

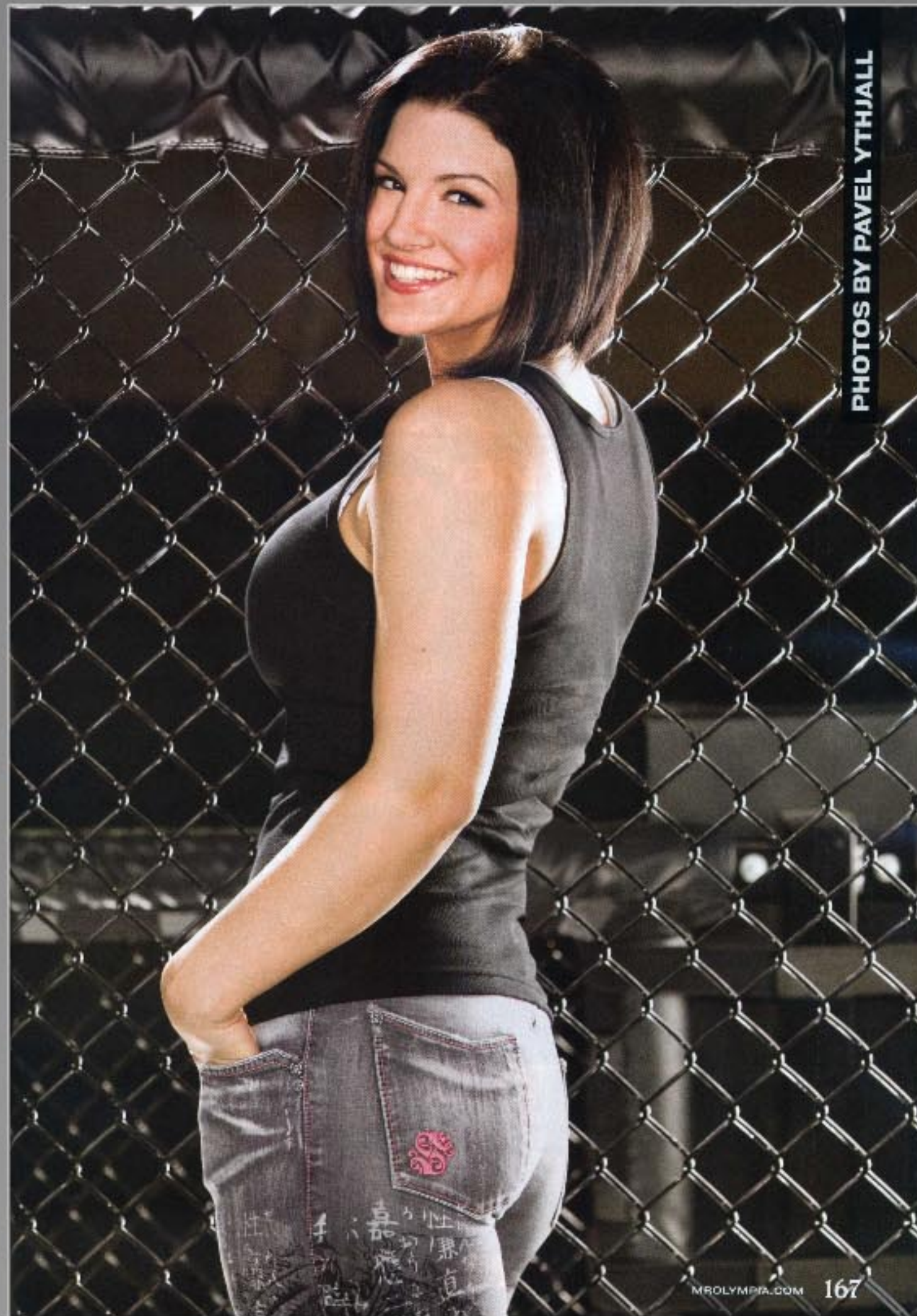
PROFILE

# CAGED BEAUTY

Personable and powerful, MMA fistress and *American Gladiators* star Gina Carano is the nicest girl who'll ever kick your ass



