

Finding the right fight

Former Dallas resident uses mixed martial arts as an avenue to turn his life around

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

SALEM — Chris Weston has always been a fighter. The former Dallas resident, who now lives in Salem, has been a mixed martial arts fighter since 2010.

On Saturday, Weston will be one of 12 scheduled fights as part of Knucklehead's Fight to Defeat ALS at the Salem Armory.

But Weston will be fighting for more than just a victory. In a sport built around violence, Weston fights to find peace within himself.

Trouble

From a young age, Weston always wanted to be a fighter.

"I loved Ninja Turtles and all that," Weston said. "I definitely wanted to be a ninja."

His desire to be a fighter came with a dark side.

"I was a real small kid, so I always felt like I had to prove myself," Weston said. "I lived in low-income housing and I didn't have a lot of guidance growing up. I felt like I had to prove myself a certain way."

As a kid, proving himself meant one thing.

"Unfortunately, with all that anger, I fought quite often," Weston said. "I wanted to be a peaceful person, but I just had a lot of anger. That got me into a lot of trouble growing up."

Weston was sent to prison twice on third-degree assault and attempted assault



Chris Weston will fight on Saturday evening, his first bout since February of 2014.

charges, most recently from 2007 to 2009. It was then Weston decided something had to change.

"I spent the last year in the hole on 23- and 24-hour lock down," Weston said. "I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to be locked up but I didn't implement a plan. I didn't have a plan. Being locked up gave me time to think and formulate something."

It was during this time that MMA began to grow in popularity. Weston found an avenue that would give his life a new direction.

Making a change

Upon release from prison in 2009, Weston immediately

ly began working toward building his MMA career.

"I knew a promoter," Weston said. "He got me my first fight in 2010. I trained for it by fighting a few friends and punching a punching bag. I thought I was ready to fight."

Weston quickly received his first lesson in what it would take to become a professional fighter.

"I used to think it was just angry people having bar room brawls," Weston said. "I see it as a sport now. People have respect for each other."

Weston started training in martial arts and joined a conditioning gym. He won

his next four fights. As he found success in the octagon, Weston also received an associates degree in automotive technology and began taking side jobs.

"I'm working on building a network," Weston said. "It's more than just fighting. I have to market myself, establish a fan base."

He also met his girlfriend of six years, Jackie Scott, during this time.

Weston no longer fought to prove himself. He fought to provide a better life for himself, his girlfriend and her 10-year-old son.

"It makes me have responsibilities," Weston said. "I have to man up every day."

Fight night

What: Knucklehead Promotions' Fight to Defeat ALS.
When: Saturday, 7 p.m.
Where: Salem Armory.
Admission: \$25 in advance. \$30 at the door.
Of note: There are 12 scheduled bouts. Advance tickets can be purchased by contacting Chris Weston at 503-930-5631.

Having the end goal of getting that financial stability and providing a better upbringing really keeps me motivated. This is something that's made me stay dedicated. It's given me work ethic and personal growth. I'm giving this everything I have."

Scott has seen Weston's transformation first hand. And despite the long hours, the dedication necessary to succeed is worth it for their family.

"This helps show our son that there's so much more than getting into trouble," Scott said. "We want to instill into our son the things that Chris didn't have."

After earning a victory in February of 2014, things were looking up.

Life, it seems, was ready to test Weston once again.

"I went snowboarding after that fight and I tore my ACL, MCL and meniscus," Weston said.

What begun with optimism turned into a potentially devastating moment.

"Not looking at the bigger picture was hard," Weston said. "If you look at how much you have to train, it can be overwhelming. I

knew what I was able to do before the injury. Getting back to that part was real hard. I felt like I wasn't making any progress at first. It's small victories to get to that great victory."

Saturday's fight will mark the first time Weston will step back into the octagon since that injury.

"This fight means everything," Weston said. "This is coming back from an injury that has stopped other people's careers. This is another goal reached."

Weston has a lot riding on this bout.

He has plans to turn professional within a year and wants to join the UFC within five years.

More importantly, Weston hopes he can serve as an inspiration for kids like him.

After a lifetime spent fighting, he's finally found peace.

