

The new ProElite is beginning to turn its gears and is looking for an August or September launch to whatever their new vision is. ProElite is the company that was known in the past for its main subsidiary, EliteXC that ran live fights on CBS and Showtime Sports before ProElite filed for bankruptcy. The concept behind ProElite was confusing at best, as they seemed to simply be a public company (first off -- bad idea for a new company) that had capital behind it to go out and purchase smaller organizations to bring them all under one roof.

The main problem with ProElite was that EliteXC was always the only show in town and those in charge of ProElite were not in the mindset of slow, steady growth as much as making an immediate splash on the MMA world and competing with UFC right off the bat. Fans watched as EliteXC did their best to compete with UFC, while at the same time a San Jose kickboxing promotion was putting on their own series of MMA cards that had people talking.

Strikeforce took a much different approach to the Mixed Martial Arts world, as Scott Coker at the helm had a lot of experience with the martial arts world as the former head of K-1's USA operations before Mike Kogan as well as promoting Strikeforce as a kickboxing promotion in the Northern California region. Coker knew what to expect in Northern California, knew what would bring fans to the arena and how to organize these events.

Strikeforce for a long time was the little engine that could, the promotion that was in the background; they did well but they never stepped on any toes or overreached their boundaries.

The Return of ProElite: Looking at the Rise of Strikeforce as a Model to Reach For

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Dana White even had a grudging respect for Coker and would never talk bad about him. The Strikeforce formula was unique for MMA; the undercards were entirely taken from the local scene, with local up-and-comers who would fight for cheap and even help with the event (ticket sales, set up/tear down of the ring, etc.). The main card was full of fighters who were a little bit more established names but could still not command a king's ransom to be booked, guys like Joe Riggs, Bobby Southworth, Clay Guida, Tyson Griffin, etc. You might know a lot of these names from the UFC, but their UFC tenure was either over or had yet to begin.

Continue Reading to read about how they built on weak divisions and made stars.

The main events were where they spent more money, or where they'd appeal to local audiences to fill up arenas. Frank Shamrock and Cung Le were the main names that made Strikeforce big, as they were bay area legends, Frank in MMA and Cung in Kickboxing. Strikeforce would always spend a bulk of their money on the top one or two fights, making sure to have them as competitive fights between name fighters.

Early on, EliteXC and Strikeforce would cross paths, with them co-promoting cards for Showtime (EliteXC's TV deal) that mainly featured Frank Shamrock as the main billing. Strikeforce took their growth at a slow pace, with the cards that they worked with EliteXC having a higher payroll than the rest, and the usual card being housed in a proper-sized venue with the event streamed on internet sites like Sherdog.com when they could. Part of what helped immensely was their relationship with the operators of the HP Pavilion; Silicon Valley Sports and Entertainment. SVSE is a subsidiary of San Jose Sports & Entertainment Enterprises and oversaw the operations of the HP Pavilion and the San Jose Sharks, Strikeforce forged a relationship with them to house all of their major events at the HP Pavilion which in turn led to SVSE becoming a major investor in Strikeforce down the line.

Strikeforce had a home base that as long as they put on a few good fights for the locals, they would pack the arena and go crazy for the local favorites. The Pavilion was the home base of Strikeforce to the extent to where Frank Shamrock has his own reserved parking spot in the

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arena's parking lot.

Eventually, ProElite's EliteXC fell on rough times, ProElite was being extremely mismanaged and EliteXC was their only source of income, with a lot of that money coming from Showtime and CBS. Their TV deal with CBS was in trouble near the end and a very public scandal involving a Kimbo Slice fight and officials asking Seth Petruzelli to not take Kimbo to the ground was one of the very final nails in the coffin. The name was tainted and the main brand of EliteXC was seen as questionable to fans and the media. SVSE and Strikeforce teamed up to join in and make a deal with what was left of EliteXC, making off with EliteXC's Showtime television contract, television rights to old events and a good deal of EliteXC's fighter contracts.

Strikeforce was going national.

The little promotion that could was now the defacto number 2 promotion in the world and the rest is now history. Strikeforce marched along until SVSE had seen enough and put the company up for sale with Zuffa making off like a bandit, putting the nail in yet another coffin.

One of the most surprising aspects of the Strikeforce purchase was the firing of Rich Chou, Strikeforce's longtime match maker. To many, Rich Chou was the unsung hero of Strikeforce. Joe Silva is known as the best in the business, but when given the deepest talent pool in the world and a constant stream of events, it is hard to not put together good events. Rich Chou had a much different challenge ahead of him with Strikeforce, as he was working with an incredibly limited roster yet always found a way to put on a show that was as good as they could possibly put on. Frank Shamrock vs. Ceasar Gracie and Frank Shamrock vs. Cung Le are matches that could make themselves, but making sense of a Light Heavyweight division that was based around Bobby Southworth, Renato Sobral, Vernon White and Anthony Ruiz and somehow turning it into something interesting is nothing short of masterful.

Chou and Strikeforce always found a way to showcase their fighters, thus building stars and making fans compelled to see them fight. This is a stark contrast to the UFC model, where no man comes before the UFC brand other than Dana White. So why this long, overreaching point about Rich Chou? Rich Chou has recently been announced as one of the men in charge of the new ProElite. I can't say exactly who or what the new ProElite will present to us, but as someone that watched Strikeforce grow from promotion Cung Le Kickboxing fights to promoting a Heavyweight Grand Prix, I have faith in Rich Chou's abilities and truly believe that MMA in the United States is not UFC or the Highway. The story of Strikeforce proves that there is hope for a

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smart promoter, now all we can do is sit back and hope that ProElite is a smart promoter.