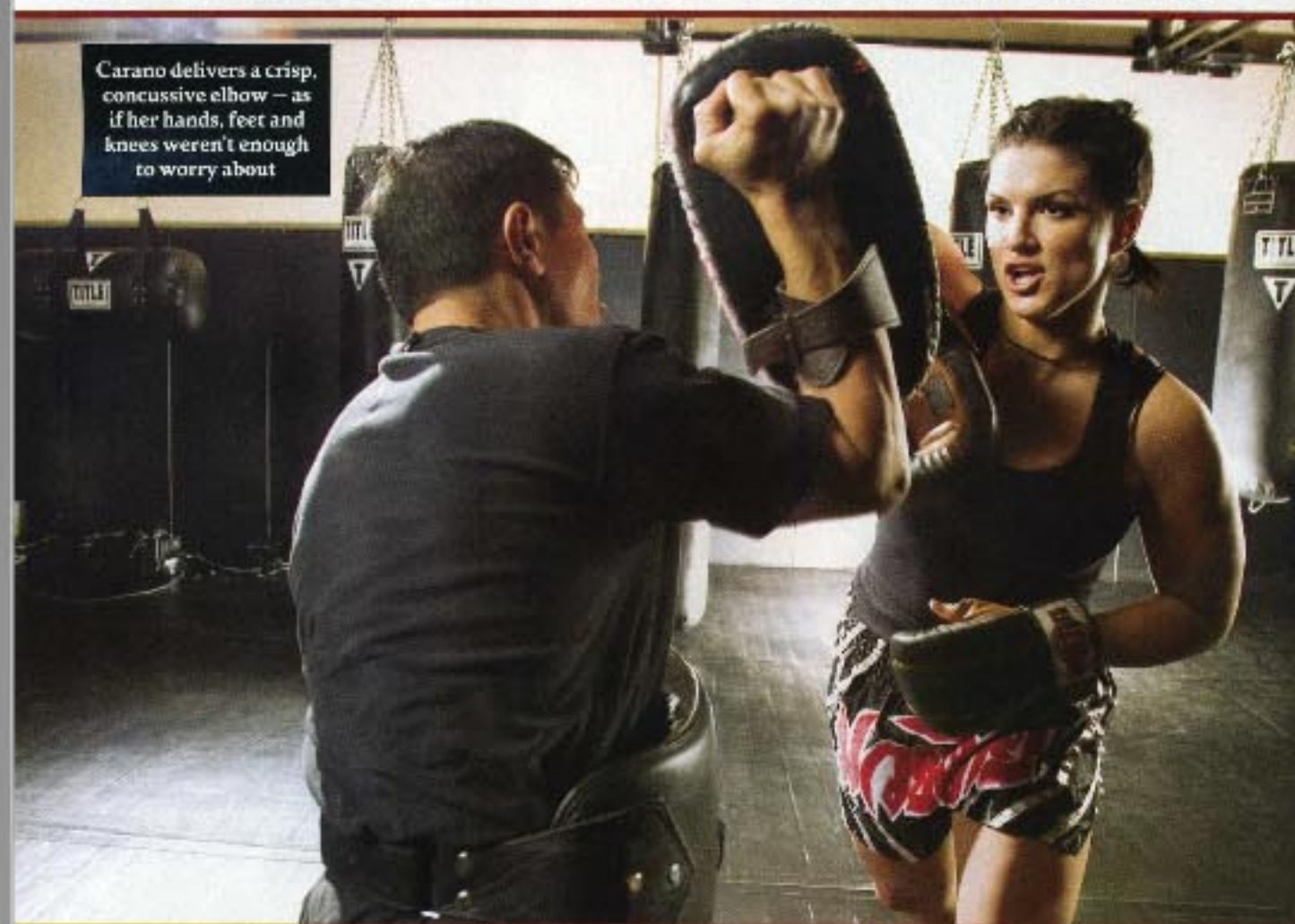
BY ERIC VELAZQUEZ



PHOTOS BY PAVEL YTHJALL

### Let's be clear about one thing right up front:

Gina Carano is the baddest woman on the planet. We realize that the demure, dimple-framed smile and girl-next-door looks seen on the previous page may seem to contradict that billing, but it's true. Doubt at your own discretion. ¶ A delightful blend of femininity and ferocity, Carano can definitely throw mad hands (and feet and knees). But it hasn't always been bright lights and big crowds for the wildly popular MMA star and *American Gladiators* cast member. It used to be that Carano's fistic fury was showcased only when solicited.



Carano delivers a crisp, concussive elbow — as if her hands, feet and knees weren't enough to worry about

"My friends and I were at a bar one night and this girl had a huge problem with me because she thought I was flirting with her friend's boyfriend, which I wasn't," Carano recalls. "I just ignored her, and that made her that much angrier with me for whatever reason. So she started verbally attacking my roommate, who's very petite.

That's when she got my attention.

"The bouncers knew I wasn't the troublemaker, and they started escorting that girl out the back way. I wanted to fight her, but the bouncers held me back and told me to forget about it and not to go outside. But I was so frustrated that I took off my heels, left them inside and went around to the

back where she was. By myself."

Carano, the lone defender of her roommate's honor, confronted the girl — along with her drunken, belligerent posse — by knuckling the Zima out of her pores.

"I punched her, mounted her and started throwing some bombs," she says with a giggle. "But then one of her



friends grabbed me by the hair and completely swung me off her, and then the bouncers got there.

"But I'm prouder of the stuff I've done in the ring since."

As well she should be. Easily the hottest female fighter — as much in appearance as in rising popularity — in the ever-emergent world of mixed martial arts, Carano held a squeaky-clean record of 5-0 (two knockouts, one submission) in the cage at presstime, and was part of the first-ever Showtime-televised, sanctioned MMA female fight card in Southaven, Mis-

