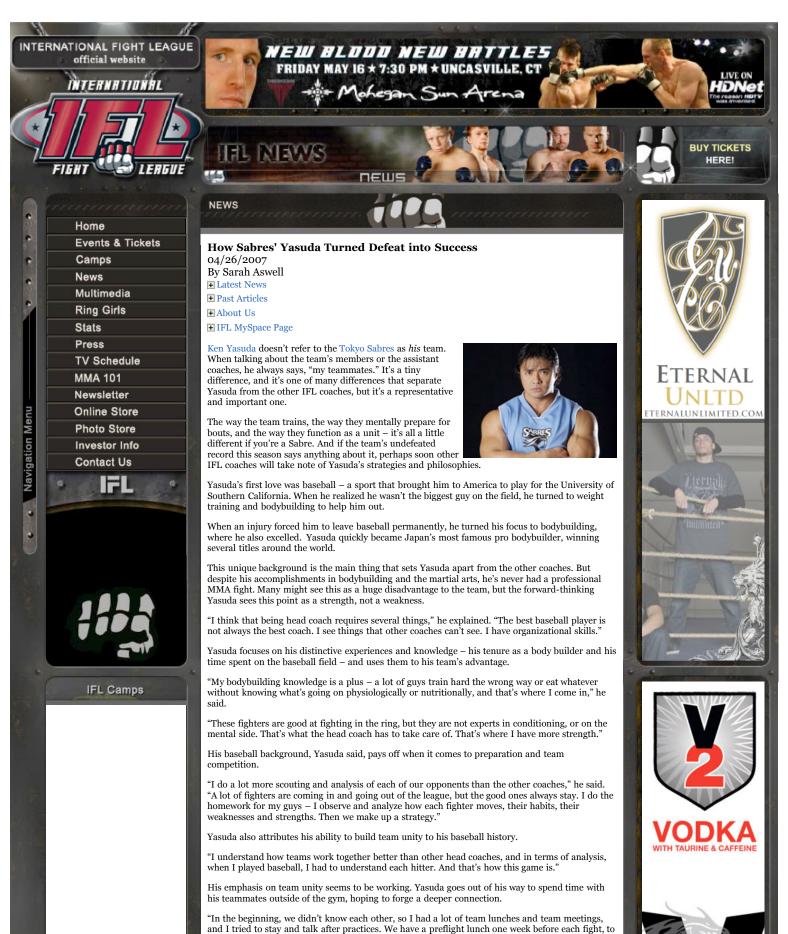
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spend more time together outside the gym to get to know each other. That's a plus."

How does this team unity pay off? At the IFL Los Angeles bout in March, Yasuda watched as Kazuhiro Hamanaka was beaten by the Condors' Jeremy Williams. Fellow Sabre Vladimir Matyshenko jumped into the ring directly afterward, angry and seeking revenge.

"[Hamanaka and Matushenko] get along very well," Yasuda explained, "Hamanaka is like his little brother. And watching him lose was a bit of a shock."

Matyshenko won his fight quickly, and helped earn a close 3-2 victory for the Sabers.

"You could see it," Yasuda said. "Everybody was pretty much together by L.A."

The team work and the winning record is a big change from last season, when the Sabres did poorly, and only one member made the cut into 2007. Yasuda admitted that newly acquired heavyweight Wayne Cole was afraid he was going to get fired after his KO loss to Antoine Jaoude. But Yasuda explained the difference between the kind of fighter he will cut and the kind he will continue to work with and have faith in.

"I like Cole and his attitude," he said. "He wants to get better and he trains hard. I told him, he learned a lesson about what not to do. I saw some things he needs to improve. As long he works on those things hard, I'm fine with it, and that's what he's done."

It seems to be Yasuda's philosophy: if you have a weakness, you should focus on understanding it and destroying it.

"I wasn't the biggest guy, so to survive at a pro level, I had to gain strength and fitness. I began studying nutrition and conditioning," he said. "If you spend the time, you can obtain the skills. And if you don't have the conditioning to use those skills, the skills are meaningless. It's hard to get in tip-top shape. It's not easy."

But despite his almost obsessive focus on conditioning, training and nutrition, Yasuda isn't as strict as he might at first seem – as long as you're winning.

"It's very important to respect all of my teammates, and that means respecting the way that my teammates prepare for a fight," he said. "But they have to be responsible for their job – they have to come in tip top shape, and they have to win."

Yasuda breaks his team down into two parts – veterans who he considers professional fighters, and younger fighters who are still honing their skills.

"The younger starters are still learning to be in top shape and to perfect their skills and strategy," he said. "I require them to go through a specific system of basic training."

For now, Yasuda is looking ahead to the team's June 1st bout against the Wolfpack in Everett, Washington

And, not so surprisingly, he's also already talking about the Sabres' role in the semi-finals and championships coming up this summer – analyzing his team's strengths and weaknesses, evaluating and considering the styles and habits of his fighters' opponents, and always, always striving for unity and improvement.

