

Mixed Master

Oregon City senior Jake Morris is a rising star in one of the state's fastest growing and most brutal sports – Mixed Martial Arts

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The Oregon City News, May 5, 2009, Updated May 5, 2009



JAIME VALDEZ / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP

Jake Morris, top left, in the first and only round of his fight last weekend at the Roseland, which he won to move to 3-0.

For a minute and a half the two fighters dance around each other within the eight walls of the cage, throwing jabs and testing lunges, feeling out the opponent.

Both move with quickness and determined intensity, shoulders jabbing in feigned strikes, fists hovering, circling, menacing like angry wasps, building the anticipation of the blow that will open the bout.

Fans scream as Oregon City High School senior Jake Morris sends a few lashing kicks at the calves of his opponent, Hamilton Ash.

And then, halfway through the first round, Morris explodes. He lands a right hook to Ash's jaw, wraps him in a headlock and throws him to the corner. He slams four quick blows to the head, then two more right hooks as the two are tangled. Morris picks him up, throws him into the cage wall and, with Ash's mouth already filled with blood, Morris half stands, shoulders and left arm pinning his opponent, and his right fist pummels Ash – one, two, three powerful blows to the face.

One more jab to the jaw and Morris backs off like he'll let Ash get up off his back. But when Ash is half standing and clearly off guard, Morris slams his anvil of a right fist into Ash's face. Ash's open hand goes up in a desperate attempt to block, but too late, and he tumbles across the ring, only to be pinned against another wall.

There are 30 seconds left in round one, and all Ash can do is hold his hands around his head, trying to limit the blows that connect and waiting for the reprieve of the bell. But Morris' intensity is as strong as ever, and the beating continues.

The referee calls the match after one round. Morris wins by virtue of having broken Ash's jaw.

Few rules in MMA

Morris, a senior at OCHS, is 3-0 in his short mixed martial arts career after Saturday's victory at the 43rd Rumble at the Roseland in Portland.

MMA is essentially a hybrid of boxing, martial arts and wrestling. – the rules are few, the fights all-out. Few of Saturday's matches lasted the entire three rounds.

Morris turned 18 on Dec. 2 and fought his first MMA bout only four days later. Neither of his previous two matches lasted more than a minute. During his high school career he finished first, second and third place at the state wrestling championship.



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In stark contrast to Saturday night's ferocity, the atmosphere at weigh-ins that morning was light, fighters chatting and joking with one another. One of the contestants even smiled for his pre-fight photo.

"A lot of people think that if you're mean and you can beat a lot people up in bars and stuff that you're going to be good in this, and it's really the exact opposite," Morris says. "Most of the guys that are hot-headed and people that fight in bars, they usually only last in MMA six months; they're so cocky, then they get beat up and they're done. But most of the guys in here that are pretty successful, they act pretty calm, act like it's a sport, get the W."

One of Morris' coaches, Jon Krohn, says Morris fits that bill.

"For an 18-year-old kid, he's not full of attitude," Krohn says. "I think he came in knowing he was going to have to start at the bottom of the food chain, he didn't come in muscles all flexed."

Morris exhibits a similar attitude outside the ring. While he has strong potential in the sport, he hasn't been overtaken by the glitz and hype. He hopes to go pro eventually, but first he's going to wrestle for **Clackamas Community College** for two years, and even then might transfer to a division one school for another two years on the mat.

“Wrestling has been my sport since I was probably three years old, so it’s kind of my heart,” he says. But, he adds, “you can’t really make much money at wrestling besides getting your school paid for; after that you can go to the Olympics and stuff, but MMA, you can see these guys making hundreds of thousands of dollars and wrestling’s dominating the MMA field.”

Morris says he’ll start out taking general courses at CCC, but he’d like to focus on either a business or law enforcement degree.

“I’ve got a lot of big decision to make,” Morris says with a grin.

Amateur status for now

Morris got into MMA by watching his long-time mentor, Chael Sonnen, go pro in the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

“I’ve wrestled for him for probably the last 10 years, and I watched him kind of go through wrestling and MMA and then his success in MMA, so I’m kind of trying to follow in his footsteps now,” Morris says.

And he’s on his way. While amateurs can’t be paid – they endure the pain in hopes of going pro – he is sponsored by Island Tan, American Laser Center, Karma Fight Club and is an amateur fighter for Gresham-based Team Quest.

Krohn says Morris going pro is certainly possible, but he’ll have to work his way up slowly.

“I’m not in a hurry,” Krohn said. “A fighter at this age, we’ve got time to build him like we should ... right now he’s doing good, he’s winning his fights, but I want to see him go a three-round fight and see if he can make it. Anybody can fight for 30 seconds; can you fight for nine minutes?”

Morris, for his part, is confident he can. In the ring after the match, the emcee asked him about the fight – Morris’ original opponent had to drop out, and Ash was a replacement.

“My coach didn’t want me to fight him at first because he has more experience,” Morris told a screaming crowd. “Well, it looks like I’m tougher.”

And what about challenging for the championship, the emcee asked?

“(Ash) went three rounds with the champion – yeah, well, I just broke his jaw.”

The next Rumble at the Roseland is on Saturday, June 13. Visit www.thefcff.com for more details.