#### STRIKE THE SILENCE

That's about the sum of Carano — answering the bell for any challenge. When she was picked for a transition from Muay Thai into MMA, many saw her as an easy mark. "Just get her on the ground and submit her," was the prevailing report on the cage rookie. But her detractors ignored a vital part of her background.

"Of course, you need to train and become more versed with the ground stuff like jiu-jitsu and wrestling, but my transition was natural because growing up I was always wrestling around with



#### "I have a natural body, very natural muscle. I've always been athletic," Carano says

issippi, in February 2007. (Carano was scheduled to fight in the CBS TV premiere of EliteXC's *Saturday Night Fights* on May 31.) Before catching on with the MMA circuit, she built a record of 12-1-1 in Muay Thai fighting. It's understandable, then, that she has become the poster girl for Pro-Elite's growing stable of fighters. But how does a girl like Carano — affable, modest and funny — end up earning her keep in the tumultuous world of the combative arts?

Her foray into the world of fighting came when a Muay Thai instructor made a remark about her weight.

"I walked into a gym one day to watch my then-boyfriend's Muay Thai training, and one of the Thai trainers came up to me and said, 'Oh, baby, baby, you fat, you need to lose weight!'" she says, doing her best Thai accent. "I just figured anybody can give you crap about losing weight, but this Thai man had nothing to gain or lose from saying it. That pushed me to sign up for 20 lessons, and I haven't stopped since."

the guys and arm-wrestling them," she says. "So when [my opponents] thought they could just take me down and submit me, that didn't necessarily happen. They didn't know I've got a background in tomboy!"

Her first MMA opponent, Leiticia Pestova, found that out the hard way, missing a shot at a takedown only to end up on the mat herself. Carano was the one in the mount position, in which she rained punches onto Pestova's face and head in pistonlike fashion until the referee called a halt. One fight, one knockout — Carano was starting her MMA career by silencing critics.

