

Topper: Welcome to Part II of my interview with UFC 155 pounder Gregor Gillespie, who's set to make his debut in the Octagon on Saturday, September 24 at UFC Fight Night 95.

A couple quick notes at the top here.

- If you haven't listened to part one, it provides some important context for this podcast and you might want to go back and listen.
- The subject matter in this episode is pretty heavy, dealing with some of Gregor's very real, very raw challenges along his long road to the Octagon.
- While I tried to clean things up, there's still some adult language in here and I just wanted to give a warning.

With that, let's jump right into it.

GG: Alright, we'll get into it, we'll jump right into it.

When I was, I was on a scholarship to Edinboro, obviously. I was on the five-year school plan, assuming I would redshirt. I think that was kind of the assumption for most guys that have money and are highly touted recruits.

There was an assumption that I would be a five-year school guy with the redshirt year so I did the five-year school plan. And, I didn't redshirt, so I wrestled four years straight with no eligibility left and I had another year of school left and...

Coach Flynn and my eligibility. You know, it kept me on track enough to stay in school and be eligible, but I was by no means a saint in college, I made a lot of very poor choices; lifestyle choices, and I'm not where sure that stems from. I like to believe that I've got a good heart but I made some poor choices. Never bad enough to get me kicked off the team; never bad enough to get me kicked out of school. Never bad enough- maybe I was sneaky enough, I don't know.

My fifth year the agreement was - you want your scholarship, you're going to be the volunteer coach, you stay and you finish your fifth year of school.

I think my first two months of school back at Edinboro my fifth year, I might have made it to two practices. I really had gotten into some trouble personally, I was going down a really bad path, drinking a lot. Drinking way too much, doing some drugs. It was really off course. My aim was in the wrong direction.

MO: What do you think it was, Gregor? do you think that you just loved the adrenaline surge? Were you trying to escape from the spotlight? Is there anything that you've been able to pinpoint?

GG: I don't know. That's a great question. I'm six years clean and sober now and it's still a question that's eluded me to some extent. I don't have a definite answer for you, the best that I've come up with so far is that it might have been my way of dealing with pressure or bad practice.

I know that when I would come out of a bad practice...you know, throughout my college career and again something I'm not proud of, I definitely used drugs and drank throughout my entire career. Again, I could manage it to some extent while I competed. It got unmanageable when I was not eligible to compete anymore.

I know that I used and drank to maybe mask or hide or shovel some feelings under the rug that I didn't like having. I don't know if I did that at the time, recognizing what I was doing, but I remember if I got whupped up on in practice or whatever the case may be if I had a real shitty day, it was going to be ok, because I would go home, crack a beer, use a little bit of drugs, it was ok after that, no more bad thoughts after that.

That's the best I could come up with. I think from an addiction standpoint, being that I am an addict and a recovering addict, I think it's engrained. It's genuinely part of your personality when you're an addict. I think it applies to more than drug use and drinking. It's just part of your personality when you're that type of person, I think that it's deep-seeded in your personality. Again, I think it's easy to say I was hiding from something or I didn't feel loved, whatever the case may be. I think that core level: I'm an addict, and that's the facts of life.

MO: You mentioned that you're about six years sober now. You didn't do that alone, correct, you got help?

GG: I got help. So I'll run you through the quick version of this story. In college, I was engaged to this girl. This was the girl that I was going to marry, this was the girl that I was living with. She was from my hometown. She ended up moving to college with me after my sophomore year. We met actually after I won a national title.

She moved with me to Edinboro; lived together for two or three years there. My drug got progressively and progressively worse over the course of the next couple of years. We were actually living together at the time when my drug use really got out of control and my drinking really got out of control.

I wasn't going to any classes that fifth year; I wasn't going to any practices. I really had just become kind of a loser. A big loser. I definitely was a big loser. A strung out junkie I definitely was a junkie.

She ended up leaving. She withdrew from school, went home, packed her shit and left. That was the end of it for me.

I ended up moving home. I withdrew from school. Totally abandoned my obligations as the coach that I was supposed to be for the next year to keep my scholarship, so I basically abandoned anyone that had invested in me at Edinboro by not returning that favor to them or obligation, whichever you'd like to call it.

Went home, I kind of poured my heart out to my mom and dad and told them. They were completely in the dark. I was very sneaky, good at hiding it from people who weren't directly probably living with me. So they were shocked by this.

