

Local Woman has Gusto to Compete

As one of a select few to step into the ring

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

On an evening in a gym in east Portland, Jody DeSimone is nervous. In about 24 hours she will don a pair of padded fingerless gloves and will step into a cage. The door will slam behind her, and she will meet her opponent who will attempt to pummel her into submission.

DeSimone is among a handful of salty women in Oregon who compete in mixed-martial arts tournaments: a budding, full-contact sport that incorporates elements of various combative disciplines, like Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Muai Thai kickboxing, and Ninjutsu.

A fight breaking out between girls may have been a novelty on the playground, but it is even more so in a competitive arena. There is little treasure or fame for the few women who have the gusto to compete in mixed martial arts. But this doesn't deter scrappy fighters like DeSimone.

The amount of money that has gone into promoting and building mixed martial arts for women is minimal compared to male-focused full-contact sports like Ultimate Fighting Championship, according to Chael Sonnen, vice president of the Full Contact Fighting Federation.

There is no title, no money, and little fame to be gained for the

women fighters.

Sonnen said that only six women in the state of Oregon have signed up to compete, and only four have actually stepped into the ring so far.

Last month UFC President Dana White sparked controversy when he stated that there were not enough good female fighters to start a division for them.

Sarah Oriza, who owns My Girls Gym in southeast Portland and trains DeSimone, sees a bit more acceptance for women in the sport.

Oriza can rattle off the names of a few relatively famous female fighters, like Gina Carrano, but there aren't really any household names.

She said that she's had trouble getting promoters to take the fights seriously, and typically the first thing they ask is if the combatants are easy on the eyes. She suspects that men who arrange fights aren't interested in seeing women hit, especially by each other, and don't want to see them leave the ring in a weepy and battered condition.

But this isn't stopping DeSimone, who aspires to be on the lips of full-contact fighting fans everywhere.

"Everyone was like 'why would you want to do that?'" said DeSimone of the reaction of her friends and family to her decision



A rare female fighter in mixed martial arts, Jody DeSimone trains at My Girls Gym in southeast Portland.

PHOTO BY
JAKE THOMAS/
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to fight competitively. Only her brother and father understood.

When DeSimone was growing up in Washington's San Juan Islands she recalls her parents buying her a pony, and being indifferent to it. She remembers being more interested in building tree forts, getting dirty, and firearms during her childhood. She was also interested in martial arts, and had an all black ninja outfit at age 7.

At My Girl's Gym, heavy metal music hums in the background over the percussive thwacks of DeSimone striking a punching pad held up by Oriza.

After a few minutes, Oriza tackles DeSimone. The two frantically roll around on the mat trying to subdue each other, with an occa-

sional chortle slipping out.

"I'm exhausted," said DeSimone of her training.

DeSimone began attending mixed-martial arts class at the gym for exercise. After two months, Oriza, approached her about fighting competitively. A girl had dropped out of a fight and a replacement was needed.

DeSimone was uneasy with the idea. Most fighters train for six months. She had only trained for two. Her opponent weighed about the same, about 125 pounds, but was about a foot taller.

DeSimone, who describes herself as career-oriented, works in advertising and didn't relish the idea of meeting a client with a

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Black Coalition Calendars Available

Portland's Coalition of Black Men has published its first tribute calendar featuring 12 African American men who were instrumental in Portland's history, making life better for African Americans and all Oregonians.

"This calendar is the first of what we hope will be an annual project for the Coalition to promote past effective and influential leaders of the African American Community," said James Posey, coalition president.

Proceeds from the calendar will be used to support the group's initiatives that focus on economic development for the African American community and educational equity for our youth.

Calendars can be purchased for \$10 from Coalition members or from the following locations: Reflections and Talking Drum Bookstore, Elliot E-Mat Café, Geneva's, Platinum Fade Salon, The Urban League of Portland, Tate Insurance, Victory Outreach Church, Earl's Barbershop, Northeast Coalition of Neighbors and Mahogany Beauty (Lloyd Mall).

For more information, email Posey at posej@comcast.net or call Tony Jones at 503-954-4027.

Local Inauguration Event

The West Lexus Lounge at One Center Court in the Rose Quarter will host a local Inauguration Celebration rejoicing in the installation of Barack Obama as the first African American President.

Scheduled Tuesday, Jan. 20, from 6 p.m. to 1:30 a.m., the celebration is open to public, and sponsored by the National Association of Real Estate Brokers and MW Prince Hall Mason.

The Inauguration will be broadcast on huge screen TVs

and there will be community speakers and live entertainment featuring Norman Sylvester, Ocean 503, Andy Stokes, Elite, Ngulua Dodier, Liv Warfield and others.

A donation of \$10 or four non-perishable food items is requested to support the Oregon Food Bank and Calvary Christian Church community housing and education programs.

For more information, call Calvin Kyles at 503-975-2769 or Earline Penson at 503-804-8781.

Faubion School Inaugural Ball

Faubion Elementary, 3030 N.E. Rosa Parks Way, will host a "Power of a Dream" community celebration honoring Barack Obama as the first black President on Friday, Jan. 16 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

School leaders, parents and volunteers will turn the school

cafeteria into a mini inaugural ball with food, music and balloons.

Dion Jordan, a motivational speaker and Faubion parent will give the keynote speech.

For more information, call Principal LaShawn A. Lee at 503-916-5686.

Zoo Admission Free on MLK Day

The Oregon Zoo invites families to a free admission day for the Martin Luther King Jr. National holiday on Monday, Jan. 19.

"Our hope is to make the zoo accessible to all," said Tony Vecchio, zoo director. "Through discounted days like MLK Day and our Second Tuesday program held every month, we strive for as many visitors as possible to

make emotional connections with animals."

The zoo is a service of Metro and is dedicated to its mission to inspire the community to create a better future for wildlife. The zoo opens at 9 a.m. daily and is located five minutes from downtown Portland, just off Highway 26. The zoo is also accessible by MAX light rail line.

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