#### SMILE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

These days, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone with reservations about Carano's potential inside the ring or out, largely due to her conduct in the cage but in part because they're getting to know her better. Between fights, her team has upped her visibility by maximizing some key opportunities. In 2007, Carano served as a mentor for

(Continued on page 175)



From top: Thanks to her training intensity, Carano never misses weight; a casual stretch before her workout at XTreme Couture in Las Vegas; dedication to her ground game has made Carano a complete fighter; last September, Carano submitted Tonya Evinger via this same rear naked choke



A self-professed tomboy, Carano has gone from playful arm-wrestling to perfecting armbars for a living



## Conditioned Response

GINA CARANO KNOWS THAT IN A FIGHT, GOOD CONDITIONING AND SOLID NUTRITION CAN MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A VICTORY AND A SET OF BUTTERFLY STITCHES ON THE BROW

» On the difference between Muay Thai and mixed martial arts:

"Muay Thai is a lot of stand-up and a lot of striking. So in MMA, the groundwork requires a completely different kind of conditioning. I've had to implement my old-school conditioning with the new. Striking someone is completely different from rolling around on the ground with them."

» On ground training:

"On the ground, we start off with just technique. Then we go into ground sparring — they call it rolling. You can do it for 5–10 minutes and just be completely exhausted."

» On her typical day:

"I've never really looked at the weights. I have a very natural body, very natural muscle, and I've always been athletic. Usually I'll do Pilates and yoga in the morning, and then I work with a strength and conditioning coach in the afternoon at Xtreme Couture in Las Vegas. That doesn't build me up or make me bulky but makes me a bit stronger and works on my stamina and toning a bit."

» On training for a living:

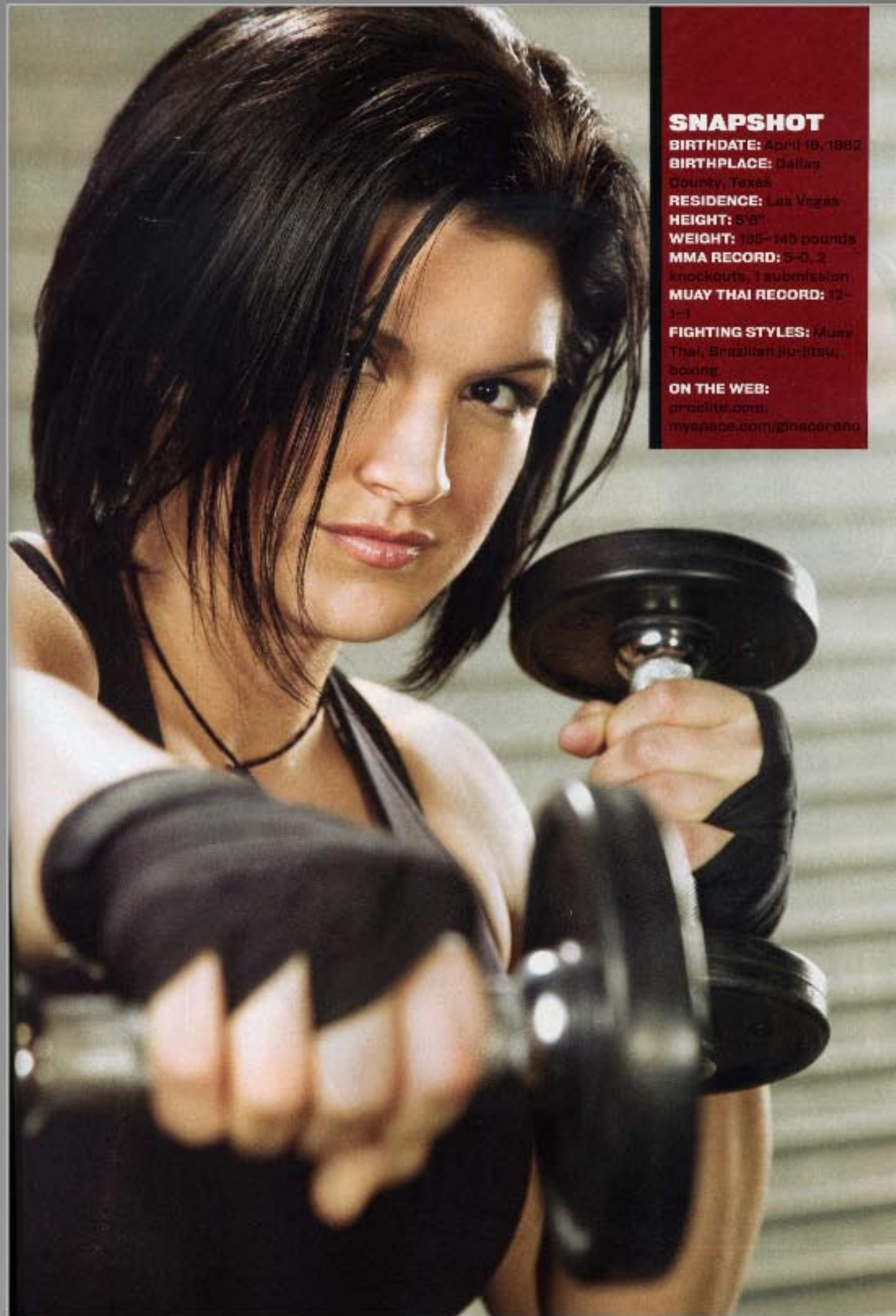
"I have a beautiful, beautiful life. I get to focus on my body, my mind and my spirituality."

