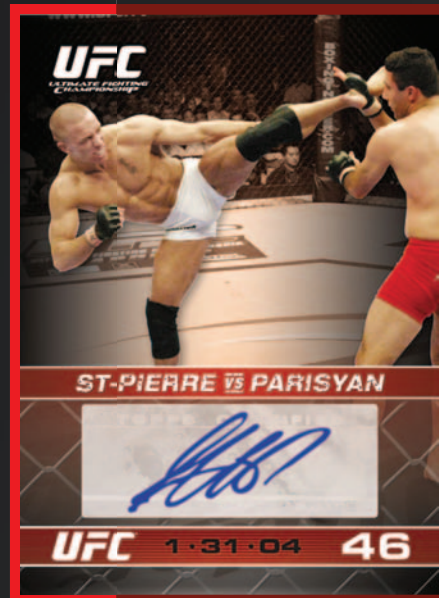


## ◆ UFC INTERVIEW

# ONE ROUND WITH GEORGES ST-PIERRE

◆ By David Lee



UFC welterweight champion Georges St-Pierre, simply known as GSP to his fans, isn't much on material things. In fact, he keeps his championship belt in his closet. As one of the most celebrated champions in mixed martial arts today, the 27-year-old fighter is all about, as he says, fighting for the name.

He also is building his name in the collectibles industry, with cards already released in two products within one year, including the new Topps UFC Round 1 set. In combination with our review of the first UFC-licensed card product, we caught up with GSP to talk about his rise to the top of the fastest-growing sport in America, and to get his opinion on mixed martial arts entering the trading card world.

**BSCM:** Take us through your martial arts background and how it brought you to the UFC.

**Georges St-Pierre:** "I started martial arts when I was 7 years old. My dad used to teach me. I went to a school and competed a lot when I was young. I had a problem at school growing up. I was picked on by older teenagers. I [took martial arts] to defend myself. I started to compete professionally when I was 19. After that, I did very well and was recruited by the UFC."

**BSCM:** What made you want to become a professional fighter?

**GSP:** "Growing up, I was a big fan of Jean-Claude Van Damme and 'Bloodsport.' I always wanted to be champion in some sort

of martial arts. The UFC is the ultimate proving ground."

**BSCM:** Are MMA fighters best professional athletes in the world today?

**GSP:** "I don't know about that. I respect every athlete in every sport. It demands a lot of sacrifice to be on top. What we do, it's like a triathlon of combat sports. It's not only judo, it's not only wrestling, it's not only boxing — it's all mixed together."

**BSCM:** What sets you apart from other fighters?

**GSP:** "I'm not the best at something — I'm not the best striker, I'm not the best grappler — but I can do pretty much everything very well. And I always come very prepared for a fight."

**BSCM:** You are regarded as one of the most athletic fighters in MMA. Is your athleticism something that you realized early in your career that would be a big asset for you?

**GSP:** "I train in different disciplines. I train in boxing, and some of my training partners are former world champions. I train with pure wrestlers, and some of my training partners rank at the top in the world. I go to Brazil and train with jiu-jitsu guys who are world champions. I train in all areas of the game and with the best guys in every single discipline. I think that's what makes me improve more than someone who only trains with the same team all the time."

**BSCM:** What's more satisfying: winning a championship for the first time, or defending it multiple times?

**GSP:** "Every time is something different. When I won it for the first time, it was great because it was something I didn't have. But now I don't fight for the belt. I fight for the name. I want to keep challenging myself. I want to make a legacy. I don't want to fight for the belt. I need to fight for the name — fight for the challenge that the guy in front of me will give me. I want to fight the best."

**BSCM:** What are your goals at this point in your career?

**GSP:** "I want to take the fight that will give me the most challenge. The fight that people want to see, the one that the people say, 'Hey, is Georges good enough to do this? Is Georges going to be able to step over this obstacle?' That's what drives me in the sport right now. It can be somebody in my weight class, somebody in a higher weight class. That's what I like about it — just keep challenging myself."

**BSCM:** What sports teams and players did you follow growing up, and did you ever collect sports cards of them?

**GSP:** "The Edmonton Oilers, and my favorite player was Wayne Gretzky. I had some [cards], but it was my dad who bought them for me."

