

“REAL fight fans want to see skills, and the way you conduct yourself in the cage, not how cute you look on a poster. But should you have BOTH—hell yeah I think people are going to love you.”

What started as a hobby and means to stay in shape for Tiffany Connell has morphed into a career and lifelong passion. When Connell was 15 years old, her mother invited her to start taking kickboxing classes so the pair could stay in shape. Fast forward four years and the young Connell realized that this activity she practiced in her spare time had developed into a deep passion. During high school, Connell had started practicing Muay Thai in addition to kickboxing. When away at college she often found herself missing the “Art of Eight Limbs”.

“I missed my Muay Thai/kickboxing classes so much I couldn’t stand it,” explained Connell. After only a semester away she transferred to a St. Pete College near her gym and shortly after took on her first amateur Muay Thai bout. In the three years since Connell’s first amateur bout, she has amassed a record of 12-3 in the amateur Muay Thai world. She recently took her first professional MMA fight on the main card of Tampa’s Art of Fighting organization, which she lost via close split decision. As a woman in what is still a predominately male sport, Connell embraces the idea that “sex sells”. Often told she is “too pretty to fight,” Connell is quick to point out that only she is capable of determining that. “I think a more attractive female fighter with an equal skill level to a less attractive female fighter will make it farther in the sport simply because she has ‘more’ of the total package,” stated Connell. “That’s what people want to see.”

Dealing with being “too pretty” isn’t the only stereotype Connell has had to overcome, but it does seem to be the reoccurring one. Even members of her family pepper her with questions at family gatherings, “Why can’t you just model?” and “Why don’t you just teach kickboxing?”



Photo courtesy Astrid Bidane/MMA Sphere



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TIFFANY CONNELL

NEVER TOO PRETTY TO FIGHT!

by Samantha L. Johnson | Photos by Alfonso Moreno (MADcreativity.com)



Grass Roots



Connell goes over striking with coach Mike Regina

Connell does a complete cross training program courtesy of strength & conditioning coach Duane DeKeyser



To those questions Connell responds that only she can decide what she does and in the end, "I'm going to do what I do regardless of what people say."


Having practiced Muay Thai for more than seven years, the 22-year-old knows it takes more than looks to make it in MMA. While her base is Muay Thai, she has started to branch out and learn other forms of martial arts.

"If you just throw any pretty girl in the cage with no skills and ask me if I think people will like her over a girl who has tremendous skill and isn't attractive?" questions Connell. "No, not at all. REAL fight fans want to see skills, and the way you conduct yourself in the cage, not how cute you look on a poster. But should you have BOTH- hell yeah I think people are going to love you."

Recently Connell has begun to explore other martial arts in an effort to widen her knowledge; however, Muay Thai is her true love. The sport that originated thousands of years ago in Thailand has had little changes to its general concept: use any appendage possible to injure and debility your opponent. That idea is what 115-pound Connell loves.

"Fighters, for the most part, are so respectful and have such wonderful sportsmanship," states Connell. "It's probably the most brutal sport there is, you are seriously trying to hurt your opponent BAD, but in the end, we hug, say 'thank you', and sometimes even grab a drink after the fight. It truly is awesome."

Thriving in a sport where your body is repeatedly taken to a breaking point can wear a person down. Many fighters (female or male) struggle to balance work, training and not driving their body past the point of utter exhaustion; Connell, however, flourishes under the pressure. Aiding in this are her trainers Erik Marshall and Danny Byrket--both having taught Connell since the beginning.

"Every rocky point in this journey makes me want it even MORE," exclaims Connell. "I do it because I LOVE every single minute of it!" 

Samantha L. Johnson is a freelance writer originally from South-East Idaho, currently living in Las Vegas, NV. Visit her website <http://www.sxjohnson.net> for her ramblings and rants of living in the MMA Mecca.

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