I ended up going and seeing a shrink, thought that I had it under control. You know, I had like 10 days clean and sober or something. So I was going to show the girl that had recently broke up with me that I was on the right path and that I was all better.

So I got an apartment back home in this beautiful apartment complex and that was the worst decision that I ever made. The next six months of my life I was living in that apartment and my life literally went a spiraling mess of chaos and just a nightmare.

That six months is the worst six months of my life.

My drug use totally went through the roof; I was not productive any way at all. Long story short. I was getting evicted. The girl that I was previously with, we had broken up and gotten back together another ten times. I had no money. None of my friends would even consider talking to me or come over for that matter. My family - I lived four miles from them and I hadn't seen them in six months.

I was laying...I remember it got to a point where I was up for several days. I couldn't get high or drunk anymore. My body wasn't letting me. I don't know if I was so tolerant of the drugs and drinking at that point or I was so fucked up I just didn't realize I was fucked up. I don't know. It didn't work anymore though.

I remember calling Coach Flynn on the phone. My electricity had been turned off in my apartment. I was laying on the garage floor. And I thought I was a fucking mechanic at this time too. I was working on a car. I was like ripping car this car apart and rebuilding it, it was like these crazy delusions of how good I was at building a car. Laying under the car with the lights off with a flashlight. It was on jack stands, wishing the jack stands would fall out on me.

And I called Coach Flynn. Bawling. Crying. I was on the floor covered in car grease, just filthy and I was bawling my eyes out to Coach Flynn and asking him what I needed to do. It wasn't working anymore. I was really sick and tired of feeling that way.

He said, call the rehab place, who I had actually gone and gotten an intake evaluation from a few weeks' prior because the girl was pestering me to do it. And I gone and pretended I was going to rehab so I got paperwork.

I actually did the intake evaluation so they knew who I was. They had my information.

I got off the phone with Coach Flynn who basically told me, if you're not on the phone with them after this conversation, I'm driving to your house and I'm driving you tomorrow myself. I called them, asked them if they had room for me and the next day, I drove myself in. And that was May 31, 2010. I did a lot of work after that.

MO: That was more than six years ago.

GG: Yeah, that was six years, three months. I did a lot of work. It wasn't just in rehab that summer, it was after that, I did a lot of extra...a lot of meetings. A lot of other stuff to stay on top of it. The job ain't getting sober, it's staying sober. That's pretty true.

I feel that it gets a little easier with time. I did a lot of work that first year. A lot, a lot of work.

So back on the point here. I ended up going back to school after I had, I would say maybe six months clean. I went back to school. I reenrolled in school. That's when I started coaching again at Edinboro.

I was a volunteer at that time. You know, the Scots wrestling club. Head of operations or whatever the title they gave it was, but I was coaching, travelling with the team. It's fulfilling. I remember very vividly when I was using and drinking, saying I'm never doing this again...I'm so sick.

My sentence is over. I'm never going to have to cut weight again. Someone pestering me about fighting. I'm saying, "I'm never fighting. Are you crazy? I'll never do that. I'm done My sentence is served. I'm done."

And when I started coaching again, I started messing around, "I'm going to wrestle in the Open this year, Flynn."

"Go ahead, you should wrestle in the open."

"You don't think I will?"

"No, do it."

I said, "Alright, I will."

MO: Has wrestling been...or even just competition been a huge part of your sobriety so far?

GG: I think I'll always compete at something. I think it definitely keeps me focused. I mentioned this earlier. My aim was off. When I say that, I mean, I have a very specific personality and whatever I do, I'm going to be...and I have a tattoo across the bottom of my neck. It says, 1 or 100. What that means is that I'm either doing it 100% or you're probably going to get about 1 percent out of me.

So if I'm deciding that I'm doing something, I'm diving in with both feet. You know, I'm not testing the waters. It's either all in or not in at all. I think that with a mentality like that, I have to be careful where my aim is, because I was the best drug use and I was the best drinker. I was the best at that, no one could top me in those things either.

You know. I used the most. I drank the most. I stayed up the most. I went out the most, whatever the case may be. But that aim can be applied in a little different direction. And now, I'm super productive. Now, I'm someone someone can look up to instead of someone that you'd say geeze, what the hell happened to that guy? It's just where the aim is. With a personality like an addict's personality, the aim has got to be in the right direction.