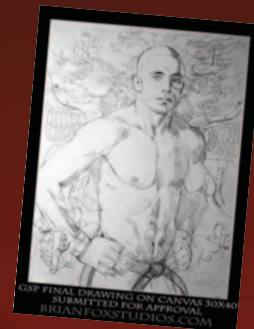
**BSCM:** What are your thoughts on the Topps-UFC partnership?

## Where to Get More GSP

Georges St-Pierre has already appeared in the Donruss Americana II Ring Kings set, with his autographed cards selling for \$50-\$100.

GSP teamed with artist Brian Fox to create limited edition giclées (pictured below) that were unveiled at UFC 94. The artwork is available at St-Pierre's website, [GSPFightClub.com](http://GSPFightClub.com), or [BrianFoxStudios.com](http://BrianFoxStudios.com).

The GSP camp also plans to launch a signature bandanas fashioned after the ones he wears in his entrance to the Octagon.



**GSP:** "I think it's something good for the fans. You can have a souvenir of the fighter. It's a plus."

**BSCM:** What Topps cards have you seen of yourself, and do you plan on collecting them?

**GSP:** "I saw the one where I was fighting Karo Parisyan. It was my first fight in the UFC. It's very nice. I haven't seen any of the other ones. I don't really collect them, but I enjoy when someone shows it to me."

**BSCM:** Are you a willing autograph signer?

**GSP:** "I never refuse a picture or an autograph signing for fans. It's because of them that we can do this job."

**BSCM:** What fighters did you look up to before you got to the UFC?

**GSP:** "Royce Gracie was my all-time favorite. I just came back from Denver and one of my friends gave me an autograph picture with a message saying, 'To the champ, GSP, fight a good fight! It's something that I put on my wall!'"

**BSCM:** Do you keep some of the equipment that you've worn throughout your fighting career?

**GSP:** "No, I don't really keep it. As a matter of fact, the funny thing is, my belt is in my closet. For me, the most important thing is the souvenir that I keep of the moment. That's something that no one will ever be able to steal from me. The belt and other things are only material."

**BSCM:** Are there enough up-and-coming fighters to grow the sport and licensed collectibles like the Topps product?

**GSP:** "Oh, yeah. It's getting more and more popular. I think it's the fastest-growing sport, and it's just the beginning."

**BSCM:** You just beat B.J. Penn, who is the UFC lightweight champion. So what's next for you?

**GSP:** "Thiago Alves is the No. 1 contender. He is a great challenge for me."



# Knockout or Tap Out?

A complete review of 2009 Topps UFC Round 1



## Quick Facts

**Availability:** Hobby-only product; also available at UFC events and UFC.com

**Packs per Box:** 16

**Cards per Pack:** 8

**SRP per Pack:** \$5

**Hits per Box:** Three autographs and three memorabilia cards

## What We Pulled:

**Autographs:** Manny Gamburyan, Roger Huerta, Ben Saunders

**Ultimate Gear Relics:** Thiago Silva

**Fight Mat Relics:** Joe Stevenson vs. Luke Cummo, Josh Burkman vs. Sammy Morgan

**Top 10 Fights of 2008:** Diaz vs. Pellegrino, Kelly vs. Taylor, Pellegrino vs. Tavares, St-Pierre vs. Fitch

**Top 10 Fights of 2008 Gold:** Pellegrino vs. Tavares

**Victorious Debuts:** Rashad Evans, Cain Velasquez, Yushin Okami, Clay Guida

**Base Gold Parallel:** Fabricio Werdum, Arianny Celeste, Chris Leben, Rameau Sokoudjou, Ed Herman, Chuck Liddell, George Sotiropoulos, Matt Riddle

**Base Silver Parallel:** Joe Rogan, Spencer Fisher, Evan Tanner, Chris Leben, Cheick Kongo

## Tale of the Tape

It was just a matter of time before one of the major card companies got a license to produce the first Ultimate Fighting Championship cards. It turned out to be the company that has been in the game for more than 50 years.

With Topps UFC Round 1, America's fastest-growing sport meets one of its most passionate hobbies. The clash makes us wonder if this will cause some mixed martial arts fans to become collectors, or cause collectors to become mixed martial arts fans. Perhaps it will be a little bit of both. If so, Topps could have a winner on its hands.



