THAT PROFILE IS HARD TO IGNORE  the Mohawk, the Asian tattoo on the side of the skull, the steely eyes especially against a backdrop of thousands of screaming fans. Their volume intensifies into a roar when their favorite warrior enters the arena and methodically approaches the center ring, prepared to do battle.

Chuck “The Iceman” Liddell (BUS ’95) makes quite an entrance at the MGM Grand Arena in Las Vegas, a fitting prelude before a fight with another fearsome opponent, played out in front of an audience that includes countless celebrities in the arena and hundreds of thousands of television viewers at home.

The 6-foot-2-inch, 220-pound accounting major held the title of Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) light heavyweight champion for two years, using skills he perfected on the Cal Poly wrestling team to take down opponents. He continues to be a huge draw for UFC’s live, multi-million dollar pay-per-view events.

But his professional world is quite a contrast from domestic life in San Luis Obispo, where the 38-year old father of two still resides and is often seen around town. You may bump into him at the local Starbucks one morning, grabbing a cup of coffee.

The Central Coast has always been home for Liddell and for the most part—life has always been a battle.

Liddell came to Cal Poly on a financial aid scholarship, after serving as a starter on the San Marcos High School football team in Santa Barbara where he grew up. He was raised by a single mother with three siblings. The family was on assisted living. Money was scarce.

That continued when he got to Cal Poly. “I worked full time and went to school, sneaking into the dorms to eat because food was kind of a luxury

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People don’t realize how hard it is to be a college athlete, the dedication it takes, the discipline. I don’t regret it – some of the best memories I have are playing and competing,” recalled Liddell. “People don’t realize how hard it is to be a college athlete, the dedication it takes, the discipline. I don’t regret it – some of the best memories I have are playing and competing,” Liddell said. “What attracted me about wrestling is that it’s an individualized sport – it’s just you against the opponent.”

When I’m fighting, I’m calculating everything, keeping track of their punches and setting them up.”

Liddell worked as a bouncer and bartender downtown while attending Cal Poly. He began studying Kenpo karate with trainer John Hackleman at “The Pit,” a martial arts facility in Arroyo Grande. He continued his training in Koei-Kan karate and embraced its ideals. Ironically, Koei-Kan means “eternal peace and prosperity,” the meaning of the Japanese tattoo on the side of Liddell’s head.

It’s not a stretch for Liddell, who friends and fans describe as “mellow” and “laid back.”

Retired Cal Poly wrestling coach and close friend Lennis Cowell said he is amazed by his former student’s success and the fact that it has never gone out of style. “People don’t realize how generous and humble Chuck is,” said Cowell. “He will always be a permanent part of the Cal Poly wrestling legacy.”

However, one of the biggest challenges of Liddell’s professional career has been fame. He regularly gets hit up, sometimes aggressively, for autographs and photos wherever he goes, whether it’s downtown Manhattan or a small Midwest town. “It’s like that classic Joe Walsh song – ‘everybody’s so different, I haven’t changed,” said Liddell. “One of the biggest reasons I’m still grounded is because I have friends in San Luis Obispo who have known me for 15 years, when I was an average guy working at a bar. Making $50,000 a year was the end of the rainbow back then.”

Now, Liddell is the most recognized face of UFC. He has appeared in the HBO show “Entourage” and the reality show “Ultimate Fighter,” along with other minor roles in television shows and movies. Liddell’s autobiography, “Liddell: My Fighting Life,” was on the New York Times bestseller list earlier this year. He is even a character in a video game.

“I have plenty of fights left in me,” said Liddell. “But I love acting and the process that goes into it.”

Liddell has no intention of ending his fighting career any time soon. But when that time comes, he will leave a permanent mark on the UFC culture, playing a prominent role in moving an underground, controversial sport into the mainstream. He is truly the sport’s first bona-fide star and cultural icon.

“It’s just might be true that the best things in life are free. Ask the folks at the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County or the nonprofit North County Connection agency. These are just a two of many local nonprofit organizations that are benefiting from a small group of Cal Poly journalism students working for free for Central Coast Perspectives, a totally student-run public relations agency.

Now in its sixth year, CCPR is advised by Journalism Professor Doug Swanson, who came on board two years ago. Before Swanson, there was no real consistency for students in the public relations track in the Journalism Department. “If you want to run a PR firm, you need to have the same person overseeing it year after year; there can’t be a revolving door of advisors,” said Swanson.

With a background in “the real world of broadcasting,” Swanson brings to the department a wealth of knowledge and experience. “I’m a jack-of-all-trades media person,” he said. “I’ve worked in radio and TV, at a newspaper and in public relations, so I can go to the students with that additional perspective.”

How fitting that CCPR was created in 2002 by a senior journalism student who insisted that Cal Poly as a learn-by-doing institution needed to give public relations students additional help beyond the classroom setting. CCPR is a required class for journalism students on the public relations track. About 10 to 12 students, all in their final year of school, spend one quarter working for the agency, learning what they couldn’t possibly learn in a classroom. Students would never experience the challenges that clients bring to the equation.

“CCPR has allowed them to have the interpersonal experience with clients they couldn’t get any other way” said Swanson. “Some clients want things that simply aren’t realistic, aren’t possible … they don’t understand public relations. So we work with them to understand PR and how they can use it to help their organization grow.”

The students are providing a valuable service to the community. “These nonprofits don’t get this help anywhere for free,” said Swanson. The students help these agencies in a variety of public relations functions, including locating funding, creating visibility and enhancing accessibility.

Wende David, membership and development manager for the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, has worked with students for several years on the organization’s annual holiday appeal program.

“It’s a really fun partnership because we get to help develop student skills, and they in turn offer a fresh perspective,” David said. “Plus we’re a local nonprofit, so it’s really great have to these collaborative relationships. It enriches San Luis Obispo’s core community by keeping it local and it teaches students the value of strengthening their community.”

Megan Korbel (JOUR) student manager of CCPR, volunteers at least 12 hours a week overseeing the agency, meeting with clients to find a good fit with students, making sure students stay on track, running a weekly staff meeting, generally tying up any loose ends.

“I thought the position would help me develop good man agerial, leadership and public speaking skills,” Korbel said. Plus it looks good on a resume.

“I spend all of my free time with my kids – I realize how lucky I am,” said Liddell. “I’m doing what I love for a living and have been able to call the Central Coast home, living with friends and family nearby. It’s been an incredible ride.”

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