


Breaking News Clinton man dead after motorcycle accident

Some fighting to legalize mixed martial arts in NY

By **VICTOR LI**

Special to the Observer-Dispatch

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Last December, Utica's Matt Hamill defeated fellow New Yorker Jon "Bones" Jones in an Ultimate Fighting Championships bout. Hamill's face, however, told a different story.

Blood gushed from his broken nose, covering his face in crimson. That was before Jones battered Hamill with two illegal elbows to the face. Jones was disqualified.

Had the fight happened in New York, where mixed martial arts events have been illegal since 1997, both men could have been arrested.

Hamill and other New York fighters are trying to overturn that ban and hope to bring awareness to their sport as well as millions of dollars to their state.

In January, Gov. David Paterson announced his 2010-11 budget proposal, which included legalization of mixed martial arts events as a means of raising badly needed revenue.

In 2009, six of the 10 highest selling pay-per-views were UFC events, including the top spot. Last month, the UFC drew approximately 17,000 fans to its show in Newark, N.J., earning a live gate of more than \$4 million.

State Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-Rome, is a proponent of legalizing mixed martial arts. He made two arguments.

"The prime motivation is the fact of the economic benefit to the state of New York," Griffo said last week. "Second, there would be regulation of the sport by the state athletic commission.

"We're missing out on multimillion dollar gates," he said. "This is the place they want to be because of Madison Square Garden. ... They also would look at upstate venues such as Syracuse and Utica."

The Utica Memorial Auditorium might not get the "elite cards," Griffo said, but "anything is possible. I'm not ruling out getting a big bout in the area. What you would most likely see is contenders rising up."

For critics who argue the sport is too violent, Griffo countered that it has become more refined over the years.

"The sport ... has evolved," he said. "They have rules and a variety of procedures in place to prevent injuries."

Gaining momentum

UFC officials believe momentum is on their side and are confident that mixed martial arts events will be legalized when the state Legislature votes on the budget, which is more than a month late.

"It's not a question of if it will pass, but when," said Marc Ratner, UFC vice president of regulatory affairs.

Griffo is not as optimistic and rates the chances at "50-50." Although it was proposed in the governor's budget and in the Senate budget resolution, it was removed in the Assembly's version.

"It's no-where," Griffo said.

New York banned the events after Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., sent letters to all 50 state governors, encouraging them to prohibit the sport he deemed to be "human cock-fighting."

Since then, the sport has adopted rules, regulations and medical procedures.

"It's not 1995 anymore. It's no longer 'no-holds-barred,'" said Ratner, who spent 21 years with the Nevada State Athletic Commission, including 14 as its executive director.

Ratner concedes that the sport is violent, but he points to a 2006 study by the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine that found that mixed martial arts actually had lower knockout rates than boxing, meaning that its fighters might be less susceptible to brain injury.

An opponent in the '90s, Ratner now is one of the biggest proponents of legalizing the sport in all 48 states that have athletic commissions, Alaska and Wyoming being the exceptions. So far, 44 states have sanctioned mixed martial arts, most recently Alabama in March. "It's a very regulated sport, and that's how it should be," said Ratner.

Ratner also cited an economic impact report commissioned by the UFC's parent company, Zuffa LLC, projecting that a UFC event in Buffalo would bring in more than \$5 million in revenue, and a New York City event would generate more than \$11 million, as well as approximately \$1.3 million in city and state taxes.

'The wrong message'

State Assemblyman Bob Reilly, D-Colonie, is the main opponent.

"Violence begets violence. When you show young children violence and tell them it's OK, it's the wrong message," Reilly said.

Reilly pointed out a recent Marist University poll showing that more than two-thirds of registered voters in New York said that mixed martial arts should remain illegal.

Reilly also argues that the economic benefit of legalizing the sport would be almost negligible.

“An event at a site such as Albany would have a gate of approximately \$4 million, with \$500,000 being added to the local economy; however, \$3.5 million would be taken out of the local economy and sent to Las Vegas where Zuffa LLC is located,” Reilly wrote in a report.

