



BIG FIGHT BREAKDOWN

Daniel Cormier vs. Frank Mir, UFC on Fox 7, April 20, 2013, San Jose, CA

BY JIM CASEY // PHOTOS BY PAUL THATCHER

Here's a joke: How do you put an alligator in an armbar? Wait, we'll get back to that. When Daniel Cormier and Frank Mir square off at UFC on Fox 7 on April 20, the aftershock (265-pound pun intended) will be felt in both the heavyweight and light heavyweight divisions. Cormier—the Strikeforce Heavyweight Grand Prix Champion—is perhaps the most lauded crossover from Strikeforce, and that's saying a lot, especially when you consider that Gilbert Melendez, Luke Rockhold, and Gegard Mousasi have also paid the toll to Charon to be ferried from Strikeforce's deceased to the UFC. Mir—the grandfather of UFC heavyweights—is a two-time UFC Heavyweight Champion, the longest tenured fighter in the UFC (since 2001), and the winningest fighter (14) in the UFC heavyweight division.

With a win, Cormier controls his own destiny: he can choose to fight the winner of Cain Velasquez vs. Antonio Silva (5/25/13) or drop to light heavyweight (belly permitting) and fight the winner of Jon Jones vs. Chael Sonnen (4/27/13). If Velasquez beats Silva, it's unlikely Cormier will want to face his AKA training partner and friend, so a move to light heavyweight could be in the cards, if he can cut back on the Chinese food.

A win for Mir? Tack on a plus-one win over someone like Alistair Overeem or Fabricio Werdum, and boom—he's back fighting for the UFC Heavyweight Championship.

Mir is definitely in the upper echelon of UFC bigs. Calling him a "gatekeeper" is insulting, especially when you look at his résumé. In the heavyweight division, there are no gatekeepers. If you're fighting for the title, you're just one punch away from hoisting gold. Big trees fall hard.

FRANK MIR

Age: 33
Weight: 260 lbs.
Height: 6'3"
Record: 17-6
Reach: 79"
Stance: Southpaw
Team: Jackson's MMA
Recipe for Success:
 Distance strikes, sweeps, submissions

Let's Get It On

Cormier is a world-class wrestler, a commonly misunderstood distinction. He's not a great wrestler (like Gray Maynard, Michael Chandler, and Chris Weidman). He's not a badass wrestler (such as Phil Davis, Josh Koscheck, and Johnny Hendricks). He's a world-class wrestler (in the vein of Ben Askren, Joe Warren, and Sara McMann). According to FightMetric, Cormier's takedown defense is 100 percent. When you couple that with Frank Mir's takedown accuracy of 46 percent, it spells problems for the former UFC Heavyweight Champ. If Cormier doesn't want to take the fight to the ground, there is a good chance it won't end up there, at least not for very long. And the ground is where BJJ black belt Mir is most dangerous. Give him a toe, and you'll hear Tank Abbott scream through the TV. Give him a knee, and you'll hear Brock Lesnar scream through the TV. Give him an arm, and you'll hear 196,655,007 Brazilians scream through the TV.

For Mir to control his own destiny, he'll have to utilize his 50 percent significant striking accuracy and 8-inch reach advantage against Cormier's alligator arms. If Mir has one superior attribute (besides his BJJ pedigree), it's reach advantage, not that it fared too well for Josh Barnett (+7 inches) or Antonio Silva (+11 inches) in their fights with Cormier. Mir will need to put on his skates and move, move, move inside the cage. Trying to punch Cormier from the clinch will lead to trouble.

What about Mir's experience edge you ask? It's true, he more than doubles Cormier in pro bouts, but I'm throwing that factor right out the window. If anything, taking pummelings from Brock Lesnar, Shane Carwin, and Junior dos Santos has made Mir's melon more unstable than a Corvair. Cormier, on the other hand, hasn't taken any real damage. He's like a 34-year-old MMA spring chicken.

The eye test says Cormier is slicker on his feet, with superior hand speed, feints, and footwork. When he gets in trouble with his stand-up, he takes the fight to the mat. Having a world-class wrestling pedigree is a nice default mechanism to fall back on. However, if there is one place Mir should be feared, it's on his back. He averages almost three submission attempts for every 15 minutes and owns nine career submission wins. He's also a sweeping fool. Mir sweeps more than most heavyweights eat.

In 29 minutes inside the cage, Cormier has never attempted a submission. He's never tried a sweep (mainly because he's never been taken down). Heck, he may be unaware that submissions are legal. Once a wrestler learns to punch, it's like Christmas every day. There's no time for silly submissions.

While it's fun to dissect the minutiae, we really won't know until both men step inside the Octagon. Once the cage door slams shut, anything can happen, and I mean A-N-Y-T-H-I-N-G. If you need a few recent heavyweight reference points, watch Frank Mir vs. Big Nog II, Antonio Silva vs. Alistair Overeem, or Mark Hunt vs. Stefan Struve.

Back to the joke. How do you put an alligator in an armbar? Very carefully. w

Cormier will come chomping. Mir needs to be careful.



DANIEL CORMIER

Age: 34
Record: 11-0
Weight: 230 lbs.
Height: 5'10"
Reach: 71"
Stance: Orthodox
Team: AKA
Recipe for Success:
 Clinch strikes, takedowns, ground-and-pound