

# 'Gladius Fights' Brings MMA to Ithaca

By Olivia M. Hall

Jerry Bradley will be a basket case when he enters the cage for his first mixed martial arts (MMA) fight on Saturday, Jan. 26. But once the punches start flying, he says, primitive instinct will take over. And then, "There's nothing like it."

Spectators can witness this debut, along with 12 other amateur MMA matchups, at Ultimate Athletics in Ithaca, which will serve as the arena for "Gladius Fights: The Training Ground." Though "gladius" is Latin for "sword," the fighters will rely on techniques from a variety of weapons-free martial arts, notably Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Muay Thai, boxing and wrestling.

Ithaca is no stranger to this rapidly developing sport. It is home to the BombSquad, a professional MMA team with multiple veterans of major competitions such as the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), Bellator and Strikeforce. Ithaca also boasts resident and former BombSquad member Jon "Bones" Jones, who, having captured the UFC light-heavyweight championship in 2011, is now one of the most widely known MMA fighters.

Hosting full-fledged MMA bouts locally, however, is new. Until now, both spectators and fighters had only the Fortune Fight League (FFL) to turn to if they wanted to stay local. That promotion separates the martial arts disciplines, using a coin toss to determine which will apply in each round. This is necessary because of New York State's 1997 ban on live MMA events.

Proponents of the ban refer to health risks to fighters and the brutality of the sport, though a 2006 Johns Hopkins University study concluded that MMA's overall injury rate is comparable to other combat sports. Knockout rates are lower than in boxing, suggesting a reduced risk of traumatic brain injury.

Instead, a dispute between the Culinary Workers Union and the UFC's owners in Las Vegas over the non-unionization of hotels, which is being carried out indirectly in New York, is often cited as the true reason MMA legislation has not been passed, despite numerous attempts over the years.

One outcome of the ongoing legalization battle is last year's clarification by New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman that the ban applies only to professional MMA events, sparking a frenzy of amateur bouts across the state. Ryan Ciotoli, owner of Team BombSquad and Gladius Fights, estimates that about five promoters have put on 10 to 15 shows since March. "It's kind of crazy," he says.

On the flipside, amateur fights are not sanctioned by a state commission, which for professional fights would appoint all officials, approve matchups, and require certain medical checks. As a result, the quality of amateur events is currently uneven. According to Ciotoli, who hopes the ban will be lifted later this year, "We've been to some really good shows and then to some shows where you can't even believe that they would allow that. And that's what makes a sport dangerous."

For "Gladius," Ciotoli says, "We



Photo by Olivia Hall

Jerry Bradley, right, trains for his upcoming MMA fight with teammate Josh Lange.

require a lot of the same things the commission does for professional fights." The combatants will follow Massachusetts unified professional rules and fight without shin pads or head gear and wearing seven-ounce gloves. The use of knees to the face or elbows, however, will be prohibited as the fighters face off for three rounds of three minutes each.

For 30-year-old BombSquad fighter Jerry Bradley (2-2 in the FFL), engaging his first MMA opponent will be the culmination of 18 months of hard work and training and a milestone on his path to becoming a professional mixed martial artist. Like some of his teammates, he works in forestry during the day, exercises at Island Fitness (which allows BombSquad fighters to train for free) and attends team practice in the evenings.

"It's hard, it's a struggle to juggle

everything," says the father of a four-year-old son, "but it's something I'm going to remember for the rest of my life."

What motivates Bradley and his teammates to make such sacrifices for a life of fighting? At this stage, it is hardly the pay. Alex Henry (3-0 in the FFL) works a night job and "can't wait to go pro and start making money off of this."

Brandon Warne, a teammate from Ovid, concurs. After his Gladius fight, win or lose, he plans to go pro. But even without monetary reward, "I like the discipline that comes along with MMA. It's probably one of the purest sports out there. It's pretty much man versus man, and you've got to put it all on the line, mentally and physically. That's as raw as it's going to get as far as sport or anything."

And while fighting can hurt, win-

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## Dinner

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effort," he says. Donations of vegetables from various area farms and producers are provided, including supplies from Farmer Grown Flour, beans from Cayuga Pure Organics and fresh vegetables from Finger Lakes Fresh.

"In addition to raising fund for the kitchen we'd like to expand our programming to serve more people, especially young people. We might try Junior Iron Chef competitions. Through PEAKs over Poverty we hope to create garden hubs and hire a neighborhood gardening coordinator. Our wish list, which is on the website, includes everything from a 4X4 pickup truck for hauling dirt and lumber to basic tools such as hammers, shovels and rakes," says Dolan.

