

**M**MA is as much a sport of super stars as it is about unsung heroes. The admiration that fighters earn through their long hours and hard work is well deserved. However, often overlooked are the efforts of the coaches and training partners that sweat alongside them. True, a handful of head instructors are regarded as masters of the craft, but we must not forget that they too have helped along the way.

The common understanding in our sport is that no man becomes a champion alone is also applicable to coaches and no coach can build a team by himself. In many ways, the assistants of today could well be the masters of tomorrow. Their wisdom and insight into the sport can provide so many lessons to their students and to us fans.

The Authority sat down with some of most influential assistant coaches in the game to bring you some insight into their world.

## Marcos Parrumpinha Da Matta



**BJJ Instructor under Head ATT Instructor Ricardo Liborio**

Where to find him:  
ATT West Palm Beach (West Palm Beach, Florida)  
www.attwpb.com



As one of the original founding members of ATT and the current head of the West Palm Beach branch, Da Matta is in many ways the captain of the team. At almost every event where a fight team member answers the call, Da Matta is there to bring the spirit and support of the ATT family. More than a recognizable face, Parrumpinha is one to lead by example. The Carlson Gracie Black Belt (awarded in 1997) and Abu Dhabi 2005 veteran, clearly has an impressive grappling resume, but in 2007 he shifted attention to MMA, where he currently holds a 6-0 record (along with two regional organization's belts). Although his future as a coach and athlete looks incredibly promising, Marcos is excited most by the prospect of fatherhood as his wife in Brazil is expecting the couple's first child, a son.

**AUTHORITY:** Marcos, you've had an extensive background in grappling with many titles and many championships. In MMA you have an ISKA bantamweight belt and WFO featherweight belt. At which weight do you feel best?

**DA MATTA:** I feel better at 45. But I can only fight up to a certain level at 45. There are a lot of guys like Mike Brown that cut down from 165-170. But I feel competitive at 135. In Brazil I used to grapple at 135. I was still planning on fighting at 145 but long ago people started talking about me and the WEC said they were going to do a lot with the 135 lb division and asked if I would be interested. I said, "Well, if the money is right." But it's a lot of work for me to do the lighter weight. To make 135 I have to give up a lot of private classes, dieting becomes very hard, and I have to spend a lot of time training. Right now, I've been away from home for a week living Gleison Tibau's life and getting ready to go back to Pitbull's camp, next there's Jorge Santiago, and the list goes on so that traveling makes things difficult. \*Note interview conducted June 19\*

**AUTHORITY:** Someone with your talents could go very far in either division. On the surface a lot of people would think that your work as an instructor, especially with your own school in Florida, would stop you from being a great fighter.

**DA MATTA:** Actually, I've had the school for five years now. I was brought here to the United States to teach Jiu-Jitsu. But as time went by I started getting more involved with MMA. I started train-

ing our fighters and obviously to train them, I needed to be on the mats with them. All of a sudden I was involved with Mike Brown, JZ, and all of those guys, and I was doing good against them, so I said, "You know what? I'm going to give it a little bit of a try." When I really wanted to be a fighter, it was way back in the day, in Brazil, when there was nobody fighting in my weight division. So I started training long before I had my first fight and since then I've been even more involved—really being an instructor is what made me a fighter. I'm 6-0 now. I had 3 fights in '07 and 3 fights this year. '08 was a really busy year for teaching and traveling, probably the busiest year of traveling in my entire life. I think once I spent about 3-4 months traveling back to back from and to Japan, Las Vegas, California and Florida. I ended up not fighting in '08 but that not because of cornering and coaching, it was actually because a lot of guys started canceling, they started realizing who I was and my role with American Top Team so people starting backing out. 2-3 fights got canceled that year because we couldn't find opponents for me.

**AUTHORITY:** Very true, as opponents were scouting you they were realizing that you were one of the earliest members of ATT. Yes, you were a Jiu-Jitsu guy, but you've been around the other areas of the sport for years in the gym. How then do you think you've benefited as a fighter from the time you spent watching MMA as an insider, from seeing teammates go into competition, and from other work as a member of the traveling ATT team?

