Share ');} else {$(_this).append(' Follow him on Twitter: @'+value+'.');}}});}});T(_t.selector).hovercards(anywhereOptions);T(".for-twitter").hovercards(anywhereOptions);//REMOVE THE CLASS NAME SO WE DON'T ANYWHERE IT TWICE$(".for-twitter").removeClass("for-twitter");});}if(typeof(twttr) == "undefined") {$.getScript("http://platform.twitter.com/anywhere.js?id="+config.key+"&v="+config.version,anywhere);} else {anywhere();}return this;}; })(jQuery);

As the WEC's second-to-last event before its formal merger with the UFC, Thursday's WEC 52 "Faber vs. Mizugaki" event at the Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas brings with it a few compelling plotlines.

First, Urijah Faber's drop to 135 pounds means the bantamweight division should be stacked with intriguing matches for the next couple years. Given champion Dominick Cruz 's impressive work of late, a rematch between Cruz and Faber seems like a natural progression -- if "The California Kid" emerges victorious from WEC 52 and Cruz successfully defends against Scott Jorgensen at WEC 53 on Dec. 16. Throw in ex-titleholders Miguel Torres and Brian Bowles -- along with Faber's stablemate, Joseph Benavidez -- and the 135-pound division becomes an easy sell for the UFC.

Let's get to the fights.

**MMA Worldwide LIVE**

WEC bantamweight Urijah Faber tells MMA Worldwide Live how he plans on beating Takeya Mizugaki at WEC 52.

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**Urijah Faber versus Takeya Mizugaki**

Like many of MMA's mainstream names, Faber has dropped in weight after hitting a roadblock -- in his case, the supremely talented Jose Aldo and American Top Team's Mike Thomas Brown . Now competing at 135 pounds, Faber faces the durable Mizugaki, whose WEC debut came in a hard-nosed decision loss to then-champion Miguel Torres.

Although many fighters who move down in weight need a couple matches to get acclimated, Faber figures to be pretty solid here, as he was never a huge featherweight. The drop, if executed without too much strain on his frame, should translate into even greater relative strength against the smaller competition.

Mizugaki doesn't do any one thing spectacularly well, but he keeps battling and sticking his nose in the fight. In short, he has proven to be one tough cuss. Expect Faber to be able to take

it to the ground at will after a brief feeling-out process and deliver his trademark high-volume ground work -- with elbows, positional improvements and an efficient work rate. With this game plan, Faber was overwhelming against most 145-pound foes, and Mizugaki has his work cut out for him here. Faber will probably be able to outpoint him on the feet, further maximizing his wrestling advantage when he decides to shoot.

Mizugaki should be a good showcase opponent for Faber as he tries to make waves in his new division -- he submitted WEC 135-pound champion Dominick Cruz in one round in a 2007 title bout at featherweight -- and jump-start his campaign for another belt. It should be exciting while it lasts, but Faber has too many weapons to encounter much trouble here. He'll win inside of two rounds and look impressive doing it.

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Want the complete preview for WEC 52's main card? Sherdog has you covered.

**Chad Mendes versus Javier Vazquez**

A stablemate and protg of Faber's, Mendes has steadily worked his way up the WEC's featherweight ranks, fashioning workmanlike wins while showing the kind of improvement one likes to see in a developing fighter. Vasquez remains one of the WEC's top submission aces, with durability and composure that will serve him well in this match: Mendes, an NCAA finalist in his senior year, is an exceptionally gifted wrestler with a good-sized frame for the weight class.

In a match where wrestler meets submission artist, both fighters will have a strong incentive to bring their best stand-up game and strike effectively. Mendes figures to have greater upside in this department given that he turned professional barely two years ago and is constantly improving. He'll need to be careful when he decides to take it to the ground, as Vasquez is masterful at grabbing submissions from out of nowhere -- though the Team Alpha Male camp should have Mendes well prepared.

Expect some high-level grappling to dominate this bout, with the two featherweights somewhat neutralizing each other but Mendes working strikes on the ground and ultimately getting the better of the clinch work to grind out a decision win. Watch for whether or not Mendes has improved enough to dictate the pace by keeping busy with ground-and-pound and on the feet. If he is unable to do so, Vazquez can win. If Mendes steps it up in comparison to previous bouts, it will be enough for him to pull out a competitive decision.

**Joseph Benavidez versus Wagnney Fabiano**

Two high-energy bantamweights meet here, with Benavidez coming off his second loss to WEC champion Dominick Cruz in a title challenge.

Both have excellent grappling and guillotines, plus active striking -- though Benavidez's stand-up is probably a little stronger technically. The wrestling advantage goes to Benavidez, as well. Still, Fabiano, who was impressive in the International Fight League's 145-pound division, is a pretty tough nut to crack at 135.

Expect some frenetic exchanges, as both fighters use punches to set up for takedowns. Benavidez excels in scrambles and transitions, and he seems to come up with a new move for every fight that leaves viewers scratching their heads and wondering how he did it.

It should be a bit of a chess match on the ground, with Benavidez staying a half-beat ahead and increasing the pressure en route to a competitive decision win. The key factor is whether or not Fabiano can neutralize Benavidez's hands while the Team Alpha Male representative is on top.

*Jason Probst is a contributor to Sherdog.com.*

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