

# COMRADES IN ARMBARS

## FIGHTLAND BLOG

(tratto da <http://fightland.vice.com/blog/comrades-in-armbars>)

In the lead-up to the UFC's first-ever women's fight, between bantamweight champion Ronda Rousey and Liz Carmouche, reporters are interviewing them and every other female fighter they can find in an attempt to dig up some malice to report, some kind of drama -- the same way they would with any other fight. What they're finding instead is a whole lot of love.

Rousey, who has made an art out of trash-talking her opponents, can't find anything bad to say about Carmouche, a retired Marine and the first openly homosexual fighter in the UFC. "Liz is the type of girl that will not be intimidated," she's said. "I've got a lot of respect for the girl ... I respect her so much that I'm going to give her the fight of her life because that's what she would want." The champ even has a **friendly offer** for her challenger: "I'm still gonna see if her and her girlfriend want to go surfing after the fight, regardless of the outcome."

Carmouche, for her part, has been nothing but charming. In interviews, she politely says she thinks she's going to surprise Rousey, but she has no insults to throw. Even after acknowledging that she thinks UFC President Dana White wants Rousey to win, **Carmouche** is philosophical about her role in the larger scheme of things. Rousey, she said, is "a pioneer, she's paving the way. And I think that if she wasn't getting that attention, maybe the fight wouldn't get the publicity that it needs for people to really get involved in it. So I'm not gonna hate on her. She's doing exactly what we need to get in the UFC and to keep it moving forward."

Other female fighters are being equally supportive. Tara LaRosa, one of women's MMA's earliest stars, acknowledged **in a recent interview** with *Fightland* that she's had a different reaction to the first women's UFC fight than she would have in the past. "I am so proud of where the sport has come and what we (women fighters) have done," she said. "It's been a collective thing. It took me a little while to come to that realization. Six or seven years ago, I was like, 'I want to be the top dog, I want to be the best, I want to be the one who makes it big.'"

Even **Invicta's** straw-weight champion, Carla Esparza, who is helping Carmouche train for her title fight, refuses to take anything away from Rousey because "she's a phenom and her armbars are just awesome."

What exactly is going on with this outpouring of love and support? Isn't this supposed to be professional fighting?

**At the gym where I spar and the bars where I watch fights, whenever the topic of professional women's MMA comes up, there are always comments about how women are fundamentally *different* from men. Everybody I fight with is fully in support of women's MMA, but we can't seem to talk about it without making sweeping generalizations about gender. And the main generalization seems to be that female fighters are simply nicer to one another than male fighters are. Could that actually be true? Are we sweeter, more community-oriented, less ego-driven, and more likely to want to be BFFs than men -- even when we're trying to knock each other's heads off?**

**"It's a bigger community among the men," Esparza tells me. "They have a gym of 40 or 50 guys they can talk to. But the men can never understand what we go through and how it feels to be in women's MMA. Cutting weight as a woman is a little bit different. We learn different. We're in a sport where we have to deal with sexism."**

**Esparza now says she counts a large community of female fighters as close friends, including ones**

she's fought. After her 2011 defeat of Felice Herrig, Herrig's manager contacted Esparza about the two fighters training together. "Felice is one of my **best friends** now," Esparza says. "There are so few women of higher caliber to train with at your weight. We're always training with guys." After Esparza and Bec Hyatt **beat the hell out of each other** for five rounds for the Invicta straw-weight belt this past January, they partied together like the best of friends (see picture above). It all gives one the impression that female fighters are just more, well, *female* about it all.

Even Michelle "The Karate Hottie" Waterson, who is skeptical about the whole idea of making friends out of potential opponents ("I'm friends with the women in my gym, but you can't be friends with everybody ... you're gonna be fighting them sooner or later"), says that because "the female side of the sport is so new and young. ... we have to have each other's back."

So maybe female fighters *do* act differently because they're female. But it's not because their hormones tell them that they need to build a community or be friendly so as not to scare off men or generally just make the sport safe enough for baby-raising. It's not because women are softer. They act differently because they're manipulating a system that wasn't built for them — a system they have to work together to change. Even when they're studying each other's weaknesses and coming up with the best way to kick each other in the head, smart women fighters realize that they depend on one another to put on a good show and make women's MMA viable in the market. They feel the same pressures the men feel to be good fighters, but they have the added pressure of making sure that there are enough of them fighting impressive enough fights to keep the sport alive.

After Ronda Rousey and Liz Carmouche fight and more women's fights show up on UFC cards, we'll probably start seeing the old juicy drama and trash-talking return to women's MMA. For now, though, Rousey doesn't see the point. "Because it's a first-time event, because [it's] the first time for women to fight on a UFC card, and she's the first openly gay fighter, [there] doesn't need to be any squabbling or argument," Rousey said recently. "It's an extraordinarily positive thing; we don't need an argument to push it. It's a positive event and I don't mind there being no arguments. It sells itself. It's history." I ask Carla Esparza whether she thinks that community feeling will disintegrate if women's MMA gains a more solid footing.

"I hope not," she says. "The men's side is always going to be bigger. I don't think the women's community will completely go away. I think it will even get stronger because we're growing together."