For more information go to <http://ccetompkins.org/www/community/gardens-4-humanity>. The PEAKs program information can be found at the left hand side of that site. To let Hallett and the staff know you're coming so that they can better plan how much food to cook go to the Facebook event page, which can be accessed through a link on the right hand side of that CCE page.

## Documentary

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earthquake that literally shook them up. And in Korea they unexpectedly ran into a long-lost classmate at a Cornell Club holiday gathering. Small world.

To date, and in addition to assisting in the production of several documentaries, Veverka Bros. Productions LLC has produced five films: "Malana: Globalization of a Himalayan Village" (2010, 17 minutes); "Bus to Somewhere" (2011, 17 minutes); "Buffalo Must Die" (2012, 10 minutes); "Jungle Warfare College" (2013, 10 minutes); and the 2010 "China: The Rebirth of an Empire," which screened at 24 international film festivals and took home six awards. For more information visit [www.passfire-movie.com](http://www.passfire-movie.com).

## Seeds

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start producing locally-adapted varieties," Gardener says. "When you select from seed that's been grown here, it's adapted to our particular climate. Most seed now comes from Oregon and Washington, because they have dry

summers and autumns. We need to select for our erratic conditions, cold winters, etc."

The next seed saving meeting is Monday, Feb. 4, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at CCE. Contact Gardener at 272-2292 for more information.

On a larger scale, Thor Oechsner is saving seed for the grain that he grows on 600 certified organic acres in Newfield. Oechsner is co-owner of Farmer Grown Flour, located in Trumansburg. "We're trying varieties of grain, and trying to find heritage varieties that are better flavored and have more nutrition," he says, "and when we find that we trial them, clean the seed and then replant it."

Through a variety trial at the French Culinary Institute in New York City, Oechsner coordinated top-notch bakers baking breads using a variety of grains, and then had food writers, chefs and bakers judge the breads. "The hands-down winner was a heritage variety called 'Warthog,' so we have focused on growing that. Everybody loves it, so we trial new varieties against it," says Oechsner.

Finding and developing varieties that grow well here, and that farmers can share is a good thing, he continues. "In terms of food security, the fact that we have a small flourmill in our area, and grain being grown here, as fuel becomes

scarcer and things have to become more regional. If we don't start now, then down the line that could become a problem."

Oechsner sees a trend toward smaller local production. "We're kind of going backward on that level, smaller stuff and more localized, but maybe backwards is forwards now. There seem to be a lot of flourmills starting up because people keep calling us to ask how we did it. It's great to share our mistakes with others, to be a model, even if it's a model for what not to do. It's great to share the successes and the failures," he says.

Oechsner also enjoys mentoring others. "Seed cleaning is a whole art, and I'm learning from square one. There's really no one around to show you about it, so you trial and error it. We bought old equipment and fixed it up, and we're making it work. It's absolutely fascinating," he says.

## MMA

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ning certainly does not. For Henry, the thrill of victory makes it all worth it. "There's no other feeling like that."

Perhaps that is why "fighting has been around forever," as Ciotoli says. "The MMA fighter is the new age gladiator. These guys train hard, put a lot of time and effort in to entertain people in a tough sport."

Those who want to be thus entertained can attend the Gladius Fights on Jan. 26, at Ultimate Athletics at the Shops at Ithaca Mall. Doors open at 6 p.m. and the fights begin at 7 p.m. Tickets are available for \$25 (standing room) and \$35/\$50 (seating) at the gym's front desk or at [www.uagym.com](http://www.uagym.com).

## Biomass

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European Renewable Energy Council states that, given sustainable biomass is limited, these technologies of small scale CHP seem some of the most promising target functions of biomass in the long term.

The agricultural biomass feedstocks first used will be weedy fields going to brush and weedy mulch hay. Though these weedy fields are the lowest strata of economic value, their environmental value complements their use as fuel. It stalls the field to forest succession preserving open space and cleared farmland. Yet native grasses and weeds, home for a biodiversity of flora and fauna, can, at the same time, provide with two to four acres the BTUs necessary to heat a home.

The purpose of the meeting is to let the community know what these local groups, and others, are doing as well as to try to engage imagination, talents and ideas necessary to making a biomass business work in all the usual business categories of marketing, finance, operations, facilities management, feedstock management, and the logistics of transport, supply, and meeting contracts.

The Danby Land Bank Cooperative wants to establish a model of sustainable harvesting and biomass use that can be reproduced in other areas, so go to their website and read the CBE short business description—and be there.

*Elizabeth Keokosky is a longtime resident of Caroline and Danby, a former systems analyst at Cornell and a recent graduate of Cornell City and Regional Planning.*

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