Jonathan Bing, a Democratic assemblyman from Manhattan, disagrees.

“It’s about net economic activity in addition to ticket sales,” Bing said. “The hundreds of employees that will be hired in order to hold these bouts aren’t going to be from Vegas. In addition, fans would come from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey and even Canada to attend a mixed martial arts competition.”

As the politicians slug it out, Hamill tries to continue educating people about his sport.

“There are safety concerns in every sport, and mixed martial arts is no different, but I believe our sport takes all reasonable and necessary steps to protect the athletes,” said Hamill, pointing out how Jones was disqualified in their fight.

And he waits for his chance to fight in his home state.

“I reside in Utica, and I have a lot of fans that have supported me from Day One,” Hamill said. “It would be my dream to be able to bring a mixed martial arts card to Utica, and the attention and revenue it would bring to the community.”

And that’s one of the facts that bothers Griffo.

“Athletes like Matt can’t compete it their own state. They have to go elsewhere. That baffles me. ... They’re not doing anything except penalizing the athletes.”

Victor Li is a graduate student of journalism at Columbia University. He wrote his master’s thesis on the battle to legalize mixed martial arts in New York.

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Comments (11)

fatcat

4 weeks ago

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let the idiots fight its as much fun as watching poker

overtaxed2x

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hamil took a beaten , he is done anyway....

555

4 weeks ago

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The state needs some more money, and NOW they want MMA. That's funny. We live in a state that when they need something they are all in, but when they don't, they do anything to stop what people want.

What's up with Griffo's comment about Utica won't bring the elite fights. What a negative comment. Gotta love our politics and the people that represent us. They are so positive.

ODFan

4 weeks ago

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Hammill is fighting Jardine next. Its gonna be a great fight.

Anyhow there is no reason why they cant legalize it. Back in the day i understood when there was no overseeing by an athletic commission nor a sanctioned referee and no weight classes and no rules there was more violence. But now they have weight classes, Sanctioned and highly trained refs, and its overseen by Athletic Commissions who can stop a fighter from fighting if they dont see them fit to fight.

pineapple10

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A civilized state should not allow a bunch of idiots to beat each other senseless for the entertainment of the lowest common denominator.

Outside the Box

4 weeks ago

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I didn't realize MMA was made illegal because of a letter from John McCain. I thought it was maybe made illegal for a reason. So what's the problem with making it legal, is John McCain still writing letters?

Pineapples can go to the opera and eat cavier with white toast triangles

proxeutica4

4 weeks ago

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Assemblyman Bob Reilly speaks and votes in the New York State Legislature with the courage of his convictions! We need MORE such elective public servants who will lead by example. Now that's truly showing young folks that violence is NOT a SPORT.

Boxing is violent. Look at self-proclaimed Greatest Boxer of All Time, Muhammad Ali, and any neurosurgeon will tell you damage occurs over years of battering the brain. Ali was advised to quit boxing years before Larry Holmes beat him senseless to end Ali's career. I watched that bout and cringed as Holmes brutally battered away at Ali's head and face for many seconds as Ali sat stupified on his heels in his corner before the referee ending the beatdown.

Football is also violent as we're still seeing 12-year-olds trained to tackle with their HEADS! As such, spearing became illegal THREE DECADES ago. But too many crazy coaches still don't GET IT! Concussions that result in severe head trauma and debilitating spinal cord injuries have INCREASED in football as potentially lethal tactics are still used to simply stop your opponent.

Look at this past National Hockey League season whereby several players sustained concussions so severe that they sat out for weeks before being cleared to skate again -- even practice -- by a team of doctors hired by the NHL to determine safety. Virtually every concussion resulted from vicious, cheap hits to the head, neck and body.

Despite the above sports that have been played for decades being violent, changes by the officials at every level have occurred to bring a semblance of safety and less barbarism to the simplicity of 'sport.' Equipment advances allow less serious injuries in hockey and football. But boxing continues its blood-letting despite some states taking action because the sport's officials failed to police itself, thereby protecting boxers from brutality for the sake of brutality.