I think you're right with the competition thing. Yeah, I'll always compete. So, when I'm done fighting, I will go back to school. And when I go back to school, I'll look at that as competition again. I'll try to be the best in my class. And when I'm done with that, I'm sure somewhere down the line I'll compete in triathlons because I love biking and I love running. I'll figure out how to swim at some point.

MO: On Instagram you'll take pictures of the treadmill after a workout. You seem to really key in on 8 miles being your distance of choice. Your best time that I could find, you were running a 5:44 pace, which is pretty incredible

On the bike, you're always on the Ocean Parkway it looks like, and you're averaging 21, 22 miles an hour.

Can you swim?

GG: On the run, I've toned down the running a little bit. I think it was beating my body up. If I were running, I would run more. I kind of have the mentality now, I still do my eight milers, I do them a little slower now. I start at 10, which is a six-minute mile. And I bump it down every 2 minutes or so, I'll bump it down .1. So end at about 8 or a little over 8 if I feel good. That still is somewhere in the range of like a 55-minute, sub-1 hour.

My fastest time actually, I didn't put it on Instagram; I did it on Christmas two years ago. I ran 5:20s, in like the mid-5:20s for 8 miles, that was my best run I've ever done; never been able to do it since. I don't know what the issue is there, but I had a really good day running.

And my best bike time on the Ocean Parkway is...it's a 17-mile loop, it's one of the most ridden routes on Long Island, it's where a lot of people go to train; a lot of the serious bikers go to train. I actually have the second best time on Strava, which is the app where everyone puts their... It's like Facebook for biking. You go on there, you make a profile and it records all your times and it compares you and your segments with everyone else that's ridden that route.

I actually had the best time in history on that route up until last year. This guy beat me by about 30 seconds. I ended up doing another ride and almost getting him and now I'm like 19 seconds off his time. That was actually a 25 mile an hour average for that 17 miles.

MO: Which is legit.

GG: When I do a longer ride though, it slows down. So yesterday, I did a 40 miler and it was 22 miles an hour, which is still moving.

MO: But you can't swim yet? You're not quite there.

GG: I can swim, I'm just not in shape. I have pretty good swim technique. It's the fact that I am not in shape at all to do it. So when I do it, I get extremely tired. I certainly wouldn't be able to swim efficiently in like a triathlon sort of setting. I think I'd have to be sticking my face out of the water. I'm just not in shape to do it.

When I went out last year to train in New Mexico with Donald Cerronne, we did a bunch of pool workouts. I got in shape, we were at altitude, I felt great swimming. But it was something I had to train for.

I could run right now in a race and do ok. I could bike right now in a race and do ok. Swimming, I'd have to train for a little while to do that.

MO: The Diaz brothers swear by triathlon training. Just to throw that out there.

GG: They're crazy. Those guys have endless gas tanks. I'd like to think I do as well. Those guys are just endurance athletes. They're just built a little differently. Some people are explosive. Some people are in between. Some people can just do something for a really long time. For endurance, they can endure.

"Hey, go run a marathon!" Alright. Whatever, sure. That's endurance.

MO: Did you fight in high school? As an extracurricular, did you mix it up with kids? Were you into striking at all before you started hitting the mitts.

GG: Now. When I started hitting the mitts, I was actually at a local MMA gym around here. Messing around with Dennis Bermudez was the kid I was hanging out with at the time. He was on the Ultimate Fighter Finale. Messing around with him at the local gym.

I never really even...I think I might have thrown boxing gloves on in my basement. My dad did a little boxing. He hit bags in the basement. I was never really into it. I never really learned.

Once a year, maybe throw the gloves on and spar some neighborhood kid. It was probably a minute of sparring, until someone was like, "Alright, that one hurt, I'm done."

I didn't have any idea in the world of what striking was about. I never watched boxing. I never did any sort of formal striking. I wasn't the kid who got into a lot of fights in high school. One or two maybe.

When I fought, if I fought, the kid. One time at school, one time at a concert I think it was. And they were basically just me wrestling the kid. It wasn't like I had any idea what I was doing standing up.

MO: Take it to the ground.

GG: Yeah, go with what you know.

MO: You attacked the learning curve I presume? You really took to it quickly, huh?

GG: I think it's pretty clear that I am a wrestler and that jiu jitsu comes a little more naturally to wrestlers. I definitely have a knack for jiu jitsu. Boxing has come a little more slowly to me. The kickboxing, the standup part of it has come a little more slowly. But I'm finding my groove and it's definitely the part that I invest most of my time with.

