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21st Century Writing&Lit
May 11th, 2014
Research Paper
Final Draft

MMA: Fighting its Way to the Top

A bloody river runs from my nose into my open mouth as I gasp for breath. The referee has a grip on my right wrist, and on the left of my opponent. My head is bowed and my eyes are closed tight. The announcer rings out, "The judges scored this bout with a unanimous decision of 29-30, with our winner..." My stomach aches from the suspense. "In the red corner, Claaaaiiire Guthrieeee!" He raises my hand and the suspense turns into butterflies. The taste of victory, sweeter than life itself.

Mixed Martial Arts is my passion. I've been training mixed martial arts for over two years now. My gym, Legion Fighting Alliance, is my home away from home. I'm always shocked that when I tell people I train MMA the most common response is, "What's that?" Mixed martial arts is not currently as popular as other sports such as football or basketball. But with the Ultimate Fighting Championship's new television coverage and addition of a women's title spot, MMA is on the rise to becoming a mainstream sport.

Being traced back as far as 3000 B.C, Mixed Martial Arts is actually one of the oldest sports to date. At this time it was used by warriors to protect their villages. ("History of MMA). Its uses and techniques can transformed MMA is a combative sport that involves many fighting styles such as Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Boxing, Kickboxing, Muay

Thai, and Wrestling. It is a form of entertainment for many, a hobby for some, and a career for few. It requires elite skill, mental toughness, self-discipline, and confidence.

To many, the sport is referred to as “cock fighting” or barbaric violence. I’ll admit, the thought of two men locked in a cage together to fight until one receives victory isn’t exactly a tennis match. As Bob Reilly, a state assemblyman from New York, put it, MMA is “a violent sport not worthy of our society.” This image of uncontrolled violence has been hard to shake. But these views are derived from a lack of knowledge about the sport.

MMA is not as dangerous as it may appear. People think of sports such as football or hockey as being safer due to their safety gear. This, however, is not the case. David Zinczenko made the comparison that helmets and padded gloves are the “equivalent of poorly designed sunscreen - ‘protection’ that allows athletes to submit to even greater levels of punishment.” In fact, in the year 2009, football and hockey combined sent 55,000 Americans to the emergency room just for head injuries. (Zinczenko) Fights don’t always consist of head kicks and knockouts. In fact, a majority of bouts end in wrestling matches. Fighters have the choice to physically or verbally tap out at anytime during the fight, which brings it to an immediate cease. The rules also vary at different levels. For example, at the amateur level, referees do not let fights go as far since people do not have the same experience or as much on the line, compared to UFC fights.

When people think MMA, there is one organization that comes to mind- The UFC. But it is not the only one. There are actually many others such as the Maximum Fighting Championship, Invicta Fighting Championship, World Series of Fighting, and Bellator. However, the UFC is the most popular worldwide. This Las Vegas-based company is “the

largest Pay-Per-View event provider in the world, broadcasts in over 149 countries and territories, to nearly one billion homes worldwide, in 30 different languages” (UFC). Its television coverage was recently moved this past August (2013) from Fuel TV to Fox Sports. This channel itself is new to television; which may be a bad thing right now because people are still discovering it and will have to adapt to the change. With high hopes, UFC president, Dana White, expressed his thoughts on the new placement of the organization, “The UFC is finally where it belongs on the number one network in the country and aligned with the most prestigious sports properties in the world.” I agree that this is huge for the sport because it is now being recognized with other top sport organizations such as the NFL, NBA, and NASCAR. White even continued to say that “I’ve always said that the UFC will be the biggest sport in the world and with this relationship it will become a reality.” It may seem like an over statement, but this is definitely a possibility.

The UFC also does a great job advertising. Instead of just posters and commercials, they take it a step further using their fighters themselves as advertising. The offer incentives for fighter’s who actively use their Twitter accounts because the “constant interaction between athletes, fans and media has only fueled the wide-open environment even further.” (Tatum)

The addition of a women’s belt in the UFC will have significant effects on the popularity of the sport. They are not the first organization to have a women’s title spot. In fact, they are one of the last. The Invicta Fighting Championship is actually made up of all women. So why would they want to switch to fight for an organization that for so long

neglected women fighters? Because now they have the chance to be a part of the most recognized MMA organization in the world. It's a goal that, not too long ago, was a mere dream for most female fighters. Women such as Miesha Tate and Ronda Rousey have made this possible. They are both strong women that take fighting very seriously and put on a show that people want to see. They are an inspiration for other women all over the world. Currently bantamweight (135lbs) is the only title spot for women. But on December 11, 2013 the UFC picked up the contracts of eleven female fighters to fill up their strawweight 115-pound division.

Not to mention, the pay day is also motivation in itself. Being successful in the UFC can allow you to rely on your fight money from just four, three, two, or even one fight a year. On the list of the top 10 UFC women contestants, number 10 makes \$8,000 to fight and \$8,000 to win, and number 1 makes \$55,000 to fight and an additional \$55,000 to win (Fox). Not that it's about the money, but being paid like that to do something you love is a dream come true.

If you've never been to an MMA event before, I ask you to give it a try. It's not for everyone, but I think people can develop a respect and interest for the sport by witnessing it live. Boxing, another combat sport, once had it's time as a mainstream sport. But its popularity is on the decline. Dana White has often been quoting saying, "Boxing is your father's sport." The witty White is right. Boxing is more popular among the older generations, while MMA has become much more popular with the youth. Through their strategic choices with advertising and media coverage and their expansion

of a women's division, the UFC is on the right track to bringing MMA to the top. If they keep doing everything right, all it will take is time.

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