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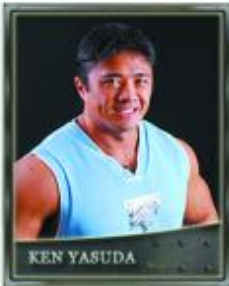


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Daily News

- COACH YASUDA TALKS IFL SABRES' REBIRTH

Wednesday, March 07, 2007 - by Nick Hammond - MMAWeekly.com



(Photo courtesy IFL.tv)

When compared to the other Head Coaches on the various IFL teams, Sabres' coach Ken Yasuda stands out for a myriad of reasons.

Most obviously, unlike the other coaches, Yasuda was never an active MMA fighter, but that doesn't make him any less a competitor or qualified to run an IFL team.

A former Major League-drafted baseball player, Ken has trained in martial arts since he was six, eventually creating a newer, more practical martial art, Choshin Ken, before moving onto competitive weightlifting, becoming one of Japan's most famous bodybuilders.

Having worked on strength and conditioning with fellow IFL coach Don Frye of the Scorpions, PRIDE's "Ironhead" heavyweight Kazuyuki Fujita, and MLB All-Star Ichiro Suzuki of the Seattle Mariners, Ken's drive for excellence is nothing short of phenomenal.

After taking over the Sabres' head coaching position for this year's IFL full-year season, Yasuda led the team to its first ever victory this past February against the Scorpions, and now Ken looks to lead his team to success March 17th in Los Angeles, California, against Marco Ruas' Condors.

"First of all, our guys were much better conditioned than they were for the last event [in February]," said Yasuda of the Sabres heading into March 17th. "That was kind of like a warm-up event for everybody. Now, we stayed in shape, trained harder, and we did all the analysis of Marco's fighters, so we're in much better shape and educated."

Ken continued, "We did our homework, so we're ready to go. We feel very good, and the team is more organized. We practice as a team every day. Last September, everybody was living in different areas, so we weren't really organized. The first time everybody was together was when we came to the

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event, but now, it's a totally different story."

Last September, as Yasuda mentions, was the month when the Sabres made their dismal IFL debut, going 0-5 to the Anacondas. But much has changed since then, including the ousting of Japanese pro wrestling legend Antonio Inoki as the team's Head Coach, and the ascension of Ken into the role.

"That time was a little confusing," admitted Yasuda. "The obligation wasn't clear on who should do how much and as we went on, basically I was doing everything. At the last minute I had to do everything to get done to make it happen. So there was an issue."

"Then it changed and I became the official Head Coach and so everything is on-line and organized, it's just so much better this way," further commented Ken.

Another factor contributing to the Sabres' newfound success this year is the team's overhauled roster. Gone are many of the inexperienced fighters and in their place stepped veterans such as Antonio McKee and Vladimir Matyushenko.

"One thing they [the veteran fighters] probably hadn't experienced was the teamwork, but to get ready for a fight, they know what to do," said Yasuda. "So that saves a lot of time and extra energy, no more trying to figure out who needs what to get into tip-top shape."

Ken added, "[Kazuhiro] Hamanaka is the youngest guy and he can learn from the veterans how to mentally and physically prepare for a fight. So the younger ones are benefiting and the older ones are showing how to behave as professional fighters and get ready."

When it comes to the Sabres' match-up with the Condors on March 17th, Yasuda believes that his team has a good chance of knocking off Ruas' squad, as long as they don't have any lapses in concentration.

"I think in terms of strength and conditioning, I think we're way ahead of the game," exclaimed Ken. "I also scientifically and physiologically watch and make diet and training plans, everything, which I don't think Marco's team is doing."

"We have more balanced skills. A lot of our guys' backgrounds is in wrestling, so they can fight on the ground, and we've improved a lot in our stand-up. So, I think overall we are ahead of the game and as long as we don't make mistakes, we'll be okay," continued Yasuda.

As for the rest of the season, which could end up being a grueling 12-month marathon – depending on the team's performance – Ken knows what must be done for long-term success in the IFL.

"Basically the key, and most important thing, is not to get injuries," explained Yasuda. "So we're always careful in practice and we always have to be in tip-top shape. I also think the hardest thing is that if somebody is switched, then we have to see if the new guy is going to adjust to this team."

Ken added, "We're like a small family, so if someone new doesn't get along with the others, then it's not good for the team and the guy won't do well, most likely. So it's very important to have the same guys to make a family, so the real teamwork will kick in. As long as we take care of those two things, I don't think that it's going to be a problem to finish up this season strong."

Should everything come together, the Sabres could very well be this season's sleeper team in the IFL. As Yasuda states, as long as everyone fights hard and puts all they have into it, then there is no way the Sabres won't at least be one of the most exciting teams in the IFL.

"At this event we will show what we've got," said Ken. "We're very excited and we're there to win and show we've got heart. Everybody is going to be impressed, regardless of what's going to happen."

"Watch us on [IFL] Battleground, we're going to be shown a lot on Episode 3, which I think is going to be [premiering on] March 24th. They did interviews with Vlado and Antonio, and I think they're going to shoot a lot at this upcoming



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event, so people will get to know us more," concluded Yasuda.

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