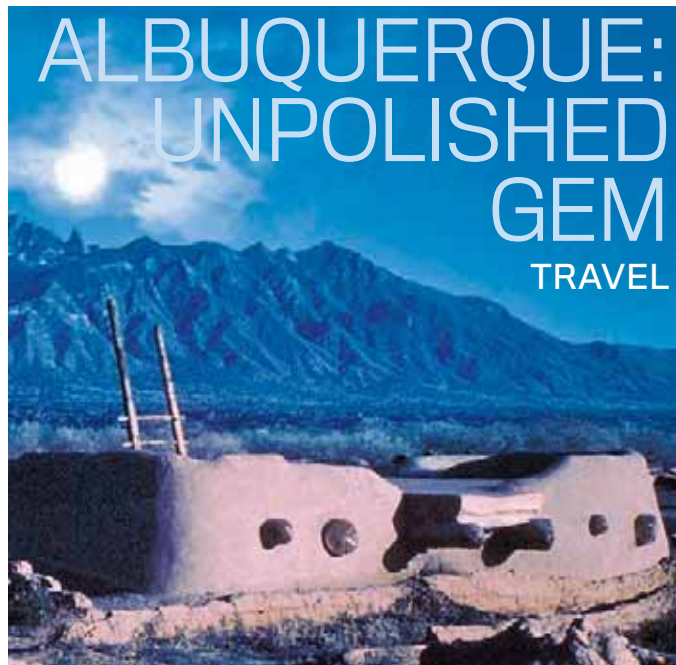


WEEKEND EDITION  
**Los Angeles Times**

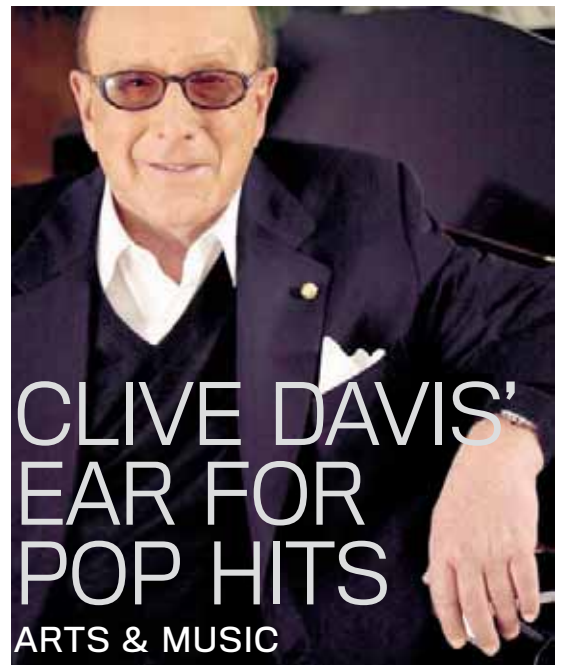


**MOVIE SNEAKS**

TAKE 3:  
 SPIDER-MAN  
 FACES OFF  
 WITH SHREK,  
 PIRATES  
 CALENDAR



**ALBUQUERQUE:  
 UNPOLISHED  
 GEM**  
 TRAVEL



**CLIVE DAVIS'  
 EAR FOR  
 POP HITS**  
 ARTS & MUSIC

Sunday, January 14, 2007

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STEVE LOPEZ  
 POINTS WEST

*A traffic  
 disaster  
 towers  
 over L.A.*

**I**No longer go to Dodger games, or the L.A. Philharmonic, or to film screenings west of the 405. I only go out to dinner at restaurants within two miles of my house."

That was Michael Gale, who lives in Pacific Palisades.

"I'd rather stick hot poker in my eyes than drive downtown from Santa Monica on a weeknight. Saturday nights are almost as bad. Therefore, I go to Disney Hall only on Sunday."

That was Kim Nicholas of Santa Monica.

"We learned fast how hard it is to go east in the evening. The first few times we tried it, we assumed there was a big rig overturned somewhere . . . We were then, and remain still, incredulous that an entire major American city has allowed itself to become paralyzed every evening."

That was Maryland transplant and Santa Monica resident Laurie Brenner, who has given up on downtown L.A. cultural attractions and scratched Skirball events because of northbound evening traffic on the 405.

This is but a tiny sampling from the traffic jam of angst that clogged my mailbag after last Sunday's column. Although my focus was Westside insanity, readers from Orange, Ventura and San Bernardino counties joined the cry-fest, insisting a historically annoying problem has reached the level of catastrophe.

But many readers saved their best work and sharpest barbs for those they hold responsible for an irresponsible explosion of residential and commercial projects erected without ad-

[See Lopez, Page A18]

Inside The Times

**Two sides of the rent-control coin**

Is it the lifeline that makes living in L.A. possible? Or does it strangle landlords?

REAL ESTATE, K1

**Chronicle of a hated 19th century Marine**

Archibald Gillespie's story is told by a retired historian with a tale of his own. CALIFORNIA, B1

**Weather:** Mostly clear and cold. Frost possible. Lows in the 30s. B10

**Latest news:** latimes.com  
**Complete Index:** Page A2



MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

**BLOODED:** Sean "The Muscle Shark" Sherk takes an elbow to the face from Kenny "KenFlo" Florian during an Ultimate Fighting Championship bout.

SAVAGERY AS SPECTACLE

**KNOCKOUT  
 MARKETING**

Mixed martial arts, the sport once condemned for its brutality, is riding a wave of popularity while struggling for legitimacy.

By SCOTT GOLD : TIMES STAFF WRITER  
 First of two parts

**T**he audience has paid to see blood and will not be disappointed.

When the arena plunges into darkness, they rise as one: an 8-year-old in a skull cap that says "Punishment," a tourist in a T-shirt that says "Legalized Brutality," a young woman who is being paid \$2,000 to wear a bikini and blow kisses to the catcalls. The bass line of a heavy metal song, its lyrics indecipherable at this volume but clearly delineating some manner of rage, compresses 10,863 chests.

It is time. Once confined to the underground and assailed as "human cockfighting," the savage sport of mixed martial arts — a spectacle melding ancient fighting tactics with those of a bar brawl — is poised to go mainstream. Cage-side seats now sell for as much as \$1,000. Fights periodically draw more men ages 18 to 34 than anything else on TV. Peddling raw, real violence to a zealous, ec-

thnic and cultural force through events like this one, held at the Mandalay Bay Events Center on a Saturday night.

Two men, barefoot and slathered with Vaseline, their hands covered in little more than leather wraps, enter a cage at the center of the arena. For five minutes, they kick and punch and lock limbs, trying to land a headlock known in their trade as a guillotine and designed to cut off the blood flow in the opponent's carotid artery.

At the end of the first round, one fighter — Kenny "KenFlo" Florian, a former college soccer player from Massachusetts — rests on a stool.

"Be patient!" his trainer tells him. "God will tell you what to do!"

Less than a minute later, Florian crushes his elbow into the right temple of his opponent, Sean "The Muscle Shark" Sherk, a father of two from Minnesota with no discernible neck. Blood begins to spurt from Sherk's head, pooling on the mat, hanging in coagulating strands from the cage fence.

Dana White, the central figure in the sport and the president of its dominant organization, the Ultimate Fighting Champi-

[See Ultimate, Page A20]

**ANTI-GANG  
 PLAN FACES  
 KEY HURDLES**

Shortfalls in the ranks of the LAPD and in jail beds could curb efforts.

**MORE OVERTIME URGED**

Officers to be shifted into problem areas.

By RICHARD WINTON  
 and MEGAN GARVEY  
 Times Staff Writers

The proposed push to attack Los Angeles gang crime seems straightforward enough: increase the police presence, broaden gang injunctions, start issuing "stay away" orders for hotspots and target the city's top 10 havoc-wreaking gangs.

But even as the plans are being drawn up, there are significant questions about whether the police personnel, jail beds and gang intervention programs exist to back up the effort, prompted by a 14% increase in gang-related crime.

