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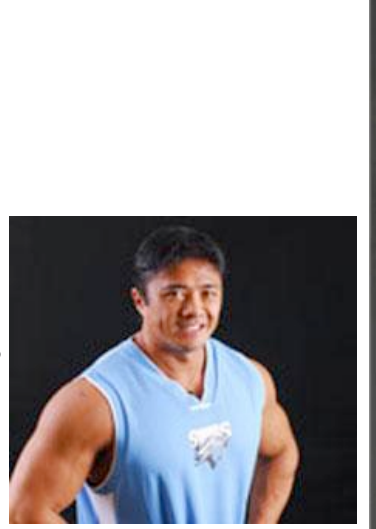


NEWS



**Japan's Arnold Schwarzenegger**  
12/2/2006  
Story By Ben Fowlkes

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"Japan's Arnold Schwarzenegger" Brings A Whole New Approach To The Fight Game

Tokyo Sabres coach and champion pro bodybuilder Ken Yasuda has many famous students in the professional fight game, but when he first met his prize pupil, baseball star Ichiro Suzuki, he admits that he jumped to some conclusions.

"I thought he was gay, actually," Yasuda says, laughing at himself in hindsight. "I saw him at a gym in Los Angeles and he was there with his manager, who was a much older man. I thought this was a sugar daddy relationship for sure."

It wasn't until Ichiro noticed Yasuda and bowed to him – a sure sign that the man was a compatriot of his – that Yasuda decided to stop and talk.

"Ichiro was very frustrated because he had been working with his Japanese team's trainer for years, but hadn't seen any results," Yasuda recalls. "So we talked and I said that I could help him, and I did."

Considering Ichiro's baseball success, to say Yasuda "helped" him might be a bit of an understatement. But that shouldn't surprise anyone who knows Yasuda.

Born in the ancient Japanese city of Kyoto to a family that boasts 46 generations of samurai warriors, Yasuda has made a big impact everywhere he's gone. As a young man he dreamed of becoming a pro baseball player, and after an impressive high school career he was drafted, but opted instead to continue his baseball career at USC. It was there that Yasuda encountered another USC baseball alum, slugger Mark McGwire, who first got Yasuda interested in the idea of lifting weights to improve his strength and power.


"As a baseball player from Japan, especially as a pitcher, I wasn't very big or tall. So I started lifting weights to gain strength and power. Mark McGwire was known for his power, and he would come and talk to us and tell us about lifting weights to increase our strength, so I started lifting even harder. Eventually, my muscularity was very good, but then I tore the ligaments in my pitching arm and that ended my career. But I was already interested in lifting weights and then with my injury I wanted to learn everything I could about nutrition and physiology."

Yasuda's dedication and enthusiasm led to a successful career in screen acting and pro bodybuilding, earning him the title of Japan's most famous bodybuilder. Now he's taken on a new task as coach of the International Fight League's Tokyo Sabres. Though Yasuda has trained several MMA fighters, including Pride's Kazuyuki Fujita and the UFC's Don Frye, he faces a daunting task in turning around a struggling Sabres team, which will face off against Frye's newly minted Scorpions squad in their first test on February 2nd.

"What's lacking in a lot of fighters and generally in professional sports is the knowledge of conditioning. They can work on practicing their skills, but they don't know enough about how to reach their top conditioning at the time of the event. It helps to enhance their physical abilities and to prevent injuries, so that's what I focus on."

Yasuda cites as evidence the number of mixed martial arts heavyweights who struggle with injuries and conditioning problems. Fujita, a heavyweight long under Yasuda's tutelage, displays the kind of agility and endurance that Yasuda wants to bring to all his Sabres fighters.

"Fujita, he's two hundred and fifty pounds, but he can do flips," Yasuda says. "He has amazing



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muscular endurance. He can exert himself throughout a fight and still not lose strength, which is what a fighter needs.”

For the 2007 season, Yasuda plans not only to change training tactics, but also to bring a whole different philosophy to his newly reconstructed team.

“I believe that you have to be able to focus on what you do. You have to get rid of things around you that might distract you. It’s my belief that you need to seclude yourself from your regular lifestyle to focus on your training and preparation, so you can bring yourself to a peak at the right time. If guys don’t do that they may end up making excuses and then not doing their best, and those guys end up regretting it deep inside. You have to give everything you’ve got to avoid regret.”

One thing’s for sure, Yasuda certainly models all the behavior he expects out of his fighters. The bodybuilding and acting success he has enjoyed are a tribute to his training techniques and dedication. Now all that remains to be seen is whether he can convert that personal knowledge into team success for the Sabres in 2007.

