixed martial arts. More tangible things such as blood, sweat, and tears are equally important. Seven years of mental and physical sacrifice—Faber’s never eaten McDonald’s—is something Faber values. He’s proud. And while he generally doesn’t listen to negativity, sometimes it happens.

they were legal back then. I was wearing my wrestling shows, kneeing him in the top of the head, then I choked him out.”

**▶ June 3, 2004, Gladiator Challenge 27**  
**Unanimous decision victory over David Velasquez**

“It was the first time one of my fights went to a decision, and it was a heated battle. I remember cussing at his corner and telling him to ‘shut the fuck up.’ It was Paul Buentello that was in his corner. He said, ‘He’s scared of you, Dave,

At a local bagel shop, an old man said Faber was a legit fighter for ignoring two broken hands in a fight. Compliment accepted, but the fan’s admission went awry when he pointed out that he had previously hated Faber because of “the pretty boy thing.”

“Hey man, I fight for a living,” says Faber. “I’ve been doing this when there was no money involved. I’ve never had braces. I don’t shave my fucking chest. I don’t pluck my eyebrows. This is just the way I look, bro. I’m not a pretty boy. I’m about as manly as it gets ... So what, I’m not a bad looking dude.”

If life is all about perspective, bet on Faber, the alpha male.

**A Karma Empire**

Urijah Faber was voted worst driver in high school.

Worst car too. He sold it to his buddy for \$50, although it was “pretty luxury for a piece of crap.” His next car was an 80-something Datsun that shook if it went too fast. A few fights into a strange, fast world of mixed martial arts, speed didn’t scare Faber. Neither did exhaustion. He was working 16-hour days, paying \$220 rent to live with college friends, and drove to and from Lake Tahoe to teach wrestling camps to get by.

One fateful night, he popped in a CD a teammate had recommended. He hit play on Atmosphere’s *Lucy Ford* and his fighting future was foretold: Urijah Faber was going to be “bigger than guns, bigger than cigarettes.”

There are many reasons that almost never came to be. Faber almost didn’t go to college, contemplating staying in his small, suburban Sacramento town of Lincoln. He almost didn’t get away

he’s scared to stand up.’ I was on top of him, and I said, ‘Fuck you,’ and went boom [dropping elbow motion]. It was primal at that time.”

**▶ Aug. 10, 2005, Gladiator Challenge 42**  
**Technical knockout loss (punches) to Tyson Griffin**

“I just fought through adversity. It was a bigger guy. I hit my head like eight seconds into it. It was the first time I really pushed through injury, and I took a ton of big punches in that fight and kept

from broken bottles and knife attacks from 12 Balinese in Indonesia. Upon returning to the United States and signing on for his Zuffa WEC debut, Nick Diaz accidentally cut Faber’s chin during training, which required stitches and endangered the contest. Faber grew what he called a goatee to hide it from inspection. It worked.

The rest is history, and until now, it’s been contained on the Versus network.

But Faber’s stardom has ascended far enough to latch the WEC onto pay-per-view satellites for the first time in the organization’s nine-year history. He attempts to reclaim his title when he tangles with 2009 *FIGHT!* Magazine’s Fighter of the Year Jose Aldo on April 24.

Faber understands fighters like Aldo are getting better, cutting more weight and competing at higher levels. It forces Faber to fight for his lion’s share. He reveals that his advantage is being battle tested and admits to having enjoyed fighting when there were no rewards.

“If you look at pictures of the [David Velasquez] fight,” he says, calling attention to a particularly bloody fight of his career, “it looks like I was having a great time.”

Only a few young guys first started fighting with knees on the ground, wrestling shoes, and without regulation like Faber did. He needed eight staples six seconds into a classic fight against Tyson Griffin, but raged on for 10 minutes. Ready to face Aldo, it’s all the same for Faber. The toughest guys with no name or the best and most hyped fighters in the sport. A fight’s a fight.

“There’s no doubt that I’ve had to fight tough guys to be where I’m at. For

me, the sport is as raw as you can get,” says Faber. “It’s just two individuals. It really doesn’t matter all that you know. It’s usually the guy’s spirit and what his heart’s about that determines whether he wins.

Competing for championships in 14 of his 27 bouts, Faber trusts his heart before war. As a headliner at Arco Arena for a third time, Faber breaks new ground again by bringing the featherweights and the WEC to pay-per-view.

Win or lose, he’s planted more positive seeds from which his empire may grow.

“I’m not defined by a belt or whatever anyone else thinks,” says Faber, who attempts to regain the featherweight crown on his mother’s birthday. “I’m defined by how I live my life, what kind of things I put into my everyday work, and who I surround myself with.”

Urijah Faber was never the best, but he always wanted to be. The California Kid unearthed the sturdiest foundation for a fighting empire: loyal followers.

“I want to fight, like, when I win, people win. When I lose, people lose. Fans like that—who are emotionally attached—are why I fucking love doing all the PR stuff and meeting all these people,” says Faber.

Randy Couture, Chuck Liddell, and Wanderlei Silva have struck the same cord with fans, resulting in legendary superstar status in the sport. As the most dominant champ in WEC history, Faber’s cemented his place in the books. But showing appreciation to fans really defines Faber’s spot in mixed martial arts—it’s a karmic exchange where fighter and fan feel like royalty at the same moments. 🗨

**In His Own Words: Faber’s 5 Favorite Fights**

**▶ Nov. 12, 2003, Gladiator Challenge 20**  
**Guillotine choke victory over Jay Valencia**

“I was just like a clean-cut college kid and I was fighting a big ole Mexican, who had tattoos across his stomach, and all my best friends were telling me not to do it. I remember the guy staring at me and just thinking, ‘Dude, you’re fucking fucked bro.’ And no one else

in that whole arena knew it but me. He went out, and I didn’t want to wrestle at all. I’d never done any striking or anything, I came out southpaw and just started firing punches at him. Boom, boom! I hit him like three times ... he double legged me. I went for a choke, I stood up, and I didn’t want anything to do with wrestling. I was trying to knee and punch him because I wanted to fight, you know? I ended up landing like two knees, then I tossed him, then I landed some knees to the head because

going and going. It was something that motivated me. After that fight, I think I went on a huge winning streak, something like a 13-fight winning streak.”

**▶ June 1, 2008, WEC 34**  
**Unanimous decision victory over Jens Pulver**

“It was the first time I fought in a huge arena. It was like the hit-big-time kind of feeling. The crowd was going nuts. I was fighting a guy who is a legend. It was just an incredible feeling.”

**▶ June 7, 2009, WEC 41**  
**Unanimous decision loss to Mike Brown (rematch)**

“It was an experience for myself where I was, like, having to deal with something I’ve never dealt with before and had to be creative. Even though I knew I wasn’t going to win, it was a fight for myself just to do it. Just to say ‘Fuck it.’ I remember saying ‘Fuck it’ in the second round. Once I got past the second round, I was like, ‘Alright, let’s figure this out.’”