

# MONTANA'S ULTIMATE FIGHTING EXPERIENCE

## Majestic Mayhem: Cage Fighting in Kalispell

By Hal Herring  
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Kalispell's Majestic Valley Arena was the host for a Saturday night cage brawl and beer drinking fest that, judging by the sold-out tables (\$300 tables, no less), floorseating and a rowdy crew in the bleachers, was a success for everybody. The crowd, (and a fairly dangerous looking crowd it was) young and fit and extremely intense, was enthusiastic but self-controlled (not always a given), and the fights in the cage were fast-moving and violent. There were a few cowboy hats in the audience, but it was a long, long way from rodeo.

In the center of the rodeo arena stood a tall, round cage, black mesh fence enclosing a floor about fifteen feet in diameter. The rules for the fights that would happen in the cage were few -- no biting or eye-gouging, no fish-hooking with a thumb in the corner of the mouth or nostrils, no knee strikes or kicks to the head of an opponent on the ground. Artists of the takedown were asked not to "spike" their opponents to the canvas, intentionally sending them down like an arrow onto their heads or necks. Otherwise, everybody was free to use whatever techniques they thought would work to render their opponents unconscious, or cause them to "tap-out" in the universal signal of surrender, the modern equivalent of saying "uncle" or "calfrope!"

There was a wide range of styles brought to the cage, from hard-core college wrestling to Thai boxing to the cage-fighters' favorite, Brazilian jujitsu, with its elegant system of throws, reversals, joint-locks and chokes, all of which integrates beautifully with other fighting systems, especially those that are heavy on the striking arts. And integration is the name of the cage fight game: no fighter will prevail here unless he has mastered techniques of stand-up -- punching, elbow strikes,

and kicks, and at least the basics of defending and winning on the ground, because almost every one of the fights will end up with both combatants in a merciless wrestling match.

The White Buffalo Warriors, led by heavyweight Will "Big Medicine" Hammond brought a big contingent of fans up from the Mission Mountains and the Jocko Valley, to judge by the roar of support whenever a White Buffalo fighter entered the cage. The first match went to White Buffalo Justin "Demon" Gardner, who listed his style of fighting as simply, "Buffalo." Whatever it was, it seemed to work real well.

A newcomer to the cage fight game was 185-pound Jeff Gregory, who came from the Bitterroot Valley to challenge Seattle Pankration fighter Travis Torkelson.



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Gregory is a jujitsu student under Brandon Olson, a cage fight veteran from the Bitterroot who would be fighting for the lightweight title later in the night. If the crowd expected a classic jujitsu match from these two young men -- a straight shot for the takedown, the physical chess game of move and counter-move, they were surprised. Gregory stepped in and threw a low leg kick, directed at Torkelson's lower thigh, a traditional Thai boxing technique of breaking an opponent down. Torkelson dropped his right hand to protect himself from the kick, and Gregory unloaded an overhand right that landed like a mule kick, knocking Torkelson out cold. The crowd, as one might imagine, went crazy.

In the next fights, Brandon Ghanan representing the Rez Dogs from St. Ignatius, Montana, took a loss by way of a rear naked choke to White Buffalo fighter Eric Hall.

Terry TJ Hintz, a Kalispell local who listed his affiliation as “military” came into the cage as a 155-pound boxing machine, overpowering another local, Quinton Sederdahl a wrestler from the Flathead Valley town of Lakeside. This was the one fight where the rules of Majestic Mayhem staggered the results of the battle. Sederdahl managed to weather the storm of punches that Hintz was raining in on him, and he shot for a beautiful takedown. Taking his time on the ground, maneuvering Hintz, as a true wrestler or jujitsu fighter is taught, Sederdahl ran out of the time allotted for fighters to remain on the floor.

That rule is intended to prevent stalemates that bore the crowd, and it may be a good one, but it worked against Sederdahl, who was, at the time the referee called for a stand-up, in control of the match. Back on their feet, Hintz moved like a surgeon to make sure that there would be no more takedowns. His relentless combinations of jabs and hooks left Sederdahl dazed and unable to defend himself, seemingly unable to remember any of the wrestling moves or shoots that could have saved him.



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Just after intermission, Kalispell’s Travis Johnson, a 155-pound Brazilian jujitsu fighter, rolled Cody Hamilton, a 155-pound wrestler from Ellensburg, Washington. The two grapplers both train at Kevin Moore’s Ultimate Submission Academy in Kalispell, where they have been exposed to some of the fighting worlds’ most interesting veterans, through Moore’s seminars with traveling instructors like the warhorse Flavio Behring, an original black belt jujitsu fighter from Brazil, and one of the most technical and sophisticated grapplers alive today. As if demonstrating a technique straight from Master Behring’s seminars, Johnston slammed

an armbar on Hamilton, using his entire body to lock out Hamilton’s elbow. Hamilton tapped his opponent in surrender before any heavy damage to the joint could occur.