» On breaks from training:

"I'm a definite 'work hard, play hard' kind of person. I do this because I love it. I just go by what I think is good for me. I think that taking time to focus on yourself is important."

» On nutrition:

"I used to be such an extremist. I ate just enough to get by when I was training. Then when I wasn't training, I would just eat everything I could. It was like a borderline eating disorder. After my last fight, I realized that I needed a little more balance in my life."



**SNAPSHOT**  
**BIRTHDATE:** April 18, 1982  
**BIRTHPLACE:** Dallas  
County, Texas  
**RESIDENCE:** Las Vegas  
**HEIGHT:** 5'6"  
**WEIGHT:** 135-145 pounds  
**MMA RECORD:** 5-3, 2  
knockouts, 1 submission  
**MUAY THAI RECORD:** 12-  
3-1  
**FIGHTING STYLES:** Muay  
Thai, Brazilian jiu-jitsu,  
boxing  
**ON THE WEB:**  
[profight.com](http://profight.com);  
[myspace.com/ginacarano](http://myspace.com/ginacarano)



**NOW AT M&F ONLINE**



For exclusive video of our Las Vegas photo shoot with Carano, visit [muscleandfitness.com](http://muscleandfitness.com). You can also visit her on her MySpace page at [myspace.com/ginacarano](http://myspace.com/ginacarano).

aspiring Muay Thai fighters on the Oxygen Network's *Fight Girls*. In 2008, she was cast on NBC's reincarnation of *American Gladiators*, where she took on the stage name "Crush."

While Carano plans to return for another season of *AG*, it took her and the producers awhile to find her niche.

"They told me not to smile so much," she says while sporting her signature

Cheshire-cat grin. "It was difficult at times, but they realized my character is just that way — I smile, I have fun, but I can be hardcore at the same time."

But the task of increasing her exposure while still forwarding the cause of women in MMA hasn't come without pointed criticism.

"Some people have said that I'm just a pretty girl who gets attention," she

says. "That's really frustrating. It's also weird for me to hear because I've never thought of myself like that and have never focused on my looks. I've always been real. I'm just a fighter."