**DA MATTA:** Oh man, it helps a lot. Especially the adrenaline and nerves stuff. Think of going down the ramp at the UFC 10-20 times with all of those ATT guys and all the people screaming and yelling. And then going to Japan where there is a totally different crowd, where people are totally respectful, where they want to really pay attention to the fights. Being around those different fans and different situations helps with all of the different feelings you can have going into your own fights. Being involved with all of the great people that help ATT grow, the boxers, the Muay Thai guys, the wrestlers, gave me a lot, a lot of knowledge to add to what I knew of BJJ. It helps me be a totally different person. Even when I look back at 2008, the year where I didn't compete, I think I grew a lot as an instructor and as a fighter just from watching and listening.

**AUTHORITY:** And as the main person that travels with ATT, it does say a lot about you that the head of the team, Ricardo Liborio, puts his trust in you to corner everyone. In fact, when you fight he corners you himself. When it comes down to it, it seems that you're the # 1 go to guy. You are the one that's trusted to be a chief's second and you are always picked to travel with the team and be where you're needed most. How has that responsibility affected you? What are the benefits and disadvantages of that lifestyle?

**DA MATTA:** The disadvantages are that sometimes I don't live in my own home for 2-3 weeks at a time. But it really is an honor, especially for someone like Liborio to step out of the game and say, "Listen, I trust you and only you." Basically he put the best team in the world in my hands. Sometimes people don't realize that it's a huge role to have at ATT and it is a lot of hard work. But really, I don't like to talk about that, because it becomes an ego thing. But it's not just me leading the team. There's Mohammed Waleed, our striking coach, Darrell Gholar, the wrestling coach, Liborio of course, all the fighters, Benkei our strength and conditioning coach, and so many other guys as well, Conan, Stefan, so many others. But what happened was Liborio said,

"Listen, I have to take care of the business and I don't trust anyone else to replace me but you." That says a lot to me, especially because he is my mentor. I got involved with ATT because of him. He brought me here to the United States. I can say so much about how much Liborio means. He's the best Jiu-Jitsu guy I have ever seen in my life. I could talk for hours about Liborio. So for him to make me one of the guys that take care of the whole of American Top Team is just such an honor. I feel so much joy from that responsibility.

**AUTHORITY:** It is good seeing you come so far within one of the premiere teams in the world—in some people's opinions the best. But as far as you've gone, you still put the work in. A lot of people don't realize that you don't just go to the big events; you also go to a lot of the smaller shows. You go through so many steps to make sure that you support the team and do your part to hold everything together. Can you tell us why that's important and what that entails?

**DA MATTA:** To me the biggest thing about American Top Team is that we are family. Some new people will join us and thank us for letting them feel so welcomed, but that's just the way it is at ATT. The family environment is a big part of American Top Team. There are lots of people outside of us that will only go to big shows, to the big UFCs. But me? Nah. One week I'll go to small shows in Nashville, Tampa, Oklahoma. Yeah I'll go to UFCs and Dreams but to me it's not about going to the shows it's about being with the fighters. I've been to some crappy places, where the weigh-ins were just crappy. But then the next week I'll go to a big WEC, or a UFC. It's what I do to help the fighters, to make sure they always have family with them.

**AUTHORITY:** We can also say that it works in the reverse. That sometimes you'll go from the big UFCs and international shows to tiny events and your fighters will feed off of that. They'll see that you're coming from the major fights to support them. What are some of things from the big show experience that you're able to share with your younger fighters?

**DA MATTA:** The thing they realize is that they need to keep training. That the more they train the better they'll look in the small shows and that the chance will be there for the big companies to pick them up. They are already in the right place. You know, I don't want to say it with any arrogant attitude, but it's undeniable that ATT is one of the top three teams in the world. If you're good there's no way that someone isn't going to pick you up. You know even if you're not so good, you're in the right place to learn.

**AUTHORITY:** Well Marcos, it would be an honor to see you make it to the bigger shows like the WEC and we hope someone makes it worth your while because all of the insiders know that you're a great competitor. On behalf of every fight fan, we appreciate everything you do to keep ATT producing great fighters.

**DA MATTA:** I look forward to fighting for everyone. I've been talking to Sean Shelby over there and the owners and it sounds like they want me there. You know a lot of people don't realize that I'm a fighter because I'm always coaching everybody and I'm always outside the cage. It's hard for them to see me a fighter, but we'll see how it all happens. I have options, maybe in Japan as well because there I have my Jiu-Jitsu background to help me in, so we'll see. In the mean time, I'm happy that I can help ATT and I'm glad the fans are enjoying our hard work.