The product is pretty simple, with a 99-card base set that features fighters' debut matches in the UFC. There also are a few announcers, referees and the lovely Octagon Girls. The photos, which are borderless on the sides and top, are from each fighter's debut match, going all the way back to the first ever UFC fight with Hall of Famer Royce Gracie.

More than 30 fighters signed autographs for the product, including champions such as Georges St-Pierre, Anderson Silva, B.J. Penn, and Hall of Famers Gracie and Randy Couture. There also are memorabilia cards with pieces of Octagon mat from specific fights and fighter-worn gear.

Inserts include cards depicting the best fights of

2008, including Forest Griffin vs. Rampage Jackson and Georges St-Pierre vs. Jon Fitch. Victorious Debut depicts fighters who won their first official UFC bout.

Topps UFC Round 1 is available at hobby shops, UFC events and UFC.com. Topps says that future UFC releases will be available in retail outlets. Packs carry a \$5 SRP. Presale boxes were going for a little more than \$100 on eBay one week before the product went live — that's more than \$20 above the SRP.

Plans are already in the works for another UFC release. Topps was at the filming of "The Ultimate Fighter 9" to conduct a photo shoot and autograph signing with the show's 16 up-and-coming fighters. The photography and autographs acquired there will be incorporated into the second UFC set.

## What We Think

### Photos



The base photos really show the history of the UFC — which celebrated its 15th year last November. Some of the pictures accurately depict the intense nature of the sport, such as card #19 of a bloody-faced Forrest Griffin landing a punch on Stephan Bonnar. One of Topps' goals, since this was the first UFC set and the first trading cards for most of these fighters, was to feature each fighter's first UFC fight.



Many of the older photos are fuzzy. Most of the base photos also don't clearly show the featured fighter's face, which should be a priority in a card product that introduces a sport and its athletes to the card collecting community. The debut fight theme works, but it would be nice to get a better view of the fighters.

### Design



The big photos are nice, but Topps could have done a better job of capturing the culture of mixed martial arts in the overall design. The Donruss Americana Ring Kings set did a great job of this. The design of the parallel cards are the same as the base cards expect for a little bit of different foil color and a thicker card stock.

### Autographs



There's a solid autograph list, with the biggest names falling about 1:120 packs. Although on-card signatures would have been better, the clear stickers are not distracting.



The debut fight theme carries throughout the product, which gets a little exhausting. The autographed cards would have been better had they featured a single-fighter picture. The list is also missing some of the bigger names in MMA, such as UFC heavyweight

champ Brock Lesnar, and former champions Chuck Liddell, Tito Ortiz and Matt Hughes.

### Memorabilia



More than 20 fighters have fighter-worn memorabilia cards in Ultimate Gear. The autographed versions are very tough pulls, falling about one every 22 boxes.

The Fight Mat Relic set features 25 fights with pieces of actual Octagon mat from the featured fight.



The one thing about fighters — they don't wear much during their matches, so making memorabilia cards of them will be tough. On the flip side, memorabilia cards saturate the hobby anyway, so this could actually be a good thing.

### Box Value



Boxes should sell for around \$80, and pulling three autographs and three memorabilia cards in each is a pretty sweet deal. Perhaps it was part of the licensing deal,

but limiting this product to hobby outlets seems odd. A product like this that could pull in a new segment of a growing sports scene seems like it would do well at the retail level where more MMA fans would likely pick it up.

### What You Think

Collectors were asked on Beckett.com how they think Topps UFC will fare in the hobby. Here's what they said:

"I think the UFC is gaining in popularity and has a large audience base already. There will be people who will embrace the product, especially if they offer the opportunity for game-used and autographs like the mainstream sports lines do."  
- Mikael1963

"It will be like Pokemon, Beanie Babies — good for a year, maybe two or three, then they're worth nothing. I am staying completely away from the product."  
- Alstott9Adams

"I'm an avid MMA fan, and to see this come into the card collecting world is pretty cool. The six hits you get per box will be nice. I just hope they don't overload the game-used and autos. I think it will carry over better if they stick to their high-end stars for those."  
- Apocalypse 4594

