

THE JOURNEY IS THE REWARD:

# ELIAS THEODOROU

Mixed martial arts fighter Elias Theodorou considers himself a nomadic individual. Fresh off his fight against Thiago Santos, we spoke with the Canadian fighter and discussed the thrill of discovery.

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For the 27-year old Greek-Canadian UFC fighter Elias "The Spartan" Theodorou, it's all about discovery. As a graduate who earned his B.A Degree in Creative Advertising, Theodorou took the road less traveled. Usually, students feel that their next step is to either land a job and embark on their career, or take a break and travel. After his graduation ceremony, Theodorou chose the latter and booked a ticket to Thailand, but it wasn't just a typical vacation for the alumnus. The destination was the world-renowned, Tiger Muay Thai Gym, and he had one thing on his mind – return to North America as a better fighter.

That's what separates Theodorou from the rest of the pack. While other graduates would search for a job, he chose the opposite path and searched for his calling. This quest started when he was in his early 20s, and he stepped foot in the Kros Mixed Martial Arts Gym. After training for years and spending countless hours on the mat, his first big break was when he was a cast member on The Ultimate Fighter Nations: Canada vs. Australia, representing Canada at Middleweight. Since then, he never looked back.

But like any athlete's journey, at some point, you have to fall to get back up. Coming off his most recent bout against Thiago Santos, where he faced his first professional loss, the young fighter is still ready to explore the unknown. If taking an L meant walking away from the Octagon a wiser fighter, then so be it. For Theodorou, the sense of discovery and evolving physically and mentally as a person is the only thing that truly matters.

**Q** Besides working out, early on, you had no desire to fight, what attracted you to the sport?

**A** The glory that you see on television is a very primal thing, yet it's very human. There is a strategy aspect of how to beat your opponent, but the primal aspect (is appealing). It's a fight or flight mentality.

**Q** You walked into the doors of Kros Mixed Martial Arts Gym at the age of 20, besides the fighting disciplines, what early teachings did you gain from there?

**A** Every person is different. I've learned emotion is a finite reverse. You can only be angry for so long. On the outside looking in, it may look like two guys going berserk trying to rip each other's heads off. When in reality, you want to be as close and enlightened from your training when you use all the tools on game day. What you want to do is be calm and collective like any other day.



**Q** The fight between Stephan Bonnar and Forrest Griffin had an impact on, not only on the UFC, but yourself personally, how did that fight influence you?

**A** Like many people (who watched that fight), I was in awe. Not many people knew, in many ways, about the sport. That was one of the first time, during the fight, where people were saying, "you have to watch this fight!" It was huge. It got something like, ten million views on cable and it put mixed martial arts on the map. It was an entirely new format. For me, it showed what was possible with this sport.

**Q** Early in your career, you trained in Thailand at the infamous, "Tiger Muay Thai Gym," where you practiced the Art of Eight Limbs, describe your experience.

**A** I went to Thailand twice. The first time my parents offered me a graduation gift to send me anywhere I want. So immediately after my ceremony, I took the usual pictures with my parents, and I jumped on the plane that same day and headed over to Thailand. I had a couple fights there, but nobody knew me. I was nowhere near a fighter as I am today. I was young, with raw talent who just loved martial arts and wanted to learn.

On my second trip I felt it came full circle when I competed for the "Ultimate Fighter." Coach Lachlan [Editor's Note: his current coach] and I both have a nomadic, martial arts lifestyle. We went back to Thailand with a bunch of other guys from the show, and I felt, it was coming full circle because the first place I went outside of Ontario (to fight) is the same place I became the first Canadian Ultimate Fighter.

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– Elias Theodorou

**Q** How different of a fighter were you when you returned to Thailand?

**A** I was a more complete and confident fighter. I was able to put all the tools together. I love removing myself from the distractions of home and brings new elements back.

**Q** When you look back at your first professional fight on North American soil, describe the wave of emotions that were running through your mind.

**A** My first professional fight was a little different. Mixed martial arts is illegal in Ontario, so I had to look elsewhere to fight. I guess with the tenacity that I had, I picked any fight [card] with anyone willing to fight me. I went to multiple chat rooms and messaged different organizations to land a fight. Eventually, a promotion company in Calgary gave me an opportunity, so I traveled with my brother, who knew less [of what to expect] than I did. I stepped into that fight, beat him up, and the rest is history.



**Q** When you won, it must have been an incredible feeling.

**A** That win one was the most exciting because I honestly didn't know what to expect. Considering my brother's guidance was more or less, "get up, punch him and kick his ass," coupled with the fact there were a few close moments, not to mention, I didn't want to get beat up in front of my little brother. It's the same emotion as every single fight, but it's more of a relief that you didn't lose. But the further [you progress] into the fight you're able to look back with joy.

**Q** What was one of the advice your younger brother gave you that still sticks with you?

**A** My brother and I kind of have the same mentality. However, he's a bit brasher, younger and bolder than me. He was in my corner in the first of many fights. When you're losing weight [leading up to the fight], you're at your weakest point, and you're breaking yourself down before you build yourself up. When I saw my opponent, he looked big and strong, but the first thing my brother said was, "fuck that guy, he's so small. You're going to crush him!" He helped boost my confidence going into those fights.