Again, like I mentioned earlier, I'm not going to get much better at wrestling at this point. My jiu jitsu, I do have a lot of room to improve but I would say the most room to improve is the one I'm least familiar with, which is striking.

So I spend the majority of my time on my striking. I'd say I'd do five days a week with my coach Keith Trimble. We spar a couple times a week. I hit some mitts. I drill. Do a lot of bag work and a lot of shadow boxing. A lot of footwork stuff. It's coming along. I'm definitely getting in my comfort zone here more than I ever have been.

I'm drawn more to the one that I'm the worst at. I need to learn more striking. I need to get more comfortable. I need to spar more.

Actually while we're on the phone I got a text from my coach Keith. We're talking about my sparring tomorrow. He's saying warm up 11:30, you'll spar at 12:00 tomorrow. Trying to get a kid to come for you.

I said, "Alright, will you move around with me tomorrow if he doesn't com."

And he said, "No, because I'll want to hurt you."

And he just texted me, he said, "He's coming, lucky you." So, that's the truth, lucky me.

MO: How long from when you first started messing around to when you actually go into the octagon.

GG: Man, a long time. When I first started messing around it was 2011. I went to my first professional MMA fight to watch as a spectator. So I would say in the summer of 2011, Fall 2011, I started messing around, putting gloves on, doing jiu jitsu. And then in November 2011, I went to my first Ring of Combat fight in Atlantic City, NJ to watch my friend Chris Wade who has a fight the week before me in the UFC this coming September.

MO: Islip kid?

GG: Yup, yup, the Islip kid. Yup.

Now he was fighting in November 2012, I went to that fight to watch. I trained another year, and then I had a scheduled fight in Las Vegas, actually, in November 2012. And this is where it got interesting because at that point I was 25, turning 26. I mean, that's not old, but it's not young. It's certainly not...where a lot of people start a little younger than that. Maybe one year out of college, 22 years old, they have their first MMA fight. I was 25 and I turned 26 in November right after that fight actually.

So I had a scheduled fight in November of 2012.

I was three weeks out from a flight, sparring with Brian Leflair, who is also in the UFC now, top 15 I believe. A very tough guy at 170. And I was sparring with him three weeks out from my first scheduled pro debut.

He threw a high kick. I blocked it wrong and snapped my ulna - which is the outside forearm bone - right in half. I had to go get surgery on that, so that fight was cancelled.

MO: And it wasn't just a broken arm, you got an extra gift when they put a plate in, correct?

GG: I told you those six months of my life we talked about previously were the toughest time in my life. This was the second toughest time in my life. I trained and waited and had several opponents bail out and finally we got a guy to fight me and I'm going to Las Vegas and I was getting my weight down and I was finally - after a year and a half of training - and I thought I was ready way before this. It felt like was waiting forever for this fight. I'm 0-0, I didn't even have a fight yet and I break my arm three weeks out from my pro debut. It was heartbreaking to find out that I was going to have to get a plate and screws put in my arm.

So we did that as soon as possible. That would have been fine. I would have gotten over that. It would have been probably five or six months until I was back fighting again. Which isn't the end of the world, kind of frustrating but that's not what happened.

Five or six weeks after my surgery I was at Dr. Mike Camp's office getting my physical therapy, and he said, "Keep an eye on that, that's getting more swollen, it shouldn't be getting more swollen. That scar's getting a little puffy." He's like, "Really keep an eye on that."

I ended up going back the next day to Mike, my physical therapist, Doc Camp. He said, "go to the emergency room or if you can get an appointment with your ortho right now, go there right now," he said. "That's infected, you need to see a doctor right now."

So I ended up getting an appointment with my orthopedic surgeon.

He said, "Tomorrow, meet at South Nassau Hospital, you're getting emergency surgery, that plate's coming out, your arm's infected."

It'd been six weeks. I guess the bone had kind of mended at that point, so they could take the plate out without any worry of the bone rebreaking. I needed to spend a couple of nights in the hospital. They said, give us two nights in the hospital. We're going to I.V. antibiotics, we're going to culture. It's probably just a tissue infection from the looks of the scar. You should be good.

My parents live six hours away...I'm only a year, year and a half living on Long Island at this point. Still relatively new to me. It's not my home. I don't have all my support here.

I called my parents, I told them, "Listen, this is what's happening. I'm being admitted to the hospital tomorrow for emergency surgery. I'm only going to be here for two nights. It will take you guys a day to get here anyways and a day to get back. Don't worry, I'll be fine. I don't want you guys stressing. Don't come down."