Los Angeles Police Department officials said this week that finding enough street officers to make a difference in the hardest-hit communities may prove hard. Although the LAPD has the money to make more hires, the department fell 300 officers short of its hiring goal last year.

"That is the big question: Where will we get the officers?" said Deputy Chief Charlie Beck, who was promoted to head the South Bureau last year after working as the second-in-command of LAPD operations. "We're going to have to pull people from everywhere: patrol, traffic. . . . We've kept general crime way down, but gang crime has bubbled up, so we're changing focus," Beck said. "We are inevitably robbing Peter to pay Paul."

In the San Fernando Valley, where gang-related crimes surged 42% last year, LAPD sources said the department is preparing to shift dozens of officers into problem neighborhoods. Expanding such efforts into other gang-infested areas is likely to require significantly more officers.

Chief William J. Bratton said he and the mayor plan to unveil a plan in two weeks to better use the department's current 9,400 uniformed officers to fight gangs. Bratton did not give specifics, but his top aides say patrol officers will be directed to take a more active role in gang suppression and intelligence gathering, expanding responsibility for duties traditionally handled by gang units.

Also under consideration is the deployment of strike forces into crime hotspots. Last year a similar approach used officers fresh from their first year of training to increase enforcement on skid row.

As the department struggles to hire about 1,000 additional officers whose positions are budgeted, Bratton said he supports a proposal by some City Council members to temporarily use

money set aside for new hires to fund more overtime for existing officers.

Another pressing issue is what will happen to gang members once they are sentenced and enter the overcrowded county jail system.

The county jails have released more than 200,000 inmates early, most serving just 10% of their time, since mid-2002, when Sheriff Lee Baca stopped using thousands of jail beds amid budget shortfalls.

But inmates convicted under gang injunctions have been kept for their entire sentences. That policy, however, is set to end soon. Instead of doing all their time, gang-injunction convicts will be let go after serving 25% of their terms in an across-the-

[See Hurdles, Page A16]

**On the  
 take —  
 and on  
 camera**

Mexico goes high-tech in cracking down on corruption. 'We had to become like Agent 007,' one official says.

By HÉCTOR TOBAR  
 Times Staff Writer

**MEXICO CITY** — Making money as a corrupt parking cop in this city has always been a delightfully simple proposition.

First you look for double-parked cars — and those are as ubiquitous in this overcrowded capital as sand in the desert. You take your tow truck, back up to the offending vehicle, and wait.

Within minutes, the owner of the car shows up and forks out some cash. Everyone knows the routine. Your act of "generosity" earns you \$25 or so (about half the fine the driver would have paid to the city).

At least that's how it used to be.

In one of many programs across Mexico aimed at using digital technology to cut down on corruption, Mexico City's police command installed cameras and global positioning system receivers on 170 tow trucks a few months ago. Twenty-five officers caught taking bribes were soon out of work.

Across Mexico, activists and a small number of reform-minded officials are working to use relatively simple record-keeping and monitoring methods to improve government efficiency and make the country's notoriously byzan-

[See Mexico, Page A6]



## SAVAGERY AS SPECTACLE



Photographs by MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

**THE SETTING:** Two fighters square off before 10,863 fans at a nine-bout Ultimate Fighting Championship event Oct. 14 at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas. Some organizers of mixed martial arts, once assailed as "human cockfighting," used to call the ring the "cage," but the UFC now prefers the more palatable "octagon."

## BATTLING FOR RESPECT

**[Ultimate, from Page A1]** onship, is sitting within spitting distance. Glancing repeatedly at a small monitor to ensure that his TV crew is getting the shot, he begins to chew his gum feverishly.

"Jesus!" he says. "It looks like he cut his arm off!"

The fighters battle for an additional 11 minutes. Sherk wins by decision, but that seems beside the point. Audience members bellow their approval and high-five each other. Later that night, at a news conference, Florian compliments Sherk on the taste of his blood. Outside the room, White runs into Frank Fertitta III, chairman and chief executive of Station Casinos Inc. and another UFC owner. They embrace.

"Great show," Fertitta tells him. "Great show."

## Blood is the new black

Do not bother asking whether all of this is OK — for parents to bring toddlers to the fights, for crowds to scream obscenities at fighters who are unable to knock out their opponents, for thousands of teenagers to mimic the fights in their backyards, then post their videos on the Internet.

It's too late for that. Blood, as the sport's aficionados like to say, is the new black. Mixed martial arts — also known to less refined fans as "extreme fighting," "cage fighting" and "ultimate fighting" — "is the sport for these times," said Bas "El Guapo" Rutten. Rutten is a renowned fighter, mostly retired, but he is a trainer and an owner of a Los Angeles gym called the Legends Mixed-Martial Arts Training Center.

"There is so much aggression right now. So much anger," he said on a recent afternoon outside the gym, banging his fist against a fence for emphasis. "These days, everybody wants to kick ass."

Today, billboards featuring menacing photos of top fighters — the most famous people you've never heard of, perhaps — are fixtures along Boulevard. At live events, necks crane to see who is in the roped-off sections — model Cindy Crawford, perhaps, or porn star Jenna Jameson.

The sport will soon become America's newest export, as executives from Southern California and Las Vegas — the twin epicenters of the sport domestically — prepare to take more matches into Canada, Mexico and Europe. The perception, right or wrong, that a global market awaits has prompted dozens of fight clubs, gyms billing themselves as mixed martial arts "universities" and upstart fight promoters vying for a slice of the pie to launch operations across the nation.

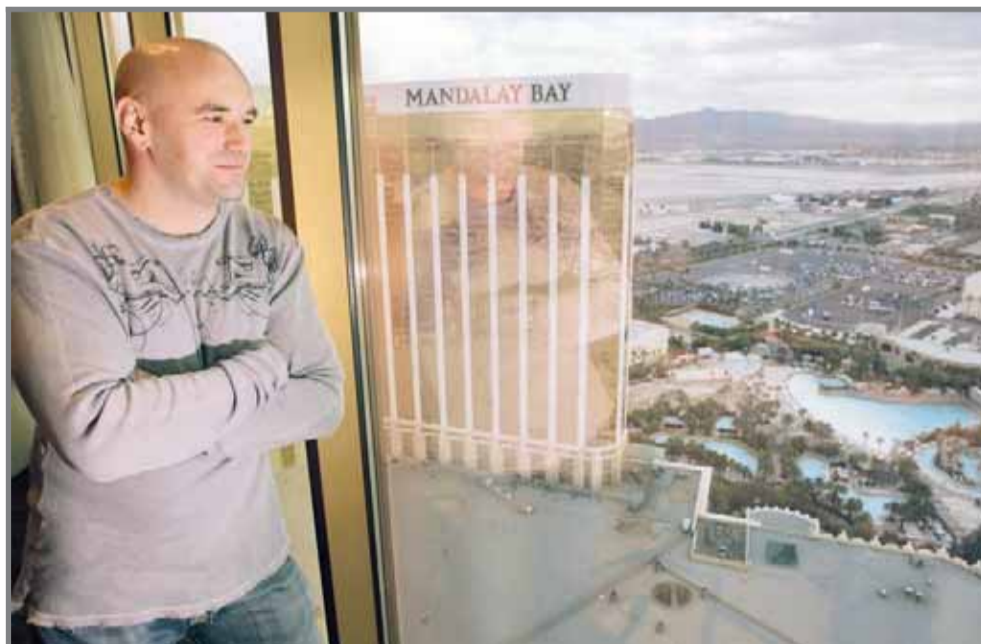
The first UFC fight sanctioned by California regulators, at the Arrowhead Pond in Anaheim in April — now known as the Honda Center — drew 17,000 fans. The \$2.6-million ticket gross made the event the most successful in the arena's 13-year history.

The Las Vegas-based UFC, which was \$44 million in the hole just three years ago, is now averaging a half-million "buys" for its pay-per-view events, most at \$39.95 a pop, according to company executives.

What executives call the UFC's first profitable year culminated with the biggest event in the sport's short history. On Dec. 30, two of the sport's most recognized faces, Chuck



**SUBMISSION:** Sean Sherk has Kenny Florian in a vulnerable position — on his back — in their Ultimate Fighting Championship lightweight title bout.



