

Weili Zhang interview transcript.

1. How has your recovery been since the fight?

The recovery has been great in the last few days. I'm feeling almost normal except for the sleeping part. Right now, I am only able to get between four and five hours of sleep each day. I am having trouble falling asleep until 2am at night, and then I'll wake up around 7am in the morning. I am not sleeping during the day, either. I am still a bit jet lagged, but it's fine since I am going back to China soon.

2. What do you think of your performance on the fight night? How about Joanna's?

I don't think our performances that night can be evaluated upon the outcome of the fight. Both of us were fighting tooth and nail to win, but in that moment, I think the outcome of the fight actually mattered little. Both of us were displaying our physical strength, as well as our mentality and will power.

3. During the fight, especially the third round, did you ever think about losing?

No. Never. As long as the fight is still on, I'll do everything to win.

4. You burst into tears as soon as the official declared the winner, what was the first thing going through your mind?

It was such a tedious preparation for this fight. At that moment, I was thinking, gosh, I can finally get some rest and take a deep breath. The entire preparation was very, very strenuous, and I had been pretty tense throughout. So when the winner was declared, I was just thinking I could finally get some rest.

5. You went straight to the hospital after the fight. What check-ups did you perform? How did you feel?

I knew I was fine physically, except for some facial bruises. I also hurt my foot on a kick to her (Joanna) knee. I went through a scan at the hospital, and found nothing serious.

6. Joanna was in tears while at hospital, and I heard you went up to comfort her. Could you tell us what happened over there?

Joanna arrived at the hospital about 10 minutes after me. She didn't look too well when she first arrived, and was in tears throughout. Seeing that Joanna arrived at the hospital by herself, I told my interpreter to give her a hand. Soon after, her coach and family arrived, and she was still in tears. Hearing her crying made me sad and wanted to comfort her, but I couldn't speak her language. I told her that she did very well, but she kept on crying.

7. Your post-fight interview generated a lot of responses in China. How do you view your red-hot fame right now?

I think the victory is much needed for everybody. China was experiencing the coronavirus pandemic and everyone had been very upset. I needed this win to cheer everyone up, so people were paying a lot of attention to it.

8. A lot of celebrities have since shared videos of your fight on social media, have you also received a lot of congratulatory text messages?

I received way too many congratulatory messages that I couldn't read all of them. It's been like this every single day that I haven't got a chance to respond one by one. I feel sorry about that.

9. Do you think your elevated fame will benefit your career in the future, or instead create more pressure?

I don't think it will (create more pressure). I will keep doing what I truly enjoying and stay away from adding pressure to myself. I will focus on my training and normal routine, and just keep doing my part. Pressure only comes from ourselves. I think we need more people to support this sport to make it better and better.

10. This has since been branded as the most exciting fight in the history of UFC, what do you think of it?

Both Joanna and I were fighting tooth and nail in this, and I was thinking the outcome actually wouldn't matter anymore. Both of us put up a fight with our best performances and will power.

11. How would you summarize your first title-defending fight?

I think it was very tough and very strenuous fight, but I am happy with the final outcome.

12. Looking back, what does this fight mean to you?

It means that I will become stronger, and that I will tackle whatever difficulties standing in my way.

13. As the first Chinese athlete to successfully defend a UFC title, what do you think your accomplishment will mean to the future of MMA in China?

I think this is just a beginning. Chinese people respect the strong and powerful, and they are very passionate. Few people in China knew about MMA before. I believe once they know more about it, more and more people will take part in it and show support, which will be a very good thing.

14. The Nevada Athletic Commission released the suspension list of UFC 248, requiring both Joanna and you to suspend for two months. Meanwhile, you also announced on social media you need some rest. What is your plan for the near future? Could you share with us?

I just wanted to give myself a good time off, and unwind a bit. Coming off this fight, I am still wound up a bit tight. Since last year's title fight, I haven't had any break, therefore I want to rest up this time, and freshen up to a new stage where I am fully hungry for victory, training and new techniques.

15. When did you start practicing martial arts? What prompted you to choose to become a MMA fighter and join UFC?

I started practicing traditional Chinese martial arts at age of six, and got into Chinese kickboxing when I was in 7th grade before I retired from it due to injuries. I got to know Coach Cai in 2012. He was the first promoter of MMA in China, pretty impressive. In 2015, I left my full-time job to start training professionally. This June will mark the five-year anniversary of that. Everyone says I have been riding on a rocket in the last five years, improving in lightning speed.

16. As a female athlete, what are some aspects of this sport that you think are unknown to the outside world?

There are very few female athletes in MMA. A lot of people associate this sport with violence and domestic abuse. I think there are a lot of biases toward MMA, so I hope people refrain from connecting it to things like domestic abuse and violence. It is just our profession. It is what we do for a living.

17. From the moment you chose to become a MMA fighter, to successfully defending your title this time, what can you share with your fans from your experience?

Now I am the winner of this title, I credit my excellent team for my fast growth. Also very important is having a big goal, and then slicing it into many incremental goals. As you accomplish these incremental goals, you are nearing your final goal. No matter what we do, we have to start with a goal and a dream.

18. In past interviews, you mentioned that some athletes have great talent but didn't see it through. What made you hold on to your dream till this date?

I think it's my attitude, and never forgetting where I came from. I have always been doing what I enjoy doing. I have always wanted to compete in UFC and win a UFC title. I have never let that go. Every time I go for a run, I always dream of wearing that UFC belt and use that to inspire myself. I think those athletes might lack some patience.

19. What do you want to say to those who aspire to become a MMA fighter?

I encourage more athletes to join this sport, especially those coming from combat sports such as Chinese kickboxing and wrestling. They will get used to MMA pretty quickly, only need some footwork practice. There are a lot of talented athletes in China. As long as you are persistent and love this sport, I welcome you to be part of MMA.

10. Now you are a defending champion, how much longer do you expect to stay at your peak? My goal is to keep winning until I become tired of it. I will then pass on my belt to someone that I think is great, and have her carry on from there.