I ended up having MRSA in my bone and I ended up spending a week in the hospital. They sent me out with a PIC line.

They thread this like three-foot long catheter through your vein in your biceps. a major vein in your biceps. They thread a catheter two and a half, three feet long, and they snake it through your vein into the top of your heart. Into the superior vena cava. It sticks right in that cavity in your heart.

It has a little spout that sticks out of your arm. It has an attachment to an IV line that you're plugged into. I was on IV antibiotics. A lot of people have PIC lines, where they just plug it and twice a day they do injections into the site. Well, mine was a continuous.

That's not the one I had; that's the easy one. I had the one that had to run 24 hours a day seven days a week for 10 weeks, so I had a backpack with this thing called a Krilin Pump in it, which is a pump run on four D batteries that is attached to the line of an IV bag that is hung in the backpack that I had to wear or sleep with or carry on the couch with me or put in the passenger's seat of my car when I was driving. I had to have this backpack that was attached to me running 24 hours a day, seven days a week for ten weeks.

I had a team of nurses that would rotate coming to my house to change the dressing on the PIC line every two days. I had shipments of medical supplies coming to my house, bags of IV, refrigerated bags of IV showing up at my house. I had to change the IV bags every 48 hours. It had an alarm on it. Every

48 hours it would beep and I'd have 10 minutes a day that I could unplug, take a shower. My arm had to be totally covered, sealed off.

If you take 10 minutes off every day that it's off, that pump pauses. By the time the ten weeks was up, I was changing my bag of IV fluid and batteries at like four in the morning. So the alarm would go off at 4 am. And I'd have to get up and I'd have to change the bag and the pump at four in the morning. That was ten weeks of... that was the second toughest time of my life.

Fast forward a little bit. After that, I had a lengthy recovery of rehab again and I didn't have my first professional fight until January of 2014.

MO: I presume you couldn't work out during the whole time you had the PIC line in.

GG: Nope.

The rules are there's no sweating, so there's no working out. They don't want the IV line jostling at all, it's in the exact spot in your heart. They actually have this ultrasound machine they put on your chest that guides the line into the exact spot they want it. So you can't be tugging on the line or getting caught on anything.

And again, the risk of infection when there's a direct line into your blood. It's not like you get a cut on your skin. It's fed directly into your vein, so anything that goes in is going to be very serious. It could pump throughout your body it goes right into your heart.

So there's no sweating so therefore no working out. This happened in December when I got the PIC line so it was cold out. And I told the doctors, "You're crazy if you don't think I'm at least walking."

I was walking between 10-15 miles a day outside. We're talking in December and January. Where I was outside in a tank top and shorts. With gloves and a hat on, but I would walk outside 10-15 miles a day with my backpack, and then I would come back inside and I would open all my doors and windows and put a fan on me and I was doing 2,000 sit-ups a day.

I couldn't sweat; it was literally 40 degrees in my house. And I was laying there in just my shorts with my feet hooked under my couch doing sit-ups.

MO: As an addict, I got to imagine you don't have the outlets you usually have. You're all by yourself on Long Island.

Two quick questions on this. One, did they give you painkillers? Or did you have to swear those off?

Two, what kind of support system did you find for yourself for that two-and-a-half-month period?

GG: Keith Trimble and the guys at Bellmore Kickboxing were extremely supportive of me. They came and saw me in the hospital a couple days in a row. My old landlord, Mr. Gresheimer, was there visiting when I was in the hospital. He was living beneath at that time. Those guys really definitely helped me out a lot. My parents did end up coming the last two days I was in the hospital because it was like getting to the point that I was losing my mind in the hospital and they could tell.

But I'm pretty private person when it comes to my space. I don't love a lot of people in my space, so it wasn't like I needed a ton of people around. I did have the nurses coming. You develop a relationship with the nurses and with the doctors. I would still walk to the gym. I was still training wrestlers at night. I couldn't show moves, but I was verbally coaching. So it wasn't like I was secluded completely alone at my house by myself 24 hours a day.

But the painkillers part, we'll go back to the first surgery when my bone was actually broken and put the plate and screws in it. I actually one of the guys that helped me get clean and sober who I talk to regularly still to this day, is an extremely close friend of mine. Family at this point actually.

