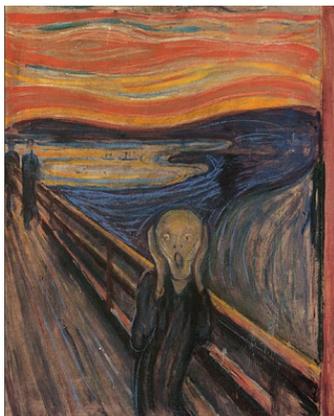


Leaked! Ultimate Women Challenge Disaster: Filming Plagued by Lack of Food, Funds & Training

By Yael Grauer



Some behind-the-scene information from the set of Ultimate Women Challenge has emerged, and it ain't pretty. The show was marketed as a women's MMA-based reality show along the lines of the Ultimate Fighter, but has gained notoriety for allegedly withholding payment from both the talent and the crew. And it gets worse. Sources close to MMA HQ reveal what really took place during the filming of the show, which makes it sound more like a hostage situation than an MMA-based reality television show. Here's some of the highlights as revealed by multiple people.

Food? What Food?

The sixteen women arrived in the house and found a distinct lack of food. In fact, there was no food aside from canned beans, mayonnaise, chips, energy drinks, soda and various condiments...not even enough to feed a single person for a week, let alone sixteen athletes who had to ration the food available the entire time they were in the house.

Gear? Training? Who needs it?

The clothing and training gear which the women were told would be provided wasn't there, and apparently Lyle Howry and the producers of the show didn't care about the fighters' training schedule, either. The fighters were not able to go to the gym on more than a handful of occasions because the show was so badly understaffed. To make matters worse, they weren't allowed to jog in the cul-de-sac at first, and when they were finally granted permission they had to schedule a jog and wait around for the production crew to show up and get footage of the jogs.

Look at the camera! Wait, don't look at the camera!

Although they didn't get to train or eat properly, some things were eventually taken care of. Penny

Buffington was initially supposed to be the house mom, but the fighters and crew were told that she was sick and sent home. (Rumor was that this was due to her being cross-eyed and not looking good on camera.)

Marissa Rodrigues was called in to replace her. Throwdown eventually provided gear. (Although many sources claim they were never reimbursed for it, Howry says they were paid back). And one person, Lou, who worked on the set of the Ultimate Fighter, did the best that he could, often paying out of pocket to cover expenses. “Lou and Marissa were [the women’s] knights in shining armor. They were the only people that kept it together,” one source stated.

“Challenges”

The format of the show ended up being a lot of different than first presented. Rather than focusing on combat sports, the focus was on a series of physical challenges, in which somebody had the brilliant idea of pairing up all of the 125-lb. women to face off against the 135-lbers. Obviously, the 135-lb. ladies had a considerable size, height and strength advantage. It also meant that women were in teams with all of the other ladies in their respective weight classes, and had to room with them rather than mixing it up.

Get Your Party On

After all 16-women were crammed into non-air-conditioned van which would comfortably seat 8 to participate in challenges favoring one team, the winners were “rewarded” by getting taken to a bar. Apparently the show producers thought it’d be a great idea to have elite level fighters partying rather than training.

It Get Worse

Fighters had to ask permission to use the bathroom (and were sometimes told they weren’t allowed), and some needed medical treatment for various conditions but were not immediately taken to the hospital when asked. In addition, they were regularly yelled at and called names by the producers and the crew and threatened with “consequences.”

Smile for the camera!

The fighters were also promised the chance to do community service but were not able to until the end, even though they were sitting around and unable to train. At one point they were secluded in the house for 5 days straight with no training. Out of the entire 6 weeks they were in the house, the amount of days they got to train was just 16. Although the ladies did get to volunteer at St. Jude's, sources close to MMA HQ stated that Howry did not, in fact, donate \$10,000 to the orphanage as he had stated. "He didn't even tip the waitresses when we went to the Playboy Club," multiple sources revealed.

Field Trip!

Although the girls were barely taken to the gym to train and were only taken to the grocery store one time, Lyle Howry and the other show producers did find time to arrange makeovers, as well as field trips to a gun store and trampoline store—and various other people Howry promised to get on TV. The girls were also asked to participate in advertisements for products such as the Abrocker and Provestra, a libido enhancer for middle age women. Apparently, politicians were filmed holding up a check representing money that would be donated to fight ovarian cancer, but no donation was ever made. "They never donated money for anything. It was a total lie," a source revealed.

Got Fight?

After several weeks of subpar food, degrading treatment and a distinct lack of training, the women were supposed to fight. Many of these athletes, who were used to training twice a day before the filming of the show, were over weight. No sauna suits were provided, making a weight cut difficult, but to make matters worse the producers decided that weight cut day would be an appropriate time to film these fighters eating a meal. Yes, you read right. On weight cut day, the women were forced to go to a restaurant.

The Fights

Sanctioned fights did take place on the show, but were described as extremely unorganized. "The coaches had to go back and forth between women," a source revealed. "Whoever was warming up one fighter had to go to the other corner to warm the other person up."

Lyle Howry's Response

When asked if fighters and crew were paid, he said, "I can't comment on that because there's a lot of legal litigation going on, and I can't tell you anything on that. Period. All I can say is there was problems on set but things are getting worked out." Sources state that although the fighters were given a \$1,000 sign-on bonus, they were not given their per diem or other monies owed to them. Instead, they are continually given dates they would get paid by, which continue to be changed to future dates. Howry denied the lack of food in the house. "We stocked that house full of so much food it was unbelievable. In fact, they wasted tons of food," he said, adding that they "were spending a thousand dollars every other day on glamorous things."

Howry also denied that the women were not training regularly at the gym. "That's completely false," he said. "The women trained twice a day."

"The show is like a lot of shows that have had financial problems," he said. "There were snaffs on set with the footage. As far as the girls being taken care of, I can tell you this; they were taken care of like queens."

As for when the show will air, Howry said, "We obviously missed our airing date due to some stuff that happened on the set. You can check back with me after the pay stuff gets worked out." He would not comment on what 'pay stuff' was involved, and proceeded to describe his "army of lawyers" that would be released if "unaccurate stuff" was "printed about the show." "I am losing millions of dollars at this point because of stupid rumors, and they're unaccurate. a lot of them," he said.

Howry could not comment on many other specifics. "I can't disclose any of that stuff because the show has not aired and there's a lot of litigation going on and non-confidentialities," he stated.

Howry could not confirm or deny rumors of the sound crew ripping wiring out of the house due to lack of pay. Rumors that the production crew held tapes hostage could not be confirmed or denied, but Howry said "there are stolen tapes on the set, but it doesn't have anything to do with pay."

Howry did seem to be particularly concerned about the tapes, as indicated by a voicemail message in which he asked for my attorney's number, which seems to be standard operating procedure for the

show. “The reason I need your attorney’s number is because the insurance company is going to locate you to find out who’s putting out these rumors, especially about these tapes. If you don’t comply, you can be held for fraud. I’m not going to play this game. This is a serious issue on tapes and it has a serious effect on this show. You need to give me your attorney’s number and I need to deal with it like that, okay?” he said. “I also need to know exactly what you’re going to print before you print it,” he added.

Howry originally stated the show will be syndicated on select NBC-operated stations. Whether it ever sees the light of day remains to be seen. Stay tuned for more details as they become available.