

GROOMED FOR GREATNESS



Prodigious brothers Bradley and Dylan Swanepoel.
PHOTOS: COMBATCOACHING.COM

Amanzimtoti's Swanepoel brothers are at the summit of South African U14 mixed martial arts. QUINTIN VAN JAARVELD reports

NESTLED in the heart of Amanzimtoti is the CombatCoaching.com gym headquarters.

It is here where brothers Bradley and Dylan Swanepoel are being groomed for greatness under the astute tutelage of their father and coach Morné Swanepoel, owner of the establishment and one of the most knowledgeable and respected mixed martial arts figures in South Africa.

A lifelong practitioner of the martial arts, it was inevitable that his sons would follow in his footsteps. The prodigious brothers were cut from the same cloth. Born to fight, born to compete, they share their father's indomitable spirit, live, eat and sleep martial arts and form part of the gym's elite Team MMA Fighter stable.

The brothers already boast more than seven years of mixed martial arts training and find themselves at the pinnacle of the sport in its junior circles in South Africa. Bradley, the older of the brothers at 13 years of age, made history in April when he became the first-ever U14 mixed martial arts champion in South Africa.

"The Nightmare", a moniker he proudly shares with Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) star Diego Sanchez, squared off against Lindo Shangase in the historic KwaZulu-Natal U14 championship bout at a Megladon Fight Club event at Sibaya Casino, Durban.

After winning the first two three-minute rounds with a clever mix of strikes and takedowns, Bradley finished the fight with a textbook triangle choke in the third round to realise his dream and improve his immaculate fight record to eight wins and just a solitary defeat.

"It's like a dream come true," an elated Bradley said after the fight. "I've made history! All my hard work has paid off and it feels really great. I have set the standard now and hope to keep increasing that standard."

Hard work indeed, as Bradley had been pushed to the limit by his father and sparring partners throughout an intense seven-week training camp ahead of the title tilt. On the surface, the vigorous training left Bradley battered and bruised. In hindsight, however, it is clear that it steered him to become the champion he was born to be.

The seven weeks preceding the April 1 fight had merely polished the young diamond after years of dedication to the physically demanding sport of mixed martial arts. It is a journey that began a decade ago when at the tender age of four, Bradley started training in submission wrestling. At 12 years old, Bradley stepped into the cage for the first time and has since carved out a reputation as the apex predator in South African U14 mixed martial arts.

A refined mixed martial artist for his age, Bradley is equally adept at striking, wrestling and jiu-jitsu. His mental ability matches his physical gifts, making him a calculated, cerebral tactician who picks his opponent apart and jumps at the slightest opportunity to finish his foe. "My favourite technique is jab, jab superman punch for stand up and the rear naked choke submission," discloses Bradley.

The inspiration behind his fighting style becomes clear as young Bradley reveals that he is a big admirer of UFC welterweight champion Georges St-Pierre, whom he describes as "a scientist when it comes to fighting".

Morné says it is this slow poison approach that earned Bradley the nickname "The Nightmare". "Bradley's approach is passive aggressive, where he will beat his opponent systematically with superior technique and just riding the storm. It is a nightmare because before you know it, he has you in a submission," comments Morné.

Having captured his maiden title, the naturally gifted Bradley is not resting on his laurels and has slotted straight back into the Team MMA Fighter training regime. "We train six days a week, two to three hours at a time. My father lets us watch motivational video clips and I listen to music a lot, which helps me focus," says Bradley, adding they are a tight-knit contingent. "We train like a team and fight like a family. There is trust and discipline within the team, and they work me hard for my upcoming fights."

The 13-year-old equipped himself with aplomb during the lead-up to the biggest fight of his budding mixed martial arts career but conceded he felt the pressure ahead of the bout. "I don't think there is any fighter who is not nervous before a fight, but I am able



The Swanepoel brothers show off the silverware they have won on their way to the top of the U14 heap.



Bradley shoots for a takedown on Dylan during a sparring session.



Dylan prepares for some ground and pound during a sparring session.



Bradley throws a jab.



Dylan lands a leg kick.

to deal with the nerves as I have a family who supports me, a fighting team and training partners who are always there for me and last but not least God, who protects me."

The rising star says the greatest advantage of all is having his father as his coach. "I think it must be every MMA fighter's dream to have their dad as their coach. My dad is known as one of the best coaches in the world and I know he will always do his best for me."

"He is my hero as he truly lives the life of a fighter and a martial artist, and always gives more than 100%. Very few people know him like I do and it is difficult to explain what passion he has for fighting, MMA and the martial arts. I look forward to winning a lot more titles with my dad and my brother Dylan right next to me."

Bradley says he and Dylan share a close brotherly bond. "Dylan and I are very close. We never go anywhere without each other. Everyone knows us this way," he says. He adds that while they push each other in training, there is no sibling rivalry threatening to sour their relationship.

"There is no real rivalry between us. Sometimes when we train against each other there is a bit of competition, but it is good for both of us. During my preparation for my title fight, my brother was there every step of the way. He was my main sparring partner and he trained every second with me, pushing me and motivating me. We share my title because he worked just as hard as I did."

