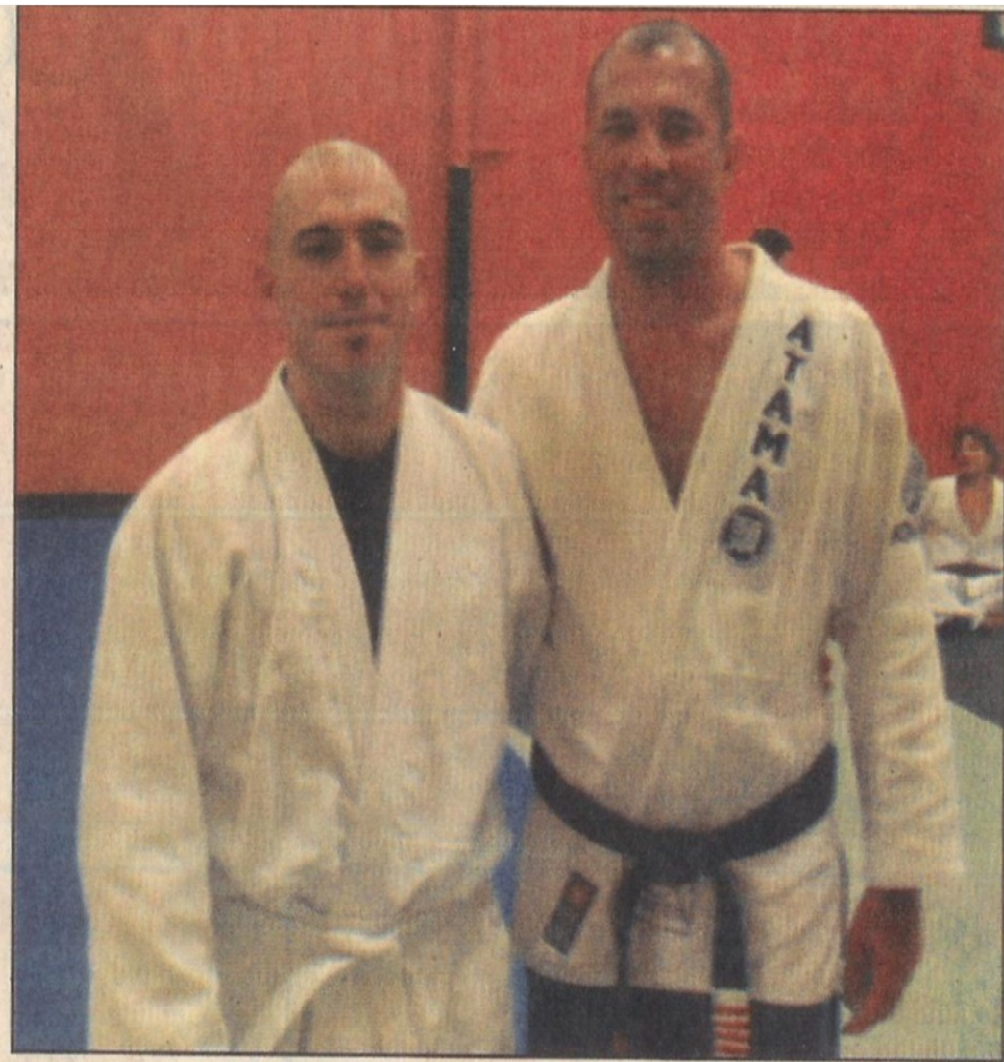


UFC Hall of Fame legend Royce Gracie visits Paducah

by **Corey Hawes**
Special to KPI

How does one define greatness? Try this. In the 1920's the Japanese colonized parts of Brazil. One of the ambassadors was a master in the martial art of Jiu-Jitsu. He was greatful enough to the Gracie family for their help to teach Gastao Gracie's son Carlos his craft. The Gracies were heavily influenced by Jiu-Jitsu and began teaching full time. While the Gracie sons taught full time, the younger and very sickly brother Helio could only sit and watch. One afternoon a student arrived with no Carlos and only Helio. With no hands on training from his brothers Helio conducted the class. His student was more impressed with Helio. Carlos was also impressed and from there on Helio instructed. Helio adapted Jiu-Jitsu to benefit the smaller fighter by using leverage in locks and submissions. With this, what is now known as Gracie Jiu-Jitsu was born. Today Helio

is still going strong at 88 years young and yes, teaching. In 1993, a tournament dreamt by one of Helio's sons Rorion called the Ultimate Fighting Championship was launched. The Gracies picked brother Royce (pronounced Hoyce). At 6'1" 180 lbs, Royce took on several men much larger and with a diversity of martial arts represented. Royce shocked the world that night by defeating 3 opponents... and winning 2 more UFC tournaments. On December 31, 2004 Royce even competed against Sumo Grand Champion Akebono. It took him a little over 2 minutes to beat him with a shoulder lock. What you've just read defines greatness. Today the Ultimate Fighting Championship is possibly the hottest thing going. If you'd like to see real excitement you can on Spike TV, channel 57, usually on Thursday nights. Mixed martial arts (mma) leagues and tournaments have sprung up all over the globe, the biggest being Pride Fighting out of Japan. This last Sunday Royce was here in Paducah.



Pictured above: Corey Hawes (L) and Royce Gracie (R).

picture provided

Royce conducted two separate three hour instructional sessions at Energy Fitness. One of Royce's students is Jason Hawkins who is a purple belt in Gracie Jiu-Jitsu. Jason owns and teaches at Three Rivers Martial Arts Academy at 9th and Broadway. The reality that there's an instructor here in Paducah teaching what single handedly changed martial arts and fighting is

pretty incredible. Interested? You can contact Jason at (270) 443-1829. As nice a guy as you'll ever meet, thank goodness. The funny thing is the picture. The good looking taller guy is Royce. The other one is me. I'm just someone who loves the sport and wouldn't miss it for the world. It was a great, humbling experience and quite the honor.