With Ultimate Fighting, you plainly see human beings battered like rag dolls. Kicking and punching wildly and brutally until one is bloody or knocked unconscious! That is akin to pit bulls fighting to mame or kill and ****fighting! Now the people who reap millions of dollars from their horrific sport slyly attempt lessening the barbaric battering by creating a new moniker: MIXED MARTIAL ARTS! Tell the real martial arts masters of this and they'll line up to shoot down the lie that somehow UF is suddenly MMA!

Senator Joseph Griffo (R-Rome) is the region's laughingstock Legislator as he continues to hang his hat on UF to add phoney revenue to the Greater Utica Area. He tries to convince UF's validity by saying 'The sport has evolved.' WHAT?! Why do voters still re-elect career politicians sitting in Albany for years to pad their pensions without WORKING tirelessly to attract real jobs by meeting with and writing to prospective employers seeking a State appealing enough to bring their companies to a region rich in resources of all manners?

Let's get creative and innovative in bringing stable, good-paying jobs that harbor principles, morals and honest-to-goodness work ethic to live by. Stop the game-playing! The government of the people are anxiously awaiting for good governing to occur.

overtaxed2x

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proxi thats ur opinion but we love mma anyway..its the law of nature

warrenMMAFacts

4 weeks ago

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In the past five years, the sport of Mixed Martial Arts has seen a meteoric rise in interest from nearly every age and demographic, adding to its cache as a mainstream sport. MMA fights are a display of strategy, skill, and athleticism, pushing its fighters to be extremely versatile and accomplished in a wide variety of branches of martial arts.

MMA would bring millions to NY in a time of a flailing economy creating tax revenue for the state, while filling hotels, arenas and restaurants as fans flock to the state.

Join Us To Help Bring MMA to NY!

Please join the thousands of New Yorkers at MMAFacts.com who have called, written or emailed their State Senators and Assembly members and asked them to bring MMA to NY.

Please follow the link below to email your NY Representatives to urge them to legalize MMA in New York State.

<http://www.mmafacts.com/contactyourlegislator>

You can also make an impact by joining us on our Facebook group at <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=56602878328&ref=ts>

Thank you!

Robin

warren@mmafacts.com

Martialartessence

2 weeks ago

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Respectfully to Mr. Victor Li - If you had mentioned to me that you were for the legalization of this blood-sport, I would have never even spoke to you when you asked me for a comment for your article. You did, however show the typical, Martial sportist or fan personality trait of deception and untruthfulness by telling me that you were anti-bias and neither for nor against the sport. So with 4 complete pages of why MMA sports is bad for the country and explaining the corruption and acts of Governor David Paterson of NY state, you decided not to include 1 word in your article. Note that I have 35 years in the Martial arts and have been anti-Martial sports before MMA ever began in 1993. Note also that Mr. Li is the person whom contacted me via phone and email until I replied. This is simply fascist. Strong opposition is ignored and media reporters such as Mr Li, who are fans, are extremely selective with including strong opposition in articles. Therefore, they include light opposition from individuals who will say something opinionated. So it can be easily called an opinion. Disrespectful, deceptive, insincere and fascist were your acts Mr. Li. I dislike wasting my time with people that flat out lie to me. This is not a personal attack on Mr. Li. It is simply explaining the fascist acts and untruthfulness that he has used with this article - This is fact and I have my 4 page letter to him and email of correspondence if I need to back it up to have this comment remain.

Martialartessence

2 weeks ago

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Since I see this comment section is also being used as an avenue to promote the blood-sport and individuals are leaving website addresses and comments to join groups to help MMA sports.. I will include a like to - The Martial Arts Essence Mission - (TMAEM) Free membership for all Martial artists, businesses and organizations who are not for MMA sports and would like to see it banned in the USA.

Please see:

<http://www.martialartessence.com>

for further details

Special / current mission objective: to keep the ban on MMA sports in NY State!

arigato

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