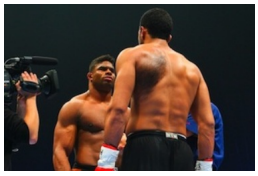

On Saturday December 5th, 2009 at the Yokohama Arena in Yokohama, Japan, one of the pivotal matches in K-1 history occured. A match that will be talked about and referenced for many years to come. Normally, a fight of this magnitude involves long-standing legends of the sport. Fighters such as Peter Aerts, Ernesto Hoost, Mike Bernardo or the late great Andy Hug. But not this one. This battle would be between a young gun by the name of Badr Hari and an outsider. A fighter known in other areas of the combat sports world that sought to add a K-1 title to his resume. While this fight could have been just another in the long history of kickboxing, it quickly became so much more.

Alistair Overeem started his kickboxing career at 17 years of age. He then moved on to fighting under the K-1 banner in 2001. Achieving little success, Overeem decided to concentrate on MMA full time. His next return to the K-1 ring would be on December 31st, 2008 at Dynamite!!. Alistair knocked-out Badr Hari in their fight and started one of the sports most intriguing rivalries. After Badr turned down a match under MMA rules, Alistair decided to further pursue his K-1 career and enter the running for one of combat sports most exclusive titles, the K-1 World Grand Prix. Alistair would go on to lose a close decision to Remy Bonjasky at the Yokohama GP in March of 2009. After being voted in as a fan favorite to compete in the Final 16, Alistair defeated the legendary Peter Aerts. This punched his ticket to the World Grand Prix. What would follow was so much more than just a fight.

It's December 4th and the stage is set for the pre-fight press conference. After the first set of fighters are introduced and they address the media, the second wave of combatants enter the room for their pictures, staredowns, and comments. Sure, Errol Zimmerman, Ruslan Karaev, Semmy Schilt, Ewerton Teixeira, and Remy Bonjasky are there, but the buzz in the room was for two fighters: Badr Hari and Alistair Overeem. What will they say? How will they approach each other?

Badr is first up and says what most fighters say at this time - that he's excited to be fighting and has trained very hard. He then acknowledges that Karaev, who he'll meet in the quarterfinals, is an exciting fighter and that he hopes their fight will be epic.

Alistair then steps to the podium and repeats much of the same rhetoric that Badr does. Then, in a brilliant bit of provocation, Michael 'The Voice' Schiavello asks Alistair to expound on what he had previously said about MMA being harder than K-1. Overeem then reinforced that statement and proclaimed he could defeat any K-1 fighter in a MMA fight in two to three minutes. This was met with a string of boos and some applause. After the translation, Alistair said that Badr already declined a fight under MMA rules and he opened the opportunity to any other K-1 fighter that would like to take advantage of it. Once again, more boos. The crowd in attendance clearly doesn't side with Alistair.

Seeing an opportunity to add an immeasurable amount of drama to this fight, Badr raises his hand, like a child in elementary school, for permission from Schiavello to speak. Permission is granted and he approaches the podium and is clearly picking his words as he addresses the media. Hari acknowledges that Alistair won their first fight and that he has done well in K-1. What came next was the sound byte that would define this whole tournament. "If he gets through the first fight against Teixeira, then I promise that he won't make it to until three minutes in the kickboxing ring with me this time." Badr turns to his right and bows to Alistair as the crowd goes wild for Badr, even starting a BADR - BADR chant. It's very clear whose side the public at-large is on. It's Alistair Overeem against Badr Hari and the K-1 world.

After Ewerton Teixeira, Semmy Schilt, and Errol Zimmerman address the media, it's Remy Bonjasky, the current K-1 WGP champion's turn to speak. Remy talks some about Errol and how he is a hungry, young fighter and even said that Zimmerman copied his flying kicks from him but he's ok with it. Schiavello then cuts to the chase and declares Remy the defender of the faith for K-1 and asks him his opinion on what Alistair had to say about MMA versus K-1. It can't be overstated how well Michael ran that press conference and asked all the right questions. Remy goes on to say that it's not only his job to defend K-1's honor but every fighter that will be in attendance that weekend. Remy believes that Alistair is treating K-1 as a part-time job and that he wants to take the title back to MMA. Then, in what could be considered a desperate plea, Bonjasky asks all fighters to "Beat Alistair, please!" This statement is met with more applause as Remy takes a seat.

Alistair, not to be outdone, arises to take the podium, without asking for permission as Badr did, and clearly has a rebuttal to Remy's outcry. After Schiavello quiets the boos brought on by Alistair taking the mic, Overeem says that with due respect to the fighters, many are afraid of

him and to "Do your best. I wish all of you luck."

This was all well and good but the buildup between Badr 'Golden Boy' Hari and Alistair 'The Reem' Overeem will be for nothing if they don't meet in the semi's. Thankfully, Badr defeated Ruslan Karaev in 38 seconds and Alistair brutally knocked-out Ewerton Teixeira leaving both men fresh and ready for what's sure to be a cataclysmic fight in the semifinals.

Alistair enters first and he looks somewhat anxious, if not a bit nervous. The enormity of the moment had to be staggering. He had been making very bold statements and the time had come to put up or shut up against one of the sports most luminous stars. Even the normally calm Overeem may have been just a little caught up in what was about to happen.

Badr enters second and is carrying the honor of the sport he loves upon his very capable shoulders. It was time to vindicate the K-1 world and he was the man destined to do it. A loss here would be a huge blow to not only Hari but the sport of kickboxing. With every victory, Alistair was making good on his statements that irked so many fighters before.

The fight starts calmly as both are very respectful of each others skills. Badr moves in to land a combination and Alistair clinches then dumps Badr to the ground in stunningly quick fashion. They exchange strikes with neither fighter doing a large amount of damage. Badr moves in to land another combination and Alistair throws him to the turnbuckle like a child. The strength of Alistair is incredible. He is showing that he'll win the strength battle. Apparently, Badr didn't appreciate that happening a second time as he knocks down Alistair with a right hand after the stand-up. The crowd roars with excitement as the referee gives Alistair an 8 count. Hari smells blood and goes after Alistair, mixing in body shots and kicks with his punches. Badr used this to seal the win as he pushed Alistair back towards the corner with punches that seemed to knock Overeem off-balance before that pivotal high-kick ended the fight at :47 of the first round. Well within Badr's promise of beating Alistair inside of three minutes.

This fight had everything needed for it to be one of the all-time best. The storyline could not have been written any better. The glory of K-1 being defended by one of its tough young fighters

against a more than capable foe. An instant classic.

Alistair has went on to have much success in the K-1 world. He's the reigning 2010 World Grand Prix champion and has won over the hearts of fans all over the world. He is a very popular fighter in Japan and his popularity will only grow in the America's through the upcoming Strikeforce Heavyweight World Grand Prix. I believe Badr will be back fighting this year and maybe we'll see the rubber match in this very exciting rivalry. We can only hope.