So if her opponents get caught up in the fuss over Carano's curves or latest photo shoot, that's fine by her. They can ask for an autograph after they're done taking her beatdown. **M&F**



Clockwise from above: Spinning elbows add another weapon to Carano's already explosive arsenal; with strength and conditioning coach Scott Bieri; a Las Vegas resident, Carano trains exclusively at XTreme Couture; with trainer Wishan Duangisima; yes, that knee is right about chin-level — makes you wonder how much protection a mouthpiece really provides



ABOVE: TANK TOP BY NOROSTROM





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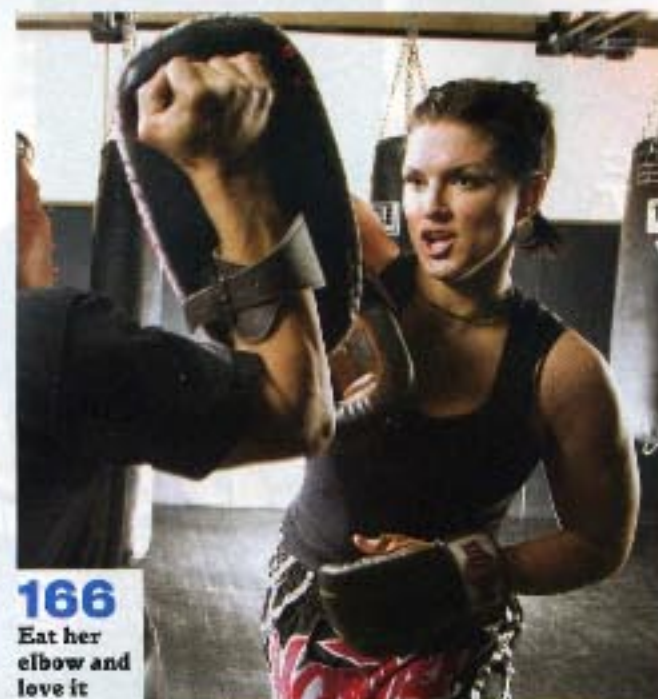
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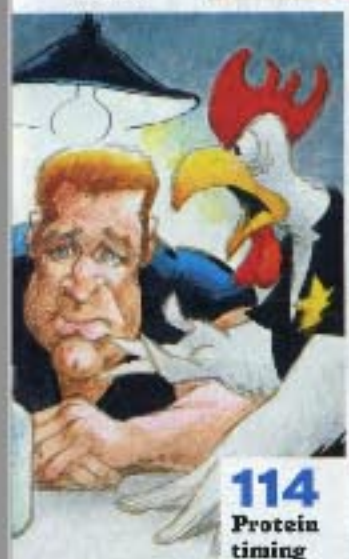
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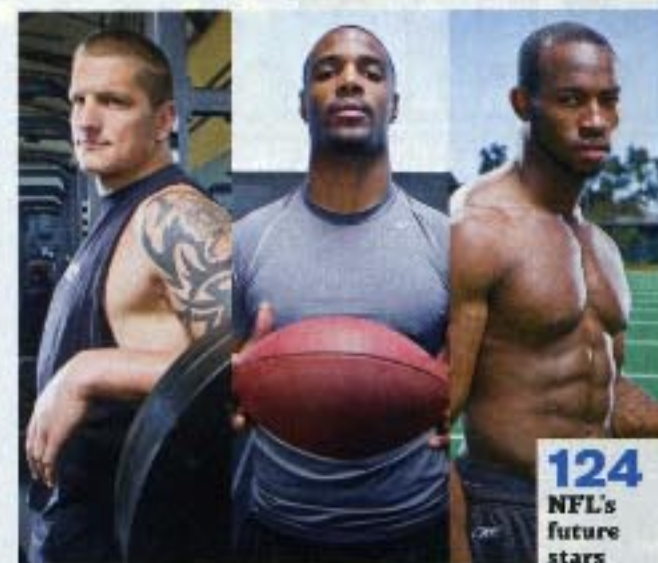
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