

Interview with Tisha “The Lil’ Bully” Rodrigues



by
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Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is a brutal sport. It takes strength, endurance, toughness and a certain breed of individual to not only train, but compete in MMA fights. MMA has grown considerably as a sport around the world and Massachusetts is home to some of the best MMA gyms. UFC fighter’s Kenny Florian, Marcus Davis and Joe Lauzon are legends from Massachusetts and there are gyms popping up throughout the state. As a fellow practitioner and huge MMA fan, I was pleased to conduct an interview with up-and-coming MMA fighter, mother of three and New Bedford resident Tisha Rodrigues. Check out her website and Facebook Fan Page to follow her fighting career!



What got you into Fitness?

There were a few factors that led me down the path into the fitness industry. One was that I am a very goal-oriented person. I always like to have something I am trying to accomplish, excel at, get better at and prepare for. It’s easier for me to get things done that way. It was also because I struggled with anorexia and bulimia for many years and was in the process of overcoming that. I started

teaching people that they didn't have to starve themselves to try and fit the extremely high standard beauty magazines and television had set for them. You can have beautiful muscle tone on your body and be strong and fit and still eat! Actually a person can eat even more, it just has to be the right foods. A complete healthy lifestyle change.

I also knew that through this, I could share my success story of how I was able to overcome bulimia and anorexia and make a positive change in my life. I'm not just someone saying not to do this or not to do that. I have actually been through it, I'm fighting it, and I'm winning!

And lastly, because I am a mother of three and I wanted to look and feel good again, inside and out. What better way to do this than to have a goal of competing in a fitness competition or modeling for a fitness magazine?

Why did you transition from being a fitness competitor to MMA?

That's easy. The end result was so much more worth it! At the end of a fitness competition, you didn't always come out a winner, even if you looked amazing. You sometimes had as many as 70 other women to compete against, at the end of the show, you'd get a trophy. Although, I snagged five wins in my last year and a half of competition, all the 16 week diets didn't seem worth it to me anymore. I pretty much had accomplished what I set out to do and MMA just seemed so much more gratifying personally.



As an MMA fighter you train in many different arts, having to excel at not one, but all of them to be the best. To get inside the cage after an 8-12 week fight camp and be able to showcase your talent like that is amazing. If you come out victorious, you get the trophy and the glory, for what seemed to me, so much more than just what my body looked like on

stage. Two opponents step in the cage and only one steps out the winner. No one is judging my symmetry, I ate real food through my fight camp and I don't feel like I'm going to pass out under the bright lights. I don't mean this as a slight against figure, fitness or bodybuilding competitors. I had a passion for those competitions for seven years of my life. It was just a personal decision of mine to do something that made me feel empowering, strong, and unstoppable. To me that was worth more.

To put it plainly, after a fight whether I won or lost, I really wasn't losing anything. I learn from my losses and feel great in my wins. Something that started out as a way to get in shape for my shows stole my heart and told me that now I was where I belonged.

What is your record?

2-1 as an amateur MMA fighter. I also do grappling tournaments. I won a gold medal back in May of this year, one month after receiving my Blue Belt. It was unbelievable,



What is your Ultimate goal in MMA?

To get to the top of course. I would love to be on Strikeforce or Bellator (fighting championships, similar to Ultimate Fighting Championship or UFC) someday. Everyone wants to be the best in their weight class and that's what I'm striving to be. I have many top competitors to get through in order to get there, so I just have to stay focused and dedicated to the task at hand. I must always remember why I do this at the end of the day, and that is because I love it. I need to stay true to myself and continue to evolve as a fighter. There is never going to be a fight where I don't leave it all in the cage or a grappling tournament that I don't leave it all on the mat. If I come out guns blazing every single time, then, that's all I can do.

I spend a lot of my time promoting myself so that I have other avenues to venture into within the sport. When I can no longer fight for a living, I want to have something else going for me within the sport. This is important because I love it so much, I don't want to do anything else.

Any Upcoming fights?

Yes. One possible fight withing the next month or so, and one in February. I don't want to say much more than that at the moment.

You are from Rhode Island. What brought you to New Bedford?



I grew up in Woonsocket, RI. I moved to Florida in my sophomore year, finished high school down there, and then came back to Rhode Island where my friends were. I really never liked Florida. When I met my husband Mark, who was born and raised in New Bedford, we decided to settle in our first apartment here in the city. Then we moved to Dartmouth for four years and, ironically enough, landed back in New Bedford only one street off from where we started out 14 years before that.

What advice to you have for females thinking about becoming a MMA fighter?

Oh, I have been asked this question before, but today, I'm going to answer it a bit differently. The biggest problem is that everyone wants to be an MMA fighter, much like the way every girl wants to be a model. It's so mainstream now that some parts of it are just getting out of hand. I say this because I believe women are getting into MMA for the wrong reasons. They see females like Gina Carano (a beautiful MMA fighter who has had great success) and they assume it's just that easy. They all want to be the "next" Gina Carano but, sadly, it doesn't work that way. For the women who are truly dedicated to the sport in each and every aspect it brings bad publicity.

I see women who are getting in the cage with absolutely no training at all. I have heard them say, "How hard can it be?" They want to become famous from MMA and be recognized as the pretty girl who fights. It's just ridiculous. Gina may be beautiful, but she is beautiful, extremely powerful and talented. Good looks were not winning her fights at the end of the day.

In this sport if you have good looks and talent, you will be golden, but if you think you can just step in the cage and fight and get into Strikeforce, your imagination is running ahead of you. Fighting is a job, just like any other; It's

full-time. You have to learn, train, evolve, eat right, weight train and promote yourself, on top of everyday life. If you seriously want to fight, if you are ready to give 100% of yourself, say goodbye to your social life because any extra time you have will be spent training, training and training. And if you are with the "right" fight camp, when it comes down to you actually doing your training for an upcoming fight, be prepared. A true fighter eats, sleeps, trains and repeats. I will personally fight no more than two times each year, not including grappling tourneys, because I am married with three children. I can't train like a single fighter who can come and go and train as they please with no one that they have to take care of at the end of the day. I'm so dedicated year round and obviously more so when I have an upcoming fight, it doesn't leave as much special family time for me as I would like. So when I'm done with a fight, I take a small timeout from training and spend lots of extra time with my kids.

My husband is my main training partner, so we are seldom apart. I'm just fortunate enough that my children are involved in the sport and training with us on most days. Plus, my fight camp, "The Boneyard," is like second family to me, so the kids are always welcome there.

You can see why I say I would only fight about twice per year because it's not just about the actual date of the fight, but everything leading up to it that is extremely time consuming. To make it the long haul, you have to be for real at the end of the day. Once you honestly see what it takes to fight and do something with your fighting, I'm pretty sure that alone weeds out the people who can't handle it and leaves only serious athletes.

If you are a female who thinks they have what it takes, after all that I have just said, then go for it. Find a good school, check out some classes and give it a shot. Of course female fighters want to see more female fighters. We want a

bigger pool of women to compete with and we could all use the support. We all want to see the sport grow in a positive light.

In fact, I encourage women to take up MMA as long as they know it takes a special kind of woman to follow through and stick with it. We aren't all cut out for all things. We try some things that we know automatically are not for us, and perhaps, there is something you would be great at that you have not tried. I just want to continue to see women's MMA grow in the right direction with the right women behind it who are in it for the right reasons.

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