

## SPORTS

## Sorenson completes stunning title comeback

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"I wanted to try kickboxing, cardio kickboxing, so I Googled it, walked into a gym and kind of fell in love with it. I like the fact you can always be better. I like to see progression. No matter how good you are, there's always something you can do a little better, a little cleaner. There's really no end point to it."

That desire for improvement fueled her rise to title contender.

### 'I'm going to see if I can do it or I can't'

Back to this January.

Sorenson had just lost her previous fight two months prior at Invicta FC 32 in four rounds to Felicia Spencer for the vacant featherweight championship.

Eager to get back to the mat following her surgery, Sorenson's doctors told her to expect six to eight weeks of recovery time.

Only, her interpretation of "recovery" was a little different than her doctors.

"They tell you six to eight weeks to recover, so you think, 'I'm going to be right back on the mat in six to eight weeks.' But it's sitting in a chair and going for a walk or two a day for six to eight weeks. There were times I thought 'Man, I don't know if I'm going to get back.'"

Finally, she was able to slowly add a little bit of light training. But it remained a painful process.

"For a long time I was like, I don't want anyone to touch anything near my stomach. If I was fighting me I'd think, 'Maybe I should punch her in the stomach!' When I came back I couldn't move, I couldn't twist. You use your core for everything in kickboxing. It was probably April or May before I started actually being able to train a little bit harder.

"One day I said to myself, 'I'm going to walk into the gym and I'm going to see if I can do it or I can't.' Everything was just fine and I thought all right, now I can get back into shape. Let's do it."

### 'If you're feeling up to it, let's do it'

After having to turn down an offer to fight early on in the summer, she was given another call for a spot in an August showdown, once again with a ti-



Blaine's Pam Sorenson, left, lands a punch against Kaitlin Young during her Invicta FC featherweight championship win Aug. 9.

Photo courtesy of Dave Mandel, Invicta FC

tle on the line. This time, she was ready to accept.

"I definitely was not expecting to come back to a title fight," Sorenson said. "It's one thing when you go from fight camp to fight camp, take a couple weeks off in between. This was an extended layoff and building from ground zero.

"There was not a whole lot of time to get ready for a 25-minute fight."

Her friends and support system out of The Cellar Gym in Minneapolis believed she was ready.

So did she.

"My coaches know me very well, they've been working with me for a long time," Sorenson said. "It meant a lot to me that they said, 'I'm 100 percent confident you can do it, so if you're feeling up to it, let's do it.'"

The showdown fight was set for Invicta FC 36, pitting Sorenson against fellow Minnesotan Kaitlin Young, once again for the featherweight championship after Spencer moved to the UFC.

### 'This was a totally different feeling'

Finally, after months of recovery, doubt and work, the date that would change Sorenson's life yet again arrived.

Rather than her typical pre-fight nerves, though, Sorenson felt at ease. She felt excited.

"Usually before fights I'm like, 'No one talk to me!' I'm a little cranky, I like to be left alone and collect my thoughts by myself," Sorenson said. "This was a totally different feeling. I was so happy to be there."

### 'I think I'm actually going to win'

The fight got off to a deliberate start, both fighters well-acquainted with one another beforehand. Slowly, Sorenson used her grappling to gain the upper hand.

"Kaitlin and I both know each other very well," Sorenson said. "We've known each other for a long time, we've competed against each other and trained together. The fight got off to a very slow start because we know

what each other is capable of."

Sorenson, adept at changing styles depending on the opponent, sought to take the fight to the mat to counteract Young's striking ability. As the minutes passed, the fighter who hadn't been able to compete in almost a year was the one wearing down her foe.

"Once I got the first take-down I realized I could do this," Sorenson said. "As the fight went on, I gained more and more confidence.

"There's nothing that sucks more than having to work back up, whether you slip and fall or get taken down. Having to get back up over and over again takes a lot out of you mentally and physically."

That became evident in the middle of the fight when Young, a world-class threat from her feet, was forced to deviate from her strength.

"There was a moment in the third round — Kaitlyn is just a fantastic, multiple-time world champion Thai kickboxer — when we were on the feet and

I saw her stumbling," Sorenson said. "I thought, 'Am I actually winning? I'm winning on the feet, too.' When she shot on me and tried to take me down, I thought, 'I think I'm actually going to win this fight.'"

### 'This is for everybody'

The bell rang at the end of the fifth round with both fighters having made it through. But there was little doubt as to the winner of the night's prime clash.

By scores of 50-44, 49-45 and 48-45, Sorenson's name was called as the winner, just the fourth-ever Invicta featherweight champion following Cris Cyborg, Megan Anderson and Spencer. Immediately after, a flood of emotion rushed over the normally stoic new champ.

"I can barely even describe it," Sorenson said. "I don't cry ever and I was crying. It meant so much to me. It meant a lot to me that Invicta gave me another title shot right away coming off of a loss and a major surgery, knowing there was a possibility I wasn't going to be 100 percent.

"I had so many people helping me. It really takes a village to build someone back up to that point; my team, my parents, my boyfriend, my training partners. I realized this isn't just my win. This is for everybody."

### 'Next week, we go back to work'

In October, Sorenson will head to Bosnia to compete in the kickboxing world championships. When she returns, she'll look to continue, as always, to find new challenges and paths to improve.

"As far as MMA, I'm always hoping for the UFC," Sorenson said. "The UFC has pulled every featherweight champion, so that would be the best-case scenario. But if they don't, I would love to defend my title in Invicta as many times as I can. I'm happy there, it's run by a really neat lady, so if I stay there that's cool with me, too."

For now, Sorenson is going to savor this moment. At least for a few days.

"I'm going to take this week to enjoy it," Sorenson said. "Next week, we go back to work."

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