I didn't really talk to him about this, but I just figured it was off limits and out of bounds, the painkillers, even though that was not my drug of choice, that was not something that I enjoyed doing. My drugs are on the other end of the spectrum. I didn't like the painkillers, that wasn't something that I was worried about.

I just thought, "No mind-altering substances. Plain and simple, those are out of bounds. That's are off limits."

When I went in for my surgery consult with the doctor, he was like "We're going to put you on..."

I'm like, "No painkillers, no painkillers. Not taking 'em"

Like, "We're drilling four holes in your bone and screwing a plate into it. You know that's going to hurt, right?"

I said, "I'll be ok, I'm tough."

He goes, "Listen, I'm going to tell you right now. done this on a lot of people that are very tough." He's like, "You're going to need them. Not want them; you're going to need them."

I said, "Nope, give me the most powerful anti-inflammatory you have, but I'm not taking painkiller."

They gave me a nerve blocker in my arm which you don't feel anything when you wake up from the surgery. No painkillers. They sent me home. I remember about 8 o'clock at night, I was sitting there in a sling at my parents' house. I had my surgery Upstate at my parents, my first one. I was sitting there and I knew immediately when it wore off. Cause it went from a no pain to my arm, it feels like someone has it in a vice and it's going to explode. The bone's going to shatter, that's what it felt like. I was like, "I'm going to bed right now. I gotta fall asleep before this pain really starts in."

I did fall asleep, but I woke up maybe an hour later. I was legitimately this is not an exaggeration crying, screaming, moaning the entire night. And my dad had actually called in the doctors or whatever, the first thing when they were open and he went to the doctor's and he picked up the scrip, brought it back. He called the guy that helped me get clean and sober.

He called that guy and he's like, "Of course he can take painkillers. Surgery you're allowed to, that's fine. Just monitor it, you guys hold onto it. That's fine"

So I didn't know that was something you could have done. The next day I was on painkillers. And I absolutely needed them. It was like unfathomable amount of pain.

I've had several surgeries since then. I've had thumb surgery, I've had a broken hand, bad, bad, bad broken foot. The two surgeries on my arm and I've done the painkillers and that's not really something that tempts me and I understand that there is risk involved with that being an addict. Again, not my drug of choice. I'd be a lot more scared if they gave me Adderall.

MO: Now, you've had 7 pro fights so far, since you said January '14 was your first one.

GG: Yeah, January of 2014 was my first pro fight.

MO: And you've had six finishes, and you're 7-0 so far. The goal obviously, if you're a baseball player you want to get to the Major Leagues. If you're a basketball player you want to get to the NBA. If you're a cage fighter, the dream is to get to the UFC. Walk me through the process. How do you get on Dana White's radar? How do you get scouted and found? And how did it ultimately work for you?

GG: I felt like I could have competed in the UFC from fight number one. Do I think I was as skilled or sharp then as I am now? Absolutely not, but I've always found a way to win. I think I won matches that I shouldn't have won throughout my career against guys who were better than me. Was Dustin Schlatter technically better than me at that time? 1000% he was better than me technically, but I always found a way to win that one takedown. Then taking enough shots to stay in bounds.

The same thing applies to my fighting. I think I was ready for the UFC from Jump Street. I think I could have beaten a lot of the good guys from day 1. But I kept my mouth shut for the most part. I didn't harass anyone or call anyone out or running my mouth. I did my time and I did it quietly and I let my fighting speak for itself and I think that it has.

My only post that I made about me getting into the UFC, I'm not sure if you saw. I made one post and I said, "It's about time."

That's my feeling. And I didn't make a huge, "Oh, I have a big announcement coming." I don't like that. Here's my announcement, this is how I feel about it: It's about time

I don't what else I would have had to done to get on Dana White's radar. They certainly know who I was. Joe Silva knew who I was. I met them - not Dana White - I met Joe Silva in Vegas last year. He personally told me I was on the radar, just keep doing my thing.

My manager, Brandon Waldman said the same thing. He constantly talks to Joe about me. There was unfortunately the bad timing. There's too many guys at my weight class. And there still is too many guys at 145 and 155. There's just too many guys.

One of my main training partners, Andre Harrison is 13-0 professionally. He's at 145; there's just too many guys at that weight class. Andre would be a top-15 guy right now. Top 10 guy, right now. But there's too many guys. That's unfortunately just the name of the game. There's so many good guys from so many countries. The roster's so big. You know, 13-0 Andre Harrison. How crazy is that?