A young man with composure and discipline beyond his years, Bradley is a confident fighter with clear goals and big dreams. In the coming years, he hopes to shine in the Extreme Fighting Championship, Africa's premier mixed martial arts promotion, and ultimately emulate the heroics of Cape Town-born Trevor Prangle, who competed in the UFC and holds victories over international stars such as Keith Jardine, *The Ultimate Fighter* season-four winner Travis Lutter, Brazilian jiu-jitsu black belt Matt Horwich and current world number two ranked middleweight and number one contender for Anderson Silva's UFC middleweight title, Chael Sonnen.

"I want to win all the titles in my weight class locally and fight in the UFC one day," says Bradley.

Similar in appearance and stature, only two kilograms separate the Swanepoel brothers on the scale. The only significant difference appearance-wise is in height, where Bradley stands a head taller than his younger brother.

As fighters, the most apt description of the Amanzimtoti siblings is yin and yang. Where Bradley expresses little emotion in the moments leading up to a fight and takes pride in outsmarting his opponent, 11-year-old Dylan wears his heart on his sleeve and goes for the kill from the opening bell.

"Dylan's approach is more aggressive than Bradley's. He is known to take the fight to his opponent, he will go out to break his opponent and meet him head-on to punish him. Bradley will be the calmer one in training and before a fight, where Dylan will be the guy jumping around uncontrollably," says Morné.

That explains his moniker "The Punisher". It comes as little surprise then, when Dylan shares that his favourite fighter is Brazilian wrecking machine and current UFC featherweight kingly José Aldo. Dylan says of his hero: "José Aldo has quick Thai kicks. He has good knees and takedowns and he is good on the ground."

Like his brother, Dylan took up submission wrestling at the age of four and showed great talent from the outset. He made his mixed martial arts debut aged 10 and despite being two years younger than Bradley, has one more fight on his résumé.

His fight record makes for impressive reading — nine wins and just a single blemish prior to his July 1 Megladon Fight Club bout at the Olive Convention Centre, Durban. Dylan enjoys the hard work that goes into training and relishes stepping inside the cage.

"We train hard as a brotherhood and we support each other inside and outside the gym. Training and watching video clips make me confident and hungry like a lion to win a fight. When I finally walk to the cage, I just feel like unleashing the beast inside me," he says.

While he shares his brother's love of the eye-catching superman punch, Dylan's go-to moves are the double leg takedown and armbar submission. He would often overpower his opponent and use these moves in sequence to end a fight.

He has great respect and admiration for his older brother and the success he has achieved thus far. "He is not just my big brother, he is also my best friend. I know that together, we are unstoppable. We share the same dreams and goals in our fighting. We push each other all the time."

He adds that he doesn't feel pressured to live up to the high standard Bradley has set. "I know I can achieve the same that my brother has without it being called pressure. It's what I want to do. We push each other all the time. He pushes me when I'm tired or having a bad day and in turn, I push him. We ensure we never give up and never back down."

Young Dylan hopes to match his brother every step of the way on their path to greatness and continue his father's legacy.

"I want to take over the titles that my brother is going to win and then join him in the UFC. My brother and I also want to be involved with training and fighting full-time like my dad, so after school we are going to follow in his footsteps and keep the legacy alive," concludes Dylan.

As both father and coach, Morné takes immense pride in his sons' work ethic and subsequent success.

"I still have to meet someone who is as enthusiastic and passionate about their training and way of life as a martial artist. These boys live a fighter's life 24/7. If they are not at school, sleeping or eating, they are training. The way they carry themselves is true of a martial artist and something a lot of the new generation of martial artists have lost," he says.

The brothers will continue their rise and gain valuable international experience when they embark on a tour of the United States later this year. "We are planning to visit Las Vegas and meet and train with the likes of Wanderlei Silva, Randy Couture, Vitor Belfort, Forrest Griffin and many more," says Morné.

"From here we will make our way to Los Angeles where we will meet up with a couple of my coaches, Chris Haueter and Sergeant Jim Wagner, to train and visit some of the best gyms in Los Angeles. On the last leg of the trip, we are hoping to visit Hawaii to go back to my roots where I started MMA and Jeet Kune Do, and visit and train with Burton Richardson and hopefully BJ Penn as well. During this tour I'm also hoping that the boys can compete at some of the tournaments that are hosted in the U.S."

With passion, natural ability and the expert guidance of their father and coach, the sky is the limit for the Swanepoel brothers.

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EXPO 2012

Family Fishing Day

DATE: 19/05/2012 TIME: 09H00-13H00

VENUE: Park Rynie Beach
ENTRANCE FEE: R10.00 per angler
PLEASE NOTE: Briefing will be held at 08h30 in the education marquee.

PRIZE GIVING: 14H00
PRIZES: A HOST OF AGE GROUP PRIZES.
FIRST 50 REGISTERED GET A GIFT.

FORMAT: Competition for Anglers
1-16 Years - Parents may assist
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Fish to be measured and recorded by an official

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Don't forget to bring your fishing license

EXPO Entrance Fees:
Adults - R20
Children - R10 (ages 5-13)

First ever "big and release" fishing competition held on the South Coast