



DEWAYDE PERRY AT NORTHWEST TRAINING CENTER

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

A STITCH IN TIME

Playin' it safe with the fight doctor BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST

You can tell the guy has seen some fierce things, but his low-toned steady voice that sounds like he's a radio-jockey for some late-night jazz station creates a startling contrast — something like comfort and volition, interlocked. This is good because, chances are, if you encounter him while he is on the job, you're probably in the midst of a slightly traumatic experience.

Only five people in the state do what he does; 42-year-old Dewayde Perry is not just any medical doctor, he is a fight doctor — a ringside physician.

Combat sports like boxing, kickboxing, professional wrestling and mixed martial arts (MMA) require sanctioning by the Oregon Athletic Commission, and someone like Perry must be present at every match. Most often he is found working in local and regional MMA competitions. His job is essential to the safety of competitors, who receive pre-fight physical examinations to ensure each is healthy and capable of competing. Perry conducts post-fight examinations as well, to screen for injuries. If sutures are needed, or if a fighter needs to visit a hospital for more care, then that is also Perry's concern.

"I've definitely had to suture up a few guys," Perry explains. "It's an easy repair and that's a minor typical injury. But I have had to send a couple guys to the hospital to get MRIs for bad knockouts or facial fractures."

While Perry does have a certain say in whether a fight will or will not continue, he is not a cut-man or

referee. He isn't in the fighter's corner rubbing down swollen eyes, applying Vaseline or wiping up blood — that's not his gig. Nor is he there to ensure the fighting is conducted in a way that promotes good sportsmanship. That's someone else's job.

"The first order for a stoppage is the referee," Perry specifies, "but for injury-related type of stoppages, that goes to me."

If a fighter sustains an injury that could put his life at risk or permanently damage his body, like an accidental eye gouge, a huge cut or a serious concussion, the physician will be called into the ring to decide if the competition will be stopped.

Perry has worked amateur shows as well as some of the most high-profile professional MMA competitions in the world. He worked as ringside physician at Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) 102 and the Strikeforce Challengers 8 shows. He was there when Randy Couture fought "Minotaur" Nogueira. He witnessed Eugene fighter Evan Dunham send Marcus Aurelio's UFC career down the proverbial tubes, firsthand, just after performing a preflight examination on the talented young contender.

Considering his background, Perry is something of an anomaly in his field. A diligent student of the martial arts, Perry spent time in the legendary Chinese province of Henan studying Kung Fu with Shaolin monks. He has competed in Wing Chun point-style tournaments and Jujitsu competitions as well. Currently studying Muay Thai and Brazilian Jujitsu, Perry is a familiar face among

some of the most formidable and authentic martial arts gyms in Eugene. He also happens to have been a national award-winning bodybuilder and a master of human anatomy, given his work in general surgery.

"Because I train in combat sports, I feel I'm really able to understand what fighters go through in terms of preparation for their fights and in terms of injuries. And also knowing when to appropriately stop a fight," he says of his connection to the world of ringside physician work.

Asked about the future of MMA following the UFC franchise's recent signing of a bright, shiny, seven-year \$90-million contract with FOX Sports Net, the doc makes his diagnosis clear: "Fox Sports merging with UFC is a great thing. It will bring martial arts to more people, and hopefully it will help reduce the stigma attached to mixed martial arts by people who really don't understand the sport."

He pauses. "Because there is punching and kicking involved," Perry says, "people think it's more violent than football or rugby or any other contact sport you see on TV, but it's not. It's actually way safer. The same haematomas and lacerations and sprains exist in those other sports too."

In the world of contact sports, MMA has been labeled barbaric and dangerous — Sen. John McCain once called it "human cockfighting." But a closer look by the medical community found the sport to be as safe and, in most cases, safer than other combat sports such as boxing and kickboxing. In a 2006 study conducted by Johns