And I was 7-0 with six first-round finishes. What more do you need? I have a wrestling pedigree that is almost unmatched. There's a couple Olympians and an Olympic champ in the UFC, but Koshek is not in the UFC anymore. There's no more four-time All Americans in the UFC.

That was my feeling all along, but it's like, is me running my mouth about that stuff going to get me in? I didn't think that was the answer. I thought just keep winning fights in the most dominating fashion and I think that's your best bet. And it's paid off. But I did my time. I did it. I did and I did it quietly and it did; it's paid off.

And again, the pinnacle of fighting is the UFC and everyone knows that. But that's not my goal. Getting to the UFC is not the goal. That's a stepping stone along the way of the major goal which is to win that belt.

Everyone's like, "Oh, you made it"

No, I didn't. I got into the UFC. I've made it when I get that strap. That's when I think I've made it. And anything less than that I will have fallen short of my goals.

Do I guarantee I'm going to be the UFC champ one day?

No guarantees.

Do I think I'm capable of winning? 100%. Is it realist to believe that I can have that belt? Sure. It's fighting though. A lot of crazy shit happens in fighting. I do think I am the best fighter. I do think I can win that belt. The goal is to win the belt. The goal is not to get to the UFC, so this is just a stepping stone..not a stepping stone, a milestone. This is one of those markers. I'm on the right path. I did my time in the lower ranks; I got to the UFC.

Now I've got to put together a string of really good wins. Then I got to beat someone really good. Then I got to beat a former champ. Then I get that shot. When I win that belt, that's when I made it.

MO: I was going to say that when we got into this phone call, I didn't know if you were going to be one of those guys that said, "Hey, it's one round at a time; one minute at a time..."

I think that it's fascinating to hear that you have the long run goal and then you're able to kind of break it down to smaller parts to say, "OK, this is what I want to do and this is how I plan to get there."

GG: I break it down day by day. Tomorrow, I need to have a good sparring session tomorrow. That's important. Right now if you ask me what's more important, my sparring session tomorrow is the most important thing on my plate. It's the closest one in proximity. My sparring session tomorrow afternoon is the closest thing that I have to worry about. That's something that I've gotten better is time too, is procrastinating my anxiety. I don't have bad anxiety, I have good performance anxiety. A healthy amount of performance anxiety, I think that I perform better when I have that.

But it is not healthy to have it for three weeks or eight weeks. So whenever I start thinking like putting myself in that fight. I start getting too racy-hearted, "I just have to spar tomorrow. Let me just get through tomorrow sparring session. Let me perform well tomorrow." And if you do that it, that all adds up.

It's putting money in the bank and Sept. 24, an hour up that fight, I'll let myself feel that anxiety and I'll let my body do what it has to do before that fight and during that fight. I've gotten better...it'll run your body into the ground if you worry for weeks at a time about a fight.

Now, on the other hand, you do have to put yourself in that situation to visualize. I do believe in that. I have to see myself hitting the right hand into that takedown. I have to see myself hitting that jab into that knee pull, I have to see myself sprawling. I have to see myself passing guard. I can't be at midnight thinking about a fight, keeping myself up, that I can't win tomorrow. You know what I mean?

MO: So, was it July when you ended up getting signed? Was that the point where the UFC gave you the tap and said that you're ready to go?

GG: Yeah, my manager, actually I was laying down for my morning nap and my manager said, "Call me, you're in the UFC."

And before I could even call him, he already started dialing me up.

I kind kept it quiet for about a week. I had to do all of the signing of the paperwork. When I made that post, it was about a week later. I had known for a bout before anyone on social media knew. My immediate people knew, my coaches, my family, my close friends, they all knew. It wasn't public until about a week after I knew. Yeah that was July.

MO: If you don't mind me asking, how does it work? Is it a multi-fight contract? Or is it just one fight at a time at this point?

GG: It's a four fight. It's a basic, entry UFC. It's four fights. That's the entry one you get. I'm actually glad it wasn't...not that I wouldn't have been prepared. Short notice is usually how it happens. I got two months. Actually I got eight and a half weeks, which is really nice.

It wasn't like, "We need you in 10 days, get your weight down."

This I've had a full fight camp. I'm the most prepared I've ever been. I'm comfortable, my weight is great. It's a four fight contract. That is how the entry fight contract works. Yeah, it's a four-fight contract. That's how the entry contract works.