**KINGMAKER:** Dana White, president of Ultimate Fighting Championship, maintains a remarkably tight grip on every aspect of the production.

"The Iceman" Liddell and Tito "The Huntington Beach Bad Boy" Ortiz, fought in Las Vegas. Ticket prices reached \$1,000, the live gate was \$5.4 million — a record for the sport in the United States — and UFC executives believe the event generated more than 1 million pay-per-view orders.

If they're right — the numbers take a while to come in — it would represent more pay-per-view buys than those generated in May by a premier boxing event starring that sport's biggest draw: Oscar de la Hoya. Pay-per-view purchases of top events in boxing

typically cost about \$50. On cable TV, the numbers are higher. During an October fight between Ortiz and Ken "The World's Most Dangerous Man" Shamrock, more than 9 million people watched at least one minute of the telecast on Spike TV, according to the network.

New deals are in the works for video games and an Internet-driven "community" seeking to pair amateur fighters in the same fashion that recreation leagues pair amateur tennis players. The sport's television exposure will soon rise: A show on Fox Sports en Espanol

called "Gladiadores del UFC" recently began airing; the UFC is in negotiations to air fights on HBO; and Showtime recently committed to airing 25 fights staged by a new Los Angeles-based fighting organization called Elite Xtreme Combat.

"It's a speeding train," said White, the UFC president. "And nobody's driving."

That's heady talk, and not entirely true. The growth of the sport must be tracked not in a speeding vector but in spurts and stops. Wild success is often interrupted by money-losing matches, financial disputes and a free-for-all among competing organizations looking — with mixed results — to cash in on the craze.

To understand the current state of the sport it helps to look back at its humble roots. For that, it helps to take a trip to Victorville, in the high desert, to a seafood restaurant with a cloudy tank of crustaceans in the lobby and a forlorn view of Interstate 15 offramps.

## Humble beginnings

In the early 1990s, a bear of a man named Ted Williams worked at the restaurant. At closing time, he would beat people up, sometimes crashing under the tables as a few dozen onlookers cheered him on.

"I fought my employees, mostly," said Williams, who is now 37 and owns a mixed martial arts organization called the Gladiator Challenge. "We closed at 10 o'clock. And then we got it on. I beat the [heck] out of people."

Those were the outlaw days. On the surface, Williams and other enthusiasts scattered across the nation were looking to settle an old debate: Which style of combat was toughest? Would a wiry boxer beat a powerful but slower sumo wrestler? How would a kickboxer, using a stand-up attack, fare against a jujitsu wrestler who fights on the ground, looking to trap his opponent in a chokehold?

It was an intriguing question. But it degenerated into a brutal spectacle, fought with bare knuckles in seedy events called "smokers," in bars, Indian casinos — whose sovereign status allowed promoters to sidestep the lack of legal sanctioning — and even a drug rehab center. Fighters were often lucky to sign a contract for a "three and three" — \$300 to show up and \$300 more to win.

The sport began to catch on. But when promoters tried to bring it into the light, critics were aghast — at the broken bones, the head-butting and, in one infamous fight in Tulsa, Okla., broadcast across the nation, a fighter who won after repeatedly and brazenly punching his opponent in the groin.

U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a lifelong boxing fan, wrote to the nation's governors after watching a tape of a fight, demanding that they outlaw the sport, a move that left a lasting impression on promoters. ("John McCain is, like, anal," Williams said.) State after state banned the sport, and by 1997 it was booted from cable TV — even from some home video and pay-per-view distributors.

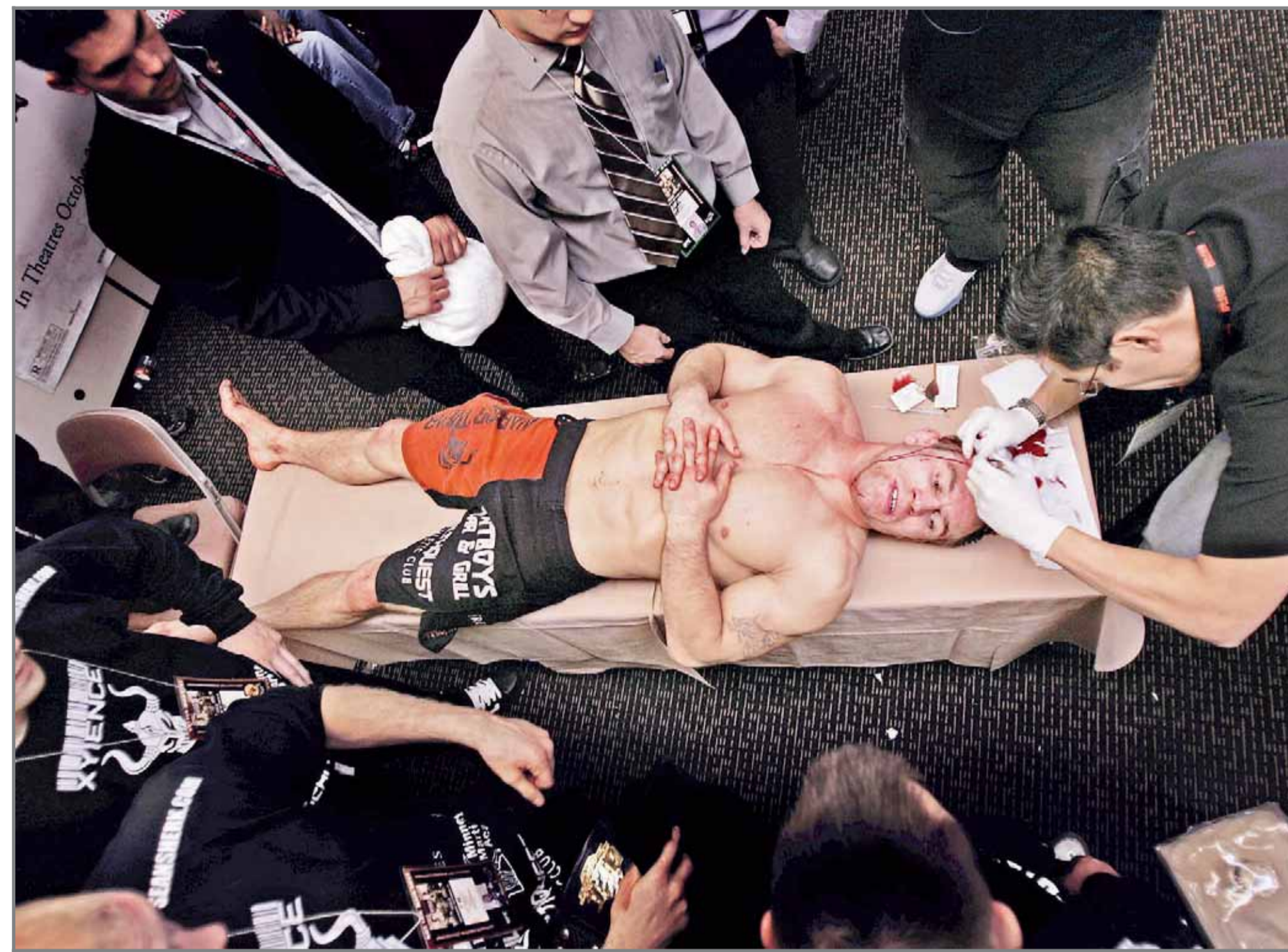
Promoters began distancing themselves from their "No rules!" marketing tactics, adopting provisions against such thuggery as eye-gouging and strikes to the spine. Executives began referring to the "cage" as a more palatable "octagon." The campaign to nudge the sport toward the mainstream was a lim-



**FAMILY MAN:** A battered and beaten Mark "The Hammer" Coleman is hugged by his anguished daughters after losing to Fedor Emelianenko in a heavyweight bout at a Pride Fighting Championship event in Las Vegas.



