

# MMA exhibitions support area vets

BY ERNIE CLARK  
BDN STAFF

BREWER — Twenty-eight mixed martial artists sacrificed part of their Memorial Day weekend to bring their sport back to the area for the first time in nearly two years and support the region's veterans community.

## MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

"All-American Kickboxing" was held at Jeff's Catering on Saturday night, with fighters representing six different Maine gyms participating in non-judged sparring exhibitions.

Approximately 400 fans

turned out to watch, and after expenses nearly \$1,400 in donated admissions was presented to the Maine Veterans Project, a year-old nonprofit that provides support for local veterans, particularly with an eye toward reducing the number of veteran suicides.

"We knew they put out 400 seats and there weren't more than 20 that didn't have someone in them, and there were probably that many more walking around," said event organizer and top local MMA prospect Josh Harvey.

"We had a great turnout." Harvey and Bruce "Pretty Boy" Boyington were among the fighters who took part in the kickboxing exhibitions.

Boyington, who is scheduled to fight on the World Series of Fighting's WSOF 31 card in Mashantucket, Connecticut, on June 17, had his sparring exhibition against Shawn "Doc" Goodwin, founder and president of the Maine Veterans Project.

"We had 14 [exhibitions] and every one went the distance," said Harvey, who battled Young's MMA teammate Aaron Lacey. "They were evenly, evenly matched and everyone said they had a good experience."

This marked the first time a combat sports event has been held in Bangor or Brewer since Hermon High School graduate and Ultimate Fighting Championship president

Dana White brought a UFC card featuring top light heavyweight contenders Ryan Bader and Ovince Saint Preux and Lincolnville native Tim Boetsch to the Cross Insurance Center in August 2014.

But it was the second such benefit exhibition held in the last two months regionally.

Harvey, in conjunction with MaineNightOut.com, held a similar sparring event at Factory One in Dexter in early April.

Between the two kickboxing events nearly \$2,000 has been raised for the Maine Veterans Project, and Harvey has scheduled another night of exhibitions for July 16 at the Dexter locale.



BDN FILE  
University of Maine hockey defenseman Rob Michel spars with a Wildcat from the University of New Hampshire in 2015 at the Cross Insurance Arena in Portland.

## Hockey

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"The fact of the matter is that we're the only Division I sports program in the state," he said. "We belong to the folks up north because they have supported us for years and years, but we also belong to the citizens of this state."

"We would play in other venues around the state if they were big enough to meet our economic needs," Gendron added.

"To be honest, if there were 6,000-seat arenas in Fort Kent, Washington County or Farmington, we would look to schedule games there," Woodcock said. "But that doesn't mean we don't want to play at the Alford. We just want to expand our brand."

He said by playing in Portland, UMaine could gain some new fans who could find their way to Orono to watch the Black Bears like he did when he was 6.

"Once you watch college hockey, if you're a sports fan at all, you'll fall in love with the sport," he said.

Woodcock said season-ticket holders will be offered two packages, one including the three Portland games with a reduced rate for the Portland games, and another without the three-game Portland package.

UMaine has suffered dwindling home attendance in the wake of a long dry spell and has missed the NCAA Tour-

namment eight times over the past nine years after making nine straight tourney appearances.

UMaine averaged 3,923 per game this past season, the lowest in over 25 years. The previous low in recent years occurred in 1991-92 when the Black Bears averaged 4,024 per game.

Season-ticket holder Doug Damon and Mike Rolnick offered varying opinions on the Portland games.

"We need to revitalize everything," said Damon. "They aren't selling out the home games so they need to open it up a little bit. By playing in southern Maine, you're bringing alumni back into the program. There are a lot of alumni down there. And it raises revenue, which is what the university needs."

He pointed out that there are 900 members in the Casco Bay youth hockey program.

"It I had to vote yay or nay, I'd vote nay," said Rolnick. "But it's not the end of the world. I'm not going to get rid of my season tickets."

Will Biberstein, the associate athletic director for internal operations, said university administrators are working with the Maine Sports Commission to submit a bid to host an NCAA hockey regional in Portland.

"We have to submit a preliminary proposal by the end of June," said Biberstein.

He said the NCAA will mull over the bids during the fall and announce the successful bids in December.

## Foxcroft

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One challenge Smith is finding when Foxcroft hosts a conference or state championship meet on a weekend when its track teams are competing elsewhere is staffing the concession booth.

"Last week was Memorial Day weekend and we weren't in the [PVC small-school] meet," said Smith. "All the track parents went to Hampden the day before where we were competing, so only a very few of them might want to go to another track meet the next day."

Instead, Smith relied mostly on family members last Saturday — though he also got a boost from Foxcroft senior three-sport standout Hunter Smith (not related).

Hunter Smith, who won four events on Friday to help the Ponies win the PVC large-school boys championship, heard when he got home from that meet that help was needed the next day, so he spent Saturday cooking hamburgers and hot dogs at a meet-record pace.

That Foxcroft is eager to host a small-school state meet even as its enrollment has elevated it to a different class has drawn the appreciation of the Maine Princi-



ERNIE CLARK | BDN  
Foxcroft Academy track star Hunter Smith helps man the concession booth during Saturday's Penobscot Valley Conference small-school championship meet at Oakes Field in Dover-Foxcroft.

pals' Association, which sanctions the state championships.

"Their willingness to host these track meets, particularly when their team isn't competing, provides the opportunities for those schools in the smaller classes with limited facilities the chance to perform on an outstanding eight-lane track, which is what we need for the state championships because of the number of participants," said Mike Burnham, MPA assistant executive director and staff liaison for outdoor track and field.

"There are some other facilities that do have eight

lanes. A number of Class A schools have been willing to host — Brewer has been phenomenal in being willing to open its track to classes other than Class A — but there are very limited track facilities with eight lanes north of Augusta."

The MPA prefers when possible to switch state meets between northern and southern locales every other year. Yarmouth, which this year was reclassified from B to C, hosted last year's Class C states.

"We like to rotate between north and south as much as we can based on the availability of the venues," said

Burnham. "I also think it's important to note that to host one of these takes a great deal of work and organization, and Tim is willing to undertake that in order to bring those championships to the Dover-Foxcroft area."

"It's a beautiful venue, and the entire community is welcoming. The schools that come to compete in those meets are made to feel welcome. It's a good feeling to go and know that people really like to have you there."

Participants from as many as 52 different schools may take part in the Class C state meet, and Smith — a Foxcroft Academy graduate — enjoys both helping to provide the local economy with an infusion of cash and exposing many of those athletes, their families and friends to a community they may never have seen before.

"It's a good feeling to try to help out because most of the business owners I know," said Smith. "I want the town to thrive and I know that these two Saturdays are big sales days for those people."

"It also shows off Dover-Foxcroft. A lot of people don't know where it is on a map, and then they come here and see this immaculate place. When people come for the first time they're astonished."

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