Morgan: You say that you are prepared, but they did switch things up on you. You were supposed to fight Joaquim Silva and he had to pull out in the middle of August.

Gregor: It doesn't matter to me. That's trivial. I'm not saying that I don't care who I'm fighting, but I don't get consumed with my opponent. I'm worried about what I can control. I can't control what he's doing. It's worrying about things that I don't have a ton of influence over. That is unneeded stress. The guy is the guy I'm fighting. If it changes again, it changes again. I'm ready for whatever. We train a specific way. I let my coach watch film and he trains me a specific way according to what I need. I don't even really know what he is training me for. I trust his training. We don't obsess over film. He watches film and trains me a specific way. I trust that he will train me fully. I listen with my full attention. That is the game plan and that has always been the game plan. It's working. No need to reinvent the wheel.

Morgan: The date is September 24th. The fight isn't anywhere in the US. You are going to the capital of Brazil, Brasilia. What do you think about that?

Gregor: It is what it is. (inaudible) of where I fight. If you're Chris Ryan and fight at the Garden you might have a little more pull over that. I'm not in that position yet. Hopefully I will be, but being my first fight this is where I'm fighting. I don't have an option of saying no so that is where I'm fighting. Not something that I can change. Is it ideal? No. Will I manage? Of course. I've traveled and wrestled. I can travel and fight. I've traveled and made weight. I've done it all before. It's fine. We used to Vegas every year, St. Louis, west coast..wherever. You can take 15-hour bus trips to the southern (inaudible). You are on the bus holding your weight down. I've done that. It's nothing new. Would I like it be in New Jersey? Sure..but it's not. It's worthless to think I wish it was here. I'm fighting in Brazil. It's a new experience. I'm sure it will be fun. I know the fans love their fighting so hopefully they treat me with respect.

Morgan: What weight are you walking around at right now?

Gregor: Between 165-170. I don't really know exactly.

Morgan: You have to get to 155.

Gregor: Yea...we would move in at 156 so it's not a bad cut. I'm fully hydrated all the time. I put away 2 gallons of water a day so that weight comes off very easily. My weight cut is not an issue. It should never be an issue for me. I'm not that biggest 155er in history. Is making weight fun? No, but I don't think it's an overwhelming task for me.

Morgan: I have a nerdy State Department question. Do you have your visa? Was it hard to get?

Gregor: All my stuff is with the UFC and at the Consulate right now. It was a battle to be honest. I have no problem running 8 miles in the morning and then sparring hard rounds and then getting on my bike and riding 40 miles. That is easy for me. The hard part is paperwork. I'm not sure great at it. That gave me much more anxiety than a fight does. All the emails, paperwork, and medicals...I'm sure you know this but getting the visa wasn't easy for me. It was super frustrating. You have to mail them your passport, mail them a head shot photo, fill out all the visa applications. Everything is mailed to the UFC and they take it to the Consulate. They hold on it, process your visa and send everything back. They have our stuff. It's at the Consulate and we're waiting to get it back. The UFC does their timeline so I'm sure it'll be back in time.

Morgan: People don't realize. They all think of the preparation to get in the cage. There is other stuff, the bureaucratic aspect. You got screwed too because there is a window that they open for the Olympics and it closes September 18. Your parents need a visa to get down there now.

Gregor: My brother is going and he had to get a visa. If it were a week earlier, we would have all been in the clear.

Morgan: Isn't that crazy?

Gregor: I didn't know. We are flying out the 19th but we get there on the 20th so we miss it by a day.

Morgan: You've been incredibly gracious with your time. Thank you for that. I think I covered everything I wanted to. Do you want to make any news? Do you want to call out Conor McGregor or anyone like that?

Gregor: Let me get through this guy first. I'm going to do it one at time. I'll look silly if you call out someone if you don't take care of the job in front of you. Let me stay on task with this guy, put this guy away and then we'll worry about who is next. If it comes to that...let me get the ball rolling first and then we'll see where we go from there.

Morgan: It's UFC Fight Night 95. It'll be on UFC fight pass and Fox Sports One on September 24th. It's Glaico Franca, the hometown boy facing off against Gregor Gillespie and 155lbs light weight.

Gregor: That's right.

Morgan: Gregor, thank you for your time. I really appreciate it. It was great speaking with you.

Gregor: I appreciated the call. It was a lot of fun.

Closing: For Gregor Gillespie and myself, Morgan O'Brien, I just wanted to say thanks for listening to the DiploSport Podcast.

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