**ADULATION:** Lightweight Kurt Pellegrino shakes hands with fans after his victory over Junior Assuncao at the Ultimate Fighting Championship event in Las Vegas. Pellegrino won by submission in the first round.



Photographs by MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

**WOUNDED WARRIOR:** Sean Sherk lies on a locker room table as a doctor stitches cuts on his forehead after his five-round bout with Kenny Florian. Sherk won by unanimous decision. Neither fighter was seriously hurt in that bout, but significant injuries, including broken hands and noses, are common in the sport.

ited success; in 2000, New Jersey became the first state to sanction mixed martial arts, adopting a formal set of rules and adding insurance provisions and safeguards against corruption and injury.

In 2001, Dana White — then the owner of several Las Vegas gyms and bankrolled by the casino-mogul brothers Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta — bought the UFC for \$2 million. The UFC built on the reform efforts. Soon there were weight divisions and professional judges. But it seemed as if it had all come too late. The UFC was hemorrhaging money — the White-Fertitta partnership had lost \$44 million by 2003 — and was surviving almost entirely through a rabid Internet-based fan base.

Everything changed in 2005 when the UFC made one final gamble: It paid Spike TV \$10 million to air a reality show, "The Ultimate Fighter," in which newly discovered fighters lived together, trained together and then fought over a UFC contract. The play worked. The show is scheduled to run through at least 2008, a Spanish-language version is in the works and the UFC — while tripling its pay-per-view orders largely because of the buzz created by the cable show — has found its calling. It is, effectively, a television production company.

"They are selling entertainment," said Jeff Clark, president of the North County Fight Club, a Carlsbad gym where he manages and trains 20 mixed martial arts fighters. "American kids want to relate to something. They don't see a cushy lifestyle. They want something edgy. They are looking for an identity, something that makes them feel tough."

At the other end of that pop culture tunnel, Dana White is waiting.

## The 'boss' takes control

On an afternoon before a fight in Las Vegas, the 37-year-old White threw a heavy arm over a visitor's shoulder. "Let me show you something," he said.

Around him, workers were scurrying about the floor of the Mandalay Bay Events Center, erecting the octagon and the mechanics of a dazzling light show. White was more inter-

ested in the workers hanging from the catwalks — taking down half of the giant posters commemorating boxing bouts that had taken place there and replacing them with posters of ultimate fighting events.

Many observers believe that the success of ultimate fighting is helping to erode the popularity of boxing, and White — who was himself a top-flight amateur boxer as a young man — couldn't have been happier about it.

"Today," he said, "is a great day."

White has been lampooned for being, at one time, a boxerise instructor. He has been accused of paying his fighters a pittance while he rakes in millions. His payroll for a recent fight in Anaheim, for example, was \$332,000, while the gross gate was \$1.8 million and pay-per-view proceeds, though they are not released publicly, routinely top \$15 million. He has also made some decisions that suggest his sport has some growing up to do. He recently agreed, for instance, to step into the ring himself to box against one of the stars on his payroll, Tito Ortiz, in a made-for-television event.

Still, White, who owns 10% of the UFC, is amassing a financial empire that belies his rough-and-tumble upbringing on the streets of South Boston, where he was raised by a single mother, a nurse. He owns a fleet of cars and recently purchased a 7,200-square-foot house in a swanky Las Vegas suburb originally developed by Howard Hughes and a 5,400-square-foot house in Newport Beach. "It doesn't suck," said White, who is married and is the father of two young sons and an infant daughter.

Considering the growth of the UFC, he maintains a remarkably tight grip on every aspect of the production. He is puppeteer and kingmaker, playing a leading role in pairing fighters and determining who will be summoned from second-tier organizations to fight in the UFC. Many of his fighters call him "boss."

Before a recent fight, White hopped into a trailer used as the editing bay for that night's pay-per-view broadcast. At a computer, White reviewed fighter interviews that were being used as a pre-fight television segment — a critical portion of the broadcast because it

plays up the soap opera between fighters and keeps the audience hooked. White demanded to know why one fighter was not talking enough trash about his opponent.

"We've tried," director Anthony Giordano told him. "He won't."

"It's weak," White told him. "Fix it."

## Legitimacy is elusive

The control that White exercises over the UFC underscores the sport's central mission: to claim an air of legitimacy. That, however — whether it's because of promoters who acknowledge staging mismatches to guarantee a bloodbath or crowds who regularly boo black and Asian fighters — is no simple task.

Promoters insist, for example, that steroids are not a problem — even that they can hinder a fighter's performance because the sport demands as much quickness as strength. But the sport has no uniform drug-testing policy and, frequently, only fighters who are involved in championship bouts are tested.

Since 2002, at least nine fighters have tested positive for substances that are banned by fight-sanctioning organizations, including boldenone, an anabolic steroid typically used to treat horses, and stanozolol, derived from testosterone.

At an October fight in Las Vegas staged by a Japanese mixed martial arts organization called Pride, two of 18 fighters tested positive for banned substances and a third was alleged to have submitted a urine sample that did not contain human hormones — meaning, officials said, that it was lifted either from an animal or a dead person.

A talking point among promoters is the safety of the sport — the notion, in particular, that no one has died after a sanctioned mixed martial arts event, unlike boxing.

But fighters routinely suffer significant injury, including broken hands and noses. On the California Athletic Commission's current list of suspended athletes, one fighter's name is followed with: "Needs Full Neuro clearance."

And the savagery that was a hallmark of

the sport's roots is hardly ancient history. On May 5, at a World Extreme Cagefighting event in Lemoore, Calif., dubbed "Cinco de Mayhem," 245-pound fighter Mike "Mak" Kyle illegally kicked Brian Olsen in the face while Olsen was on his hands and knees. Kyle then continued to pound Olsen after he had become unconscious, as referees overseeing the event tried to drag Kyle away.

California Athletic Commission Executive Officer Armando Garcia called it "a disgrace" and announced that Kyle had been suspended indefinitely from sanctioned fighting. Olsen suffered a face fracture and a ruptured sinus cavity; his career is probably over after seven fights.

The perception that the UFC is sitting on a massive monopoly, meanwhile, has fostered a chaotic world of new competition.

The sport's insiders agree that many of the world's elite fighters hail from overseas markets, particularly Japan and Brazil, where mixed martial arts is an established sport. Foreign organizations are beginning to nip at the heels of the domestic market; in October, Pride Fighting Championship held its first U.S. event in Las Vegas.

New U.S. organizations seem to pop up every week, all with different business models. Many are losing money; their executives acknowledge. Promoters, meanwhile, are often left bickering over what remains a small talent pool in the United States; one reflection of the sport's immaturity is that there are still just five or six fighters whose mere presence at an event will ensure ticket sales.

White insists the competition is healthy. But there are suggestions that the UFC's unmatched supremacy in the sport is being eroded. Fearing revolt from top fighters who suddenly recognize their value to promoters, for instance, White has quietly begun paying off-the-books bonuses to his biggest draws. On paper, for example, Tito Ortiz and Ken Shamrock were paid a combined \$310,000 for a marquee fight this summer. After their fight, however, White wrote both a check for roughly \$2 million, he has since acknowledged. UFC has also purchased, in recent weeks, two smaller fighting organizations — not the behavior, perhaps, [See *Ultimate*, Page A22]

## SAVAGERY AS SPECTACLE

SPORT  
CASHES  
IN ON  
RAGE

[Ultimate, from Page A21] of a company that welcomes competition.

"Everybody who can rub two nickels together is getting into this sport," White said. "They're all saying: How are they doing this? My feeling is: Go spend \$44 million and figure it out."

## 'The Iceman' is chillin'

CHUCK Liddell's rabid fans, who consider him the most menacing man on the planet, might be disappointed to learn that on a recent September morning, he was played in the back of a limousine, drinking an iced coffee sweetened with caramel.

The father of two and a graduate of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where he earned a degree in business and accounting, Liddell is the UFC's light heavyweight champion. At 37, he is very good at what he does — "beating people up," as he puts it with a chuckle — and has come to personify his sport. On this September morning he was headed up the Golden State Freeway to throw out the first pitch at a Dodgers game, an event that illustrates a sport in transition.

