

Why mixed martial arts is far more than just cage fighting

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WITH celebrity cage-fighters such as Alex Reid, glamour model Katie Price's ex-husband, giving mixed martial arts a "bad rap" a television presenter from Radlett is determined to stamp out widespread misconceptions about the sport.

John Gooden, 34, is so concerned about mixed martial arts (MMA) attracting negative publicity that he is speaking out on behalf of fellow martial artists.

The sports commentator who presents *Cage Warriors*, aired on Sky Sports, said it was crass to refer to the sport - one of the fastest growing in the world - as just "cage fighting".

Mixed martial arts is a full contact combat sport where competitors spar using striking and grappling techniques in a ring or on a mat. They may also fight inside an enclosed fenced arena, which means if you are picked up you cannot be thrown out, with competitors using the cage to their advantage.

John, also an electrical technician for BJB Electrical, hopes to help with the regulation and promotion of MMA.

He said: "Martial arts has been a part of my life since I was eight when I studied judo, karate and also represented St Albans Boxing Club in a couple of bouts.

"Following a few injuries and the tragic death of a friend and training partner in a kickboxing contest in Hemel, I no longer compete and decided to cross over to the 'other side' of the sport."

John went on: "The sport gets a bad rap from the media and sometimes with due cause."

He criticised those who organised fixtures despite a lack of knowledge or adequate experience of competing, and fail to provide proper medical assistance at bouts.

Warning martial artists to steer clear of such "money-making" events, he suggested they instead fought at events where there were paramedics and proper pre-



John Gooden

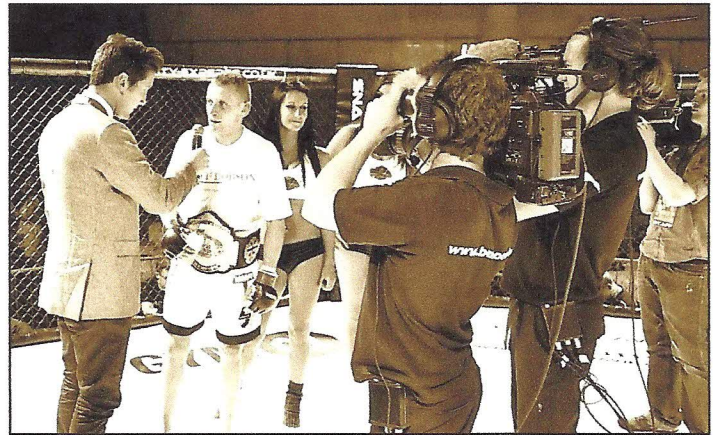
cautions taken, for example those that offered pre and post-fight cognitive tests.

John added: "Within the sport there are those who like to glamorise certain things. They are in it for the t-shirt."

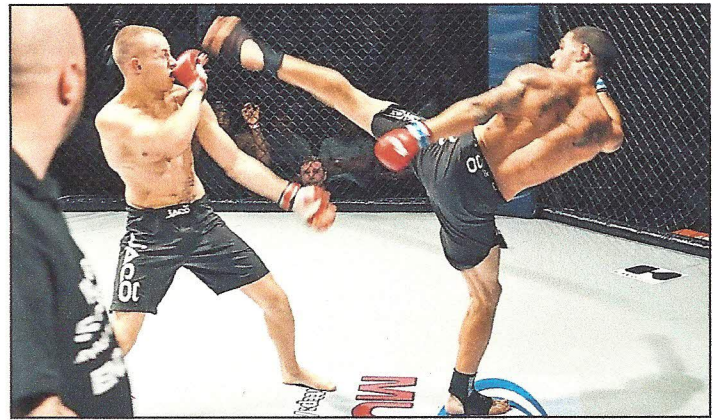
He said Alex Reid, nicknamed "The Reidemator," whose exploits in and out of the cage provided fodder for British celebrity magazines, had a "poor record" in MMA.

He added: "Alex is not the ideal face, because there are more serious sportspeople. He is in it more for the fame. However, he has given people access and publicity for the sport in the mainstream media, which is good."

John went on: "There are good people within the sport who are legitimately trying to build a platform upon which martial artists can train and compete safely whilst also earning a living, in the most mentally and physically challenging sport on the planet."



(Above) John interviews a fighter, and (below) some mixed martial arts action - photo supplied by joleesonpics.com



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