**Q** Canada is known to breed an impressive roster of MMA fighters, and it's known as "the Mecca for the UFC." What are your thoughts on being part of the tradition of champion fighters from the Great North?

**A** I think our culture has fighting engraved. Look at hockey. Who doesn't love having a beer and watching a fight? I think MMA fans, more or less, enjoy the same [action]. A lot of [the awareness] was because of George St. Pierre, and with his absence there has been a little bit of influx and a vortex of Canadian fighters. But I think there's a lot of great talent coming up because of the Ultimate Fighter, and you're going to see more fighters grow and make an impact in the sport.

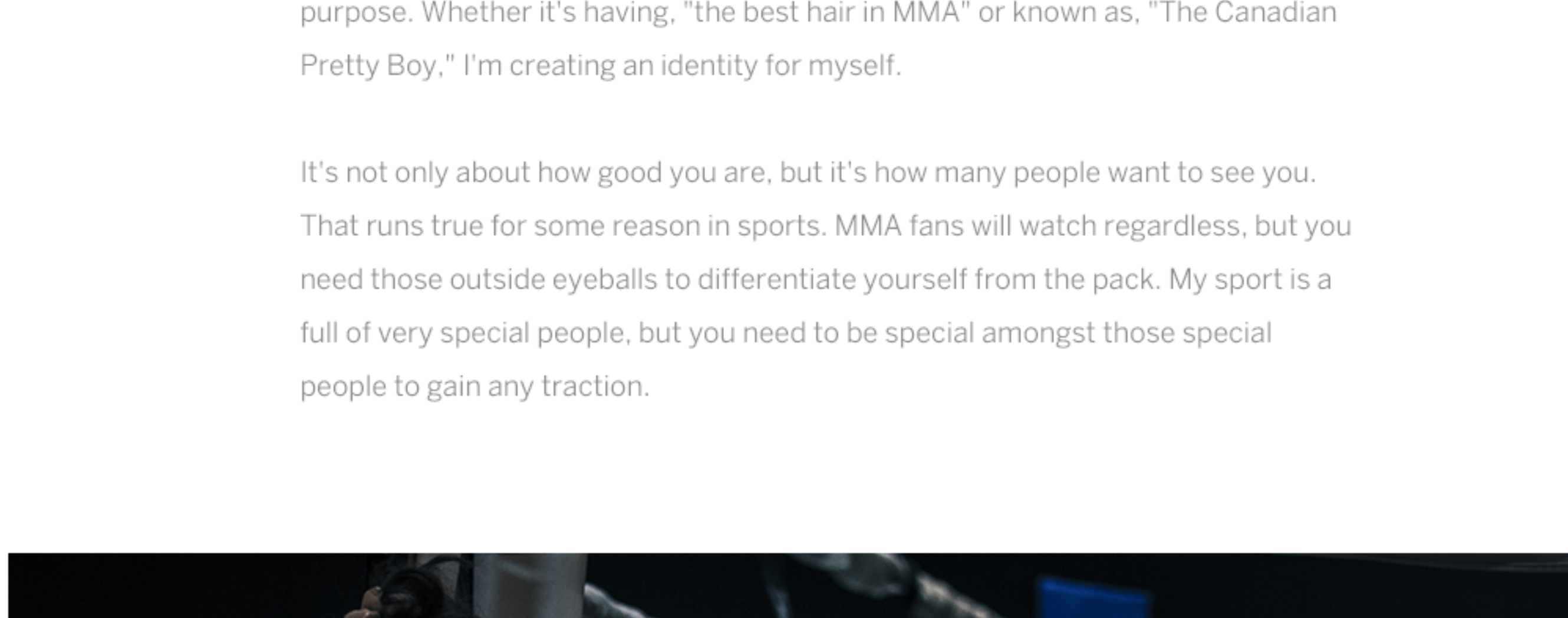
**Q** You have coined the nickname, "The Spartan", besides the Greek cultural connection, give me a bit of background behind the moniker.

**A** My first coach was also Greek. I figured I might as well run with it. For me, having a Spartan-like attitude is about learning, growing, and never be afraid to go into battle. I was never nervous going into a fight. I always looked at it like going into a test. I studied it with my coach and passed it with flying colors.

**Q** The business of sports is an interesting topic. No longer is it just about stats and performance, but it's also about brand persona and being a business, not just an athlete. What have you learned about the business since

**A** I have a BA in Advertising, so I'm developing my brand. So nothing is a mistake, whether it's my social media account, photo shoots, or interviews, it's for a purpose. Whether it's having, "the best hair in MMA" or known as, "The Canadian Pretty Boy," I'm creating an identity for myself.

It's not only about how good you are, but it's how many people want to see you. That runs true for some reason in sports. MMA fans will watch regardless, but you need those outside eyeballs to differentiate yourself from the pack. My sport is a full of very special people, but you need to be special amongst those special people to gain any traction.



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**Q** You've been climbing the ranks, but you're still only 27 years old. You have a lot of mileage ahead of you in your career.

**A** I've only been training for six-seven years, and if you compare that to my peers who have a wrestling or kickboxing background, they may have been training for more than ten years. For myself, it wasn't about how long I've been training but it's the hours (spent) on the mat.

**Q** While it's still far from the horizon when you're ready to throw in the white towel, what legacy do you want to leave behind?

**A** I want to be known to have fun with the sport the entire time and that I was able to walk away from the sport on my accord.