When he arrived, it became evident that one Dodgers executive had not gotten the memo. The executive, declaring the sport "barbaric," protested Liddell's presence in the team clubhouse — especially if there were cameras around. Phone calls flew between the front office and a Dodgers public relations representative assigned to usher Liddell through the game.

"I understand you have issues," the PR rep said into her cellphone, her voice hushed. "But it's their clubhouse. They like him. They want him there."

Liddell remembers the dark days of ultimate fighting with some fondness — days when his shorts were emblazoned with the name of his sole sponsor, Meathead Movers of San Luis Obispo, when, he says, "I was happy just to be making a living." Today, the UFC needs Liddell far more than he needs the



MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

**FAN PARTICIPATION:** A fight breaks out among fans during a Total Fighting Alliance event in Carson in November. Deputies ejected the unruly fans but made no arrests. Total Fighting Alliance is one of many upstart organizations hoping to cash in on the rising popularity of mixed martial arts. Its Southern California events draw hundreds of fans.

UFC. Asked if there could come a day when he marches into White's office and demands real money for a fight — boxing money, say — he said: "My management is looking at that."

"I didn't mind fighting for nothing when nobody was making any money," he said. "I don't know what's going to happen, but I know things are going to change."

As if to illustrate his point, the Dodgers appeared to have vastly underestimated Liddell's draw as a celebrity. They had made no provisions for escorting him through the stadium during his appearance, and he was chased by a mob of people looking for a photo or an autograph. "Whose bright idea was this?" one of his handlers shouted as they tried to wade through the crowd. A man muscled through to shake Liddell's hand. He was the assistant manager of a local Charles Schwab branch.

"You're a god in my office," he told Liddell. "This sport," Liddell said later with a

smile, "isn't going anywhere."

Its fighters, in the meantime, will come and go.

The night before Liddell's first pitch, at the UFC's Anaheim event, Jason "The Punisher" Lambert, a Carlsbad fighter, stared at the wall of a Honda Center dressing room. It was his 29th birthday.

Lambert had been working for five years instructing San Bernardino County sheriff's deputies in firearms tactics and defensive maneuvers. He had been fighting part time — most fighters still have a "day job" — and largely in second-tier events with cheesy names such as "Flaming Fury" and "Rumble on the Rock." But in March, he had gotten the call to the UFC, to the big leagues, and he had won three straight fights.

In May, he quit his job, a decision he fretted over because he has custody of his 10-year-old son, Jacob. "I wasn't going to leave my son high and dry because I wanted to chase a

dream," he said. "But there came a point when I knew I would be looking back saying, 'Coulda, woulda, shoulda.' So I've got to see what happens. Obviously, I need to win."

It was his first event as a full-time fighter. It was also the first time his son was in the crowd.

Later that night, in front of more than 12,000 people, Lambert walked into the cage to face Rashad Evans, a former collegiate wrestler who had never lost in 13 fights. Two minutes into the second round, Evans pounced on him near the fence, straddled his chest and slammed his fist into Lambert's face — once, twice, 18 times before the referee jumped between them. Lambert's eyes rolled back in his head. The crowd roared its approval.

scott.gold@latimes.com

**Tomorrow:** Amid the violence of mixed martial arts, love blossoms.

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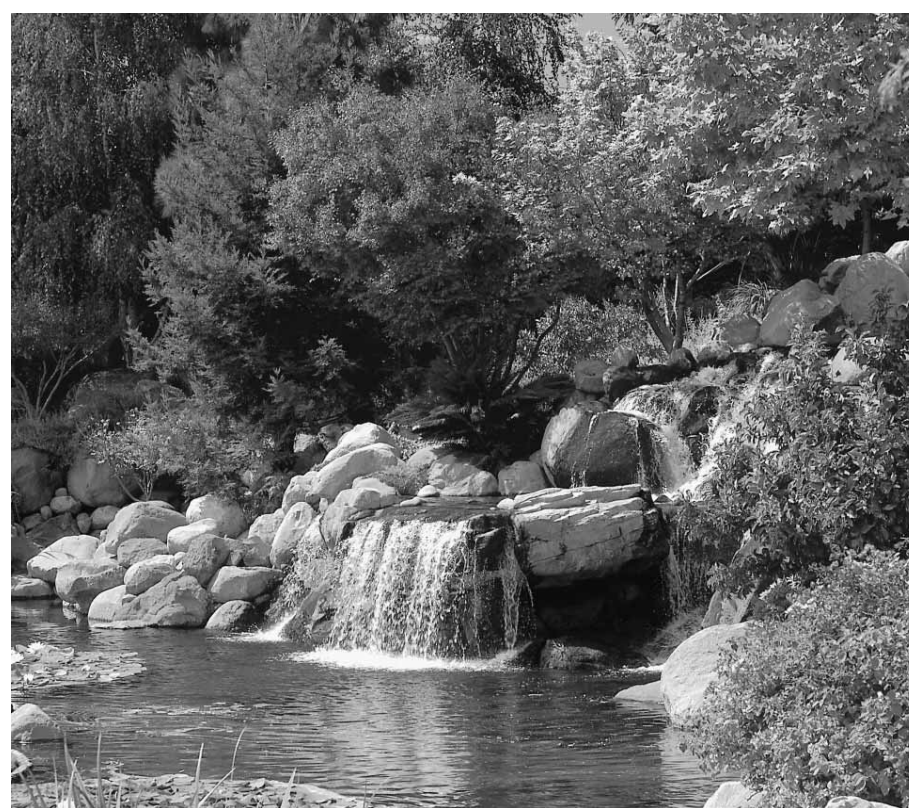
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## ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE

# Early Nevada caucuses turn heads West

The state's Democrats have unique concerns that 2008 candidates ignore at their peril.

By MARK Z. BARABAK  
Times Staff Writer

**LAS VEGAS** — Forget the jokes about caucusing in brothels, or trawling for votes amid the slot

## COLUMN ONE

### War zone midwives deliver

*With hospitals seen as costly and unsafe, many Iraqis turn to qabilas like Samira Majeed, who's unlicensed but indefatigable.*

By MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE  
Times Staff Writer

**T**HE woman was nine months pregnant and in shock: She had just watched her father and uncle die at a bomber's hands. The baby was coming, but her family was afraid to take her to a hospital, where they might be kidnapped or killed by roving militias.

And so, like many Iraqis these days, they turned to an unlicensed midwife.

The baby girl was born in Samira Majeed's makeshift delivery room, a chilly, windowless apartment foyer with a sheet of battered linoleum spread across the floor like a rug. Although the infant appeared healthy, she didn't cry — a sign of trouble, Majeed told the family.

Majeed checked the baby's mouth. Sure enough, she wasn't breathing. So the midwife started to shake her, gently at first, then harder.

Desperate, Majeed resorted to a lifesaving technique she learned from her mother, a midwife herself.

"I breathed in her mouth to give her life," Majeed said, and then she pricked the newborn's ear to revive her.

Within moments, the baby began to cry. She would live.

As gunmen increasingly target hospitals and clinics in Iraq's deepening civil war, expectant mothers rely on the country's 2,000 midwives, or *qabilas*, and 3,000 lower-skilled rural "birth attendants" — all of whom the state no longer licenses or trains, in an effort to steer women to government clinics.

Last week, a Sunni Arab woman took her 2-month-old baby to a doctor to get a birth  
[See *Midwives*, Page A5]

machines and blackjack tables along the neon-drenched Strip.

When Democratic presidential hopefuls come calling on Nevada, the real challenge will be the party faithful they find in this independent-minded state, which will host the West's first nominating contest in a little over a year.

Democrats here like guns, loathe taxes and see nature as a source of fun and profit, not a place that some Washington bureaucrat should lock away. And skip the Rust Belt rhetoric about all those manufacturing jobs fleeing to China and Mexico. Economic issues require a different approach in a state that has boomed for the last 40 years.