Brandon Olson stepped in to the cage for the light-weight title fight against Joel Thomas, a jujitsu stylist from the Bad Intentions crew of Yakima. Both men were representing the Ultimate Submission Academy. Olson started in jujitsu almost ten years ago now, after a stint on the wrestling squad at Northern Montana College, and a trip to Ecuador as a Mormon missionary. When he returned to the Bitterroot Valley, he walked in to a Brazilian jujitsu group that myself and others had formed in Hamilton, training at the River Street Dance Theater.

Learning Brazilian jujitsu is much like learning a new language. The study is never completed; as soon as you understand the game on one level, new doors appear, to new levels and new places. The greatest jujitsu artists are those who make the art their own, who take it and create a physical poetry out of it, never leaving behind the basic grammar -- the simple takedowns, body positioning, the flow of one move setting up the next, responding and reacting to your opponent in turn -- that makes it all possible. Like any art, like a foreign language, it cannot be forced on anyone, none will ever take it to new levels unless it speaks to something in their souls that has been waiting to be given voice. Olson was the person that the jujitsu had been waiting for, and vice versa. He picked it up and never really looked back, training, fighting, working as a log peeler for years to support his art. Now an instructor trading between Hamilton, Missoula and Kalispell like an itinerant Samurai, Olson has a hard won, 7-7 official fight record, with hundreds of lesser competitions in dozens of gyms and martial arts studios behind him. He’s still around 170 pounds, with no body builder muscles to tempt him to utilize power over technique. He’s still as unassuming as ever, with the easygoing confidence of a quiet person who has worked hard at doing pretty much exactly what they wanted to do.

Olson’s match against Thomas looked like a primer in basic jujitsu, and anybody who has ever fought a jujitsu match will tell you that making it look simple is the hardest thing there is. Olson dominated the match, closing in fast with a series of long fluid jabs to put Thomas back against the cage. The two fighters struggled for

the takedown, Thomas' wiry, hyper-fit power working well for him. But when they hit the canvas, Olson first took his back, controlling him with his heels hooked behind Thomas' hips, and working for the rear naked choke, forearm across the throat and the blade of the bone shutting off the arterial flow to the brain.

The Brazilians call that choke the mataleone, the lion-killer. It has been used in various forms since men were living in caves. But Thomas kept his chin welded to his chest and defended with one arm, and Olson could not sink the choke. At one point, Olson rode too high on Thomas' back, and while trying to get a clear shot to throw a punch, Olson was tossed straight up into the air, a masterful move by Thomas that brought many in the crowd to their feet with roaring appreciation for his skill. Thomas drove too hard for the advantage though. Head down, he shot for Olson's midsection, forgetting the old adage that you must not try so hard to win that you forget not to lose.

Olson sprawled just for a second to keep from being thrown, then his right arm went around Thomas' head for the guillotine choke. Once the choke was reasonably established, Olson let Thomas drive him back and down, controlling him with his legs in the basic jujitsu technique known as the "guard." On the canvas, Olson arched into the forearm that was now across Thomas's throat, and forced him to surrender.

The last time I watched 250-pound White Buffalo Warrior Will "Big Medicine" Hammond fight in Missoula, he had used a judo throw to lay out 300-pound Jake Slagel of Winchester, Washington, a move so fast and violent that Slagel very nearly burst out of the ring and exploded in the audience, an unhappy prospect indeed. Hammond has a strong record of 7-3 losses in the cage fight game. But Saturday night, the Big Medicine got shut down by a very large Trent "the Sandman" Standing of Portland. Standing listed his fighting discipline as "Pit" which one could assume incorporates all styles. But he was pure jujitsu in his meeting with Will Hammond, and it was the pure jujitsu of Standing's fellow large man Jeremy Horn, who has dominated the big Ultimate Fighting Championships with it.

Standing never let Hammond up after the initial exchange of punches led to the canvas, and he crawled him like an anaconda, like a giant wet rug, right to the choke that finished the match, left him the heavyweight

champ, and ended the evening of fights.

The world of mixed martial arts fighting, while increasingly showing up on Spike TV and other outlets, has suffered from a lack of opportunity for fighters, and certainly from a lack of financial potential for fighters who are risking life, limb, and years of training to compete. Perhaps that has limited the game to the true believers, the warriors and purists who will show up to fight for free any time they can. But it would be very interesting to see the game opened up a bit to those who cannot now afford to devote themselves to it. Events like Saturday's Majestic Mayhem are a step in that direction.