"If you give the same speech on the economy in Nevada that you give in Iowa, you're going to seem out of touch," said Eric Herzik, who teaches political science at the University of Nevada in Reno.

"A lack of knowledge," he added, "can offend quicker than anything."

Nevada represents the leading edge in a political shift, as the Rocky Mountain West becomes the new battleground in presidential politics. Democrats, hoping to bring a fresh voice to their nominating process and give candidates a head start on the fall campaign, have set Nevada's caucuses for Jan. 19, 2008.

It is the first time any Western state has had so much influence so early: Nevada will go second, after the Iowa caucuses begin the presidential balloting a few days earlier. And if the state's leading Democrats have their way, what happens in Vegas won't stay in Vegas.

"This is seen as a very, very unique opportunity to get the presidential candidates on the record on Western issues and put them in the national arena early," said Billy Vassiliadis, one of Nevada's political power brokers and the impresario behind Las Vegas's sly marketing slogan. "Instead of talking about manufacturing jobs and farm subsidies, we'll be discussing public lands, infrastructure needs, ranching, mining and water, water, water."

On Saturday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and national labor leaders announced plans for five candidate forums in Nevada, starting next month in Carson City.

For some Democrats, campaigning here may require them to learn a new way of talking — starting with the pronunciation of the state. It's Ne-VAD-uh, not Ne-VAH-duh, which may seem  
[See *Nevada*, Page A15]



MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

**TENDERNESS:** "Roxy Balboa" Richardson and Toby "Tiger Heart" Grear spar at the gym they help manage. They met and fell in love last year.

## SAVAGERY AS SPECTACLE

# LOVE PACKS A PUNCH

Two Southland fighters share their passion for mixed martial arts — and for each other.

By SCOTT GOLD : TIMES STAFF WRITER  
Second of two parts

**A**T a gym tucked away on a grungy block above Sunset Boulevard, 18 heavy punching bags swing slowly from a rack of steel girders, like carcasses on butcher hooks.

A barefoot man with a soft face begins to stalk one of the bags, breaking the silence with two jabs and a thunderous kick. Soon, he is joined by a lanky woman with black, spiky hair and her mother's name, Rhea, tattooed in Gothic script on her left wrist.

They turn on each other, striking with fists, feet, knees and elbows. Her breath quickens. "Suck it up," he tells her. She kicks him, hard, on his neck. "That's better," he says. Then she leans in and gives him a tender kiss.

Here, in the bosom of one of America's most violent sports, love is blossoming.

Toby "Tiger Heart" Grear, 27, and "Roxy Balboa" Richardson, 29, are part of a growing wave of people who are once again stepping off the apocryphal bus in Hollywood to find their fame. Unlike their predecessors, they are not here to act, or to dance, or to sing. They are here to fight.

The sport of mixed martial arts — known

to many of its fans as ultimate fighting — has leapt into the central tide of American pop culture. With its ascendance has come a network of fight clubs and training centers, many of them in Southern California.

One new entry can be found under a parking garage adorned with a peeling portrait of Marilyn Monroe. Legends Mixed Martial Arts Training Center, which opened in August, is billed as a "university" where aspiring fighters can learn all of the necessary crafts under one roof — the footwork of boxing, the "science of eight limbs" (two feet, two knees, two elbows, two fists) of Thai-style kickboxing, the submission tactics of Brazilian jujitsu.

Many of the gym's 300 members — accountants and actors, even a golfer looking for more distance off the tee — are among the legions in Los Angeles who are looking merely for a workout. But 50 of them, give or take, are looking for more.

They have come from Ohio, from Tennessee, from Sweden, and they are here to learn from professionals and, in a sense, to get discovered — to attract the attention of managers and trainers who can land them real fights.

Theirs is a new, Spartan existence, draped on the fringes of an emerging sport  
[See *Ultimate*, Page A12]



RODRIGO BUENDIA AFP/Getty Images

**FRIENDS:** Rafael Correa, right, who'll be inaugurated today as president of Ecuador, wants to pursue an agenda similar to that of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, left.

## Ecuador's divided loyalties

Both fighter and front in the drug war, it chafes at U.S. presence on its soil.

By CHRIS KRAUL  
Times Staff Writer

**MANTA, ECUADOR** — The United States is battling a dangerous new front in its South American drug war — just as a protege of anti-American leader

Hugo Chavez comes to power in Ecuador vowing to shut down a U.S. base dedicated to narcotics surveillance.

Officials have expressed growing concern that this Andean nation is being "Colombianized," illustrated by record cocaine seizures in the last two years, the destruction of a major cocaine-processing lab and a recent gangland-style killing.

In recent months, U.S. and Ecuadorean forces have collaborated in the drug fight. But with

today's inauguration of leftist President Rafael Correa, some U.S. officials worry the cooperation might be greatly curtailed.

Correa has promised to pursue a socialist agenda similar to that of his political mentor, Chavez, the president of Venezuela. Correa is the fifth left-leaning leader elected in Latin America in a little more than a year.

During his campaign, Correa promised that he would not renew the U.S. military's lease on  
[See *Ecuador*, Page A4]

## Diversity works at UC Riverside

It's preferred by many blacks and Latinos, whose numbers are low at other UC campuses.

By RICHARD C. PADDOCK  
Times Staff Writer

When it was time for Woodrow Curry to decide where to go to university, he had several choices. An African American with good high school grades and test scores, he was accepted by UC Berkeley, among other schools.

But Berkeley is not where he ended up. Spurning one of the nation's premier public universities, he picked UC Riverside. Although Riverside is sometimes scorned as the lowliest of UC campuses, it offered Curry something that Berkeley did not: a place where he felt welcome.

"I liked the atmosphere," said Curry, 22, who plans to go to law school after he graduates next year. "I liked the black community on campus. I knew that UC Riverside had the most African

## BUSH INSISTS CONGRESS CAN'T HALT IRAQ BUILDUP

Amid growing criticism, he and Cheney seek to reassert the strategy of additional troops.

## PRESIDENT ADMITS ERRORS

By NICOLE GAOUILLET  
Times Staff Writer

**WASHINGTON** — As Congress and the administration gird for conflict over troop levels in Iraq, President Bush is asserting that he has the power to send more U.S. forces, regardless of what lawmakers want.

"I fully understand they could try to stop me from doing it," Bush said in an interview broadcast Sunday on CBS' "60 Minutes." When asked whether he thought he had the authority to send additional troops in the face of opposition from the Democratic majority in Congress, Bush said: "In this situation, I do, yeah."

The president's comments were part of an administration effort to quell the growing roar of criticism about its Iraq strategy, as Democrats plan nonbinding resolutions opposing the troop increase and as some Republicans echo their resistance to the plan.

Bush acknowledged that some of the administration's steps had contributed to Iraq's instability and said any mistakes should be laid at his feet. "If people want a scapegoat, they've got one right here in me because it's my decisions," the president said.

"No question, decisions have made things unstable," he added. "But the question is: Can we succeed?"

On Wednesday, the president unveiled a plan to subdue the growing violence in Baghdad and nearby Al Anbar province by adding 21,500 soldiers and Marines to the 132,000 U.S. troops in the country. The decision ran counter to a recommendation by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group that the administration draw down troops, and it brought down  
[See *Bush*, Page A8]

## RELATED STORY

### Two former Hussein aides are executed

The pair, codefendants of the late leader, are hanged in Baghdad. **WORLD, A7**

## Inside The Times

### L.A.'s King Day parade hits its stride

After a slow start, it's now the Southland's largest tribute to the civil rights leader. **CALIFORNIA, B3**

**Weather:** Sunny skies, windy and warmer.

**Downtown:** 65/41. **B12**

**Latest news:** latimes.com  
**Complete Index:** Page A2



## SAVAGERY AS SPECTACLE



Photographs by MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

**TAKING IT ON THE CHIN:** "Roxy Balboa" Richardson is rocked by Christina Martin in a full-rules Muay Thai bout in November. Muay Thai is a mixed martial art in which fighters use punches, kicks, elbows, knees, standing grappling and head butts. Roxy has been considering turning pro as a kickboxer.

## TRADING BLOWS, KISSES

**(Ultimate, from Page A1)** and far removed from the glitz of the sport's upper echelon. It is embodied by Toby and Roxy: an inseparable couple, college-educated, articulate and ripped with muscles. Five blocks from their small apartment, they help manage the gym and train its members. Inside, they swap tips: Keep your pivot ankle at a 90-degree angle to gain more velocity on a kick; use nasal spray to constrict the passages of the nose, thereby preventing nosebleeds if you get hit in the face. They trade gym shorts, except for the lucky pair that Toby hasn't washed in two years. They nurture each other: Roxy gives him books on nutrition to wean him from fast food; he gives her books by the self-help writer Dale Carnegie.

And they train together, whaling on each other to prepare for their next fight, hoping to escape the minor leagues of their sport — "waiting," Toby said one recent afternoon, "for someone to find us."

## His Midwestern roots

He is from Lima, Ohio, a Rust Belt town named for the city in Peru — because Peru sent over the medicine used to treat malaria during the pioneer days — but pronounced like the bean.

He was the second of three boys, all red-headed, all built like sycamore trees. In Lima, a boy who doesn't play sports in his spare time has to get a job, so, naturally, the brothers became fanatical athletes. At his Catholic high school, Toby ran track, competed on the swim team and, his senior year, was captain of the football team, which held Mass before every game, with players in full pads and uniform.

In the winter of 2000, midway through the University of Dayton, he yearned for a new sport. He flipped through the yellow pages, landing in the M's — in "Martial Arts."

He enrolled in a small martial arts academy in northwest Ohio. It was a clarifying event, so much so that he remembers the color of the shorts his first mentor was wearing the day they met: blue. By the end of the year, his trainers put him in his first tournament. It was at a local union hall, a "rough-man tournament."

"I was 150 pounds. Skinny, skinny, skinny," Toby, now all the way up to 160, said one recent morning. "I fought a guy who ate steroids for breakfast."

In the second round, Toby faked two jabs and then spun in a circle, catching his opponent on the side of the head with the back of his fist.

"I put him on his ass," Toby said. "I started whaling on him. He didn't come out for the third round."

Amateur fights soon gave way to small purses and, last year, he turned pro in mixed martial arts.

"I had told everybody I could never do it, that it was too brutal," Toby said. "Then I tried it. And everything changed. It was so open. You could do anything. I could see the future."

He was hooked. And he was good. Most important, perhaps — in a thoroughly modern sport where image is key and promoters expect their talent to entertain — he frequently won in spectacular fashion.



**MEALTIME:** Roxy and Toby nurture each other: She gives him books on nutrition to wean him from fast food; he gives her books by Dale Carnegie.



**RELAXATION:** Roxy and Toby unwind. "I never thought I would find someone I could love so much," he said, "and someone I could spar with too."

At one fight, Toby instinctively leapt over his opponent's leg kick and then pounded him into submission so quickly that he had to yell to the referee to point out that his opponent had lost consciousness. At another, with his opponent on top of him, Toby scored a technical knockout while on his back, traditionally a vulnerable position.

"I understand that it's a performance," he said. "I consider myself a full-contact actor."

## Her vagabond beginnings

She was raised by a single mother, a woman she describes as the black sheep of an upper-trust British family. In stark contrast to his archetypal Midwestern childhood, hers was one of itinerant privilege.

Her mother, traveling in the United States, met the man who would become her father at a bus stop in Arizona. Roxy has never met him. "I was a mistake," she said.

She and her mother were "gypsies" who wound up living, under circumstances she still doesn't quite understand, in Italy, California, Maryland, Colorado. It was an exotic life, one she roundly rejected when it came time for high school. She announced that she would no longer be moving, and she boarded at a small Quaker school in Maryland, then attended LaSalle University in Philadelphia.

After college, she "bummed around," she said, promoting late-night "rave" parties, bartending, driving a delivery truck for a restaurant. She moved to Los Angeles in 2002 and soon walked through the doors of a kickboxing academy.

Before long, she fought her first "smoker," a small fight often held after hours at martial arts academies. Roxy looks tough; she often wears a pair of brass knuckles on a necklace. But when she stepped into the ring that night, she said, "I thought: 'What the hell am I doing here? This is really scary, and I want to get out.'"

She held her own; the kickboxing fight ended in a draw. A few months later, she recorded her first knockout.

"There is nothing like it," she said. "It's exhilarating. It's not the brutality that gets you. It's finding your strength, realizing that you did this even though the other person was trying to do it to you."

## Two hearts converge

They met through e-mail last year, introduced by a mutual friend. In April, Toby told her he was coming in from Ohio for a fight. He asked if she could pick him up at the airport.

"It was very romantic," she said with a chuckle. "I never thought I would meet my boyfriend at LAX."

If he was to make a real run at a career in mixed martial arts, they decided, he needed to move to the West Coast. He moved to L.A. in June. They moved in together the next month.

"I never thought I would find someone I could love so much," he said, "and someone I could spar with too."

As for Roxy, "I needed to find a man who is tougher than me," she said. "And I did."

Their training sessions can be harsh and aggressive. One recent afternoon, Toby was overseeing sparring sessions when he admonished a fighter who was pulling his punches against Roxy.

"Don't give her any breaks!" he yelled. "Don't be a sissy!"

Some days, it's a bit much for Roxy, who was so meek in high school that her basketball coach ordered her to foul more often.

"I forget that he is a natural fighter," she said, still nurturing a large, yellowing bruise on her shoulder, the remnant of one of Toby's kicks. "I wouldn't call myself a natural fighter. But this is in his blood. I don't particularly like sparring with him. His whole persona changes. It's like fighting with someone that I don't really want to know."

He seems unfazed.

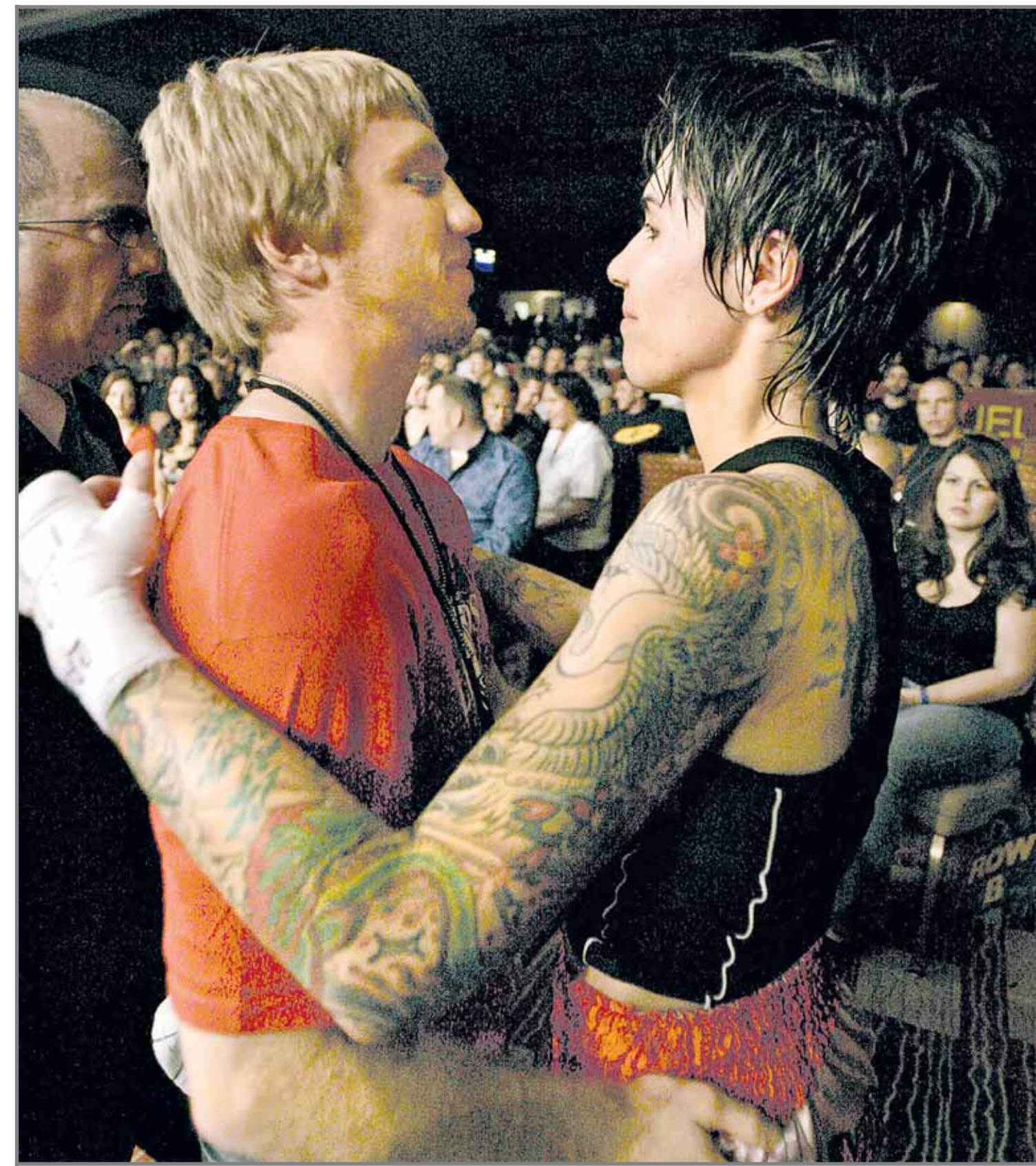
"She loves it," he said with a grin. "You know she does."

Roxy also harbors fears that he could wind up with lasting injuries.

"It's sad when I talk to fighters who have been around and have pretty clearly taken one too many hits," she said. "He's got this insane energy to him, and it's never pleasant to think that he could wind up like that. But it would be more devastating to him as a person to not do it. You can't live that way."

And so they move on, fight by fight. For now, Roxy is an amateur kickboxer, and conflicted about her future.

She has considered making the leap to mixed martial arts, though the opportunities for women are still few in the sport. She is also considering turning pro as a kickboxer. Then again, after losing a December fight, she is also thinking about retirement. Toby has encouraged her to think about it, saying it an-



MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Toby hugs Roxy after her Muay Thai bout with Christina Martin. They plan to someday move to Ohio to open a mixed martial arts training center. But first, they said, they need to achieve some success in the sport.



BRYAN CHAN Los Angeles Times

**PREPARATIONS:** Toby has his hands taped before an October bout with Victor "Joe Boxer" Valenzuela.



BRYAN CHAN Los Angeles Times

**VULNERABLE:** Toby has Valenzuela on his back, but only briefly. Toby will earn \$1,000, win or lose.



BRYAN CHAN Los Angeles Times

**KNOCKDOWN:** Toby goes sprawling onto the canvas after a flurry of punches by Valenzuela in the first round. Toby's trainers cautioned him against trading punches with Valenzuela, who has an extensive background as a boxer.

gushed him to watch her suffer. She said she's loath to even contemplate the idea, if only because she can't bear to go out with a loss.

Someday, they would like to move to Ohio to open a training center of their own. Their plan will work, they figure, only if they can sell themselves as successful fighters. In a sport that is only now emerging in the limelight, there are still perhaps fewer than 50 fighters in the country who are making a decent living fighting full time as mixed martial artists.

So Toby is giving himself five years, he said, "to become a legend." First, though, he has to wind his way through the lower-tier pro organizations that are granting him fights. He must win, more often than not, and he must win with style.

## Appointment in a cage

It is fight night, a balmy evening in October.

Toby is scheduled to fight in one of the top bouts of the evening at a California Xtreme Fighting event at the Upland Indoor Sports Arena. CXF is one of the many upstart organizations looking to profit from the upsurge of interest in mixed martial arts; on this night seven of the 20 fighters on the card will be making their professional debuts.

Toby will be paid \$1,000, win or lose. His opponent: Victor "Joe Boxer" Valenzuela, a menacing-looking man with a goatee and tattoos. Valenzuela knocked out one recent opponent in 12 seconds. Then again, Toby has never been knocked down, much less knocked out.

At Legends, Toby's entourage is assembling — trainer Chris Reilly, a former pro kickboxer and one of the gym's owners; two other fighters who will work his corner; and his mother and grandmother, who have flown in from Ohio. Toby had disappeared for the afternoon, telling everyone to leave him alone. Soon, he walks in, quieter than usual and more intense.

"Hey, champ," Reilly tells him.

In a rented minivan, Toby swings by his apartment to make sure he has a knee brace. "Who hurt their knee?" his grandmother, 67-year-old Barb Neinberg, asks from the back seat. "Nobody," Toby said. "It's a big play to make him think I hurt my knee."

The mind games are underway. Promoters love a grudge among their fighters and, earlier, Toby had handed them one on a platter.

He had been scheduled to fight Valenzuela a few months ago, but Valenzuela had pulled out, citing a hand injury.

One day, Toby joked with friends that Valenzuela had injured his hand by entering "Toby Grear" into an Internet search engine and pulling up videos of Toby's ferocious knockouts.

Valenzuela's manager, however, was within earshot. He passed word of the insult on to his fighter, who was not pleased.

When he walks into the arena, Toby spots Valenzuela.

"There he is," he says. "Still mad at the world."

The crowd, some of whom have paid \$100 for cage-side seats, is filling in. Sponsors — mostly energy drink and athletic wear companies — have hired young women to mill about the crowd wearing thongs and tight camouflage T-shirts.

Referee Cecil Peoples summons the fighters for a review of the rules, a speech that could be viewed as performance art in a different setting.

"No head butting," he tells them as they nod in solemn agreement. "No biting. No fish-hooking. No groin attacks of any kind — biting it, scratching it, twisting it. No fingers in any orifice. You can tear up the tush. Just stay away from the kidneys."

Toby is in the seventh fight on the card. Soon, organizers summon him and his team into a small room leading to curtains where fighters will enter to their chosen song, surrounded by fake smoke and strobe lights. Toby has picked a song called "Circumstances" by the Jamaican dance hall artist Buju Banton:

*Circumstances made me what I am.  
Was I born a violent man?*

Toby pulls down his hood and closes his eyes. The announcer's voice booms over the loudspeakers: "Originally from Lima, Ohio, I give you . . . Toby 'Tiger Heart' Greeeeeeear!"

Reilly, his trainer, leans in close: "Put the bad guy to sleep," he says.

The crowd is going nuts. When the fight begins, Toby reaches out to tap gloves with Valenzuela. It is a common gesture of respect in combat sports, but Valenzuela refuses to do it. Toby looks startled.

He tries a flying kick, which he cannot land. Valenzuela pounces on him, pinning him against the cage wall.

They begin trading punches — the only style of fighting that Toby's trainers cautioned him against, because Valenzuela has an extensive background as a boxer. Valenzuela lands a vicious body blow that seems to sap Toby's strength.

"Put him away!" one of Valenzuela's trainers shouts.

And then he does. After a relentless flurry of punches, Toby begins to stagger, then stops defending himself at all. At 2:46 of the first round, one last punch crumples him.

The fight is over. He has been knocked out. Doctors rush into the cage as blood trickles ever so slightly from his temple.

Tears well in the eyes of Toby's mother, Teresa Grear, 51. There are days, she confesses, when she wishes he would just come home. He had worked for the family business, a building supply company, and showed a real talent for it, she said.

"He's smart," she says, gazing toward the cage. "He went to a private college. But this is the path he has chosen, and it's his path, not mine. I have to remember that. Even when the blood runs out of my body watching this."

Toby walks backstage to gather his gear. Roxy gives him a lasting hug and wipes the sweat from his brow.

"My girlfriend is still cuter than his girlfriend," Toby says.

"You were close," Reilly tells him. "The guy was hurt."

"It was bad," Toby says. "Real bad."

"You know what, man?" Reilly tells him. "Once in a while, everybody has a bad day at the office."

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