"I knew I was a better person than (when I was getting into) trouble," Weston said. "I want to help show kids like me and give them direction. That's what I didn't have growing up. Don't give up. Small victories equal great wins and go for your dreams."

Panthers: Central faces unbeaten Crater on Friday

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The Spartans jumped out to a 7-0 lead, but Central responded with 40 unanswered points.

"We just had to play a little faster and smarter and get our head in the game," Tuipulotu said.

Berroa rushed for 186 yards and two touchdowns, while quarterback Peter Mendazona threw for 238 yards and three touchdowns. Marlon and Opeti Tuipulotu, Luis Amador and Madison Stepp each recorded a sack on defense.

Two of Central's losses this season came after blowing double-digit, second-half leads and the Panthers were eliminated in the first round of the 2014 state playoffs after holding a lead in the second half.

"The coaches did a really good job breaking down Hillsboro," Central coach Shane Hedrick said. "The

players took what we saw in practice and executed it on the game field. Offensively, we were dialed in and took advantage of some areas. We played well overall."

But the Panthers' will to finish was tested.

Trailing 40-7, Hillsboro scored 21 unanswered points to pull within 40-28 entering the final period.

The Panthers refused to cave in, holding the Spartans scoreless the rest of the way.

"It was huge," Berroa said. "Honestly, this feels really good. We had a tough loss last year in the playoffs and we came back and won this year. I love it."

The Panthers advanced to the quarterfinals round and will play at Crater on Friday.

Crater is 10-0 overall, including a 57-34 victory over Dallas on Sept. 4, a 41-37 win over Mountain View on Sept. 18 and a 45-0 win over Silverton on Friday.

Central defeated Dallas 8-0, Mountain View 42-21 and Silverton 35-21.

"They're a seasoned football team," Hedrick said. "John Beck coaches a very aggressive football style. They play to the whistle and fundamentally sound. Obviously, that's why they're undefeated coming into this game. ... They've got a good, stocky quarterback, a solid running back and will show multiple sets against us."

While Crater presents a big challenge for Central to overcome, the Panthers won't be intimidated by the matchup. Instead, players are excited to have the chance to keep playing and finish their fight.

"We just tell ourselves to keep our heads up and fight through adversity," Opeti Tuipulotu said. "That's the game right there. You just have to keep fighting."



Central running back Alvin Berroa scored three touchdowns against Hillsboro.

DALLAS GIRLS SOCCER

Dragons fall to Wilsonville

By Lukas Eggen
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WILSONVILLE — Dallas' girls soccer team's historic season came to an end. The Dragons lost to Wilsonville 6-0 in the first round of the state playoffs. While it marked the end to the season, players weren't hanging their heads.

"It was an awesome time," senior Sarah Ussery said. "Just being able to play that game was an honor."

Dallas qualified for the state playoffs for the first time in school history after defeating Springfield 3-0 in the play-in round on Oct. 30.

In the first round of the state playoffs against Wilsonville on Nov. 4, the Dragons saw what it would take for them to advance.

"I think it was good for us to get a taste of what the state playoffs are like," Dallas coach Kirk Myrold said. "It was good to see the atmosphere and having a game that was an all or nothing game and the buildup to it. The excitement the girls, the families, the school and the community had, that's what we want to have again next year and for more years to come."

The Dragons' success this season surprised some, even among the team's players.

"I certainly wasn't expecting the turnout that we had," Ussery said. "I'm grateful for that. I knew we had a lot of potential, but I didn't know how far we could make it."

Late in the regular season, Myrold said the team elevated its play, as Dallas (5-10-1 overall, 3-3-1 Mid-Willamette Conference)



Jordan Applegate (left) fights for a ball against Wilsonville on Nov. 4.

set a new precedent for success for the school's girls soccer program.

"As a squad, it just kind of clicked," Myrold said. "We figured out how we wanted to play and how we were going to play. The girls played with and for each other."

Now, players are already excited about staying in shape for next school year — and for at least one returning player, she's not afraid to set the bar even higher.

"I think we'll improve because we just made school history being the first team to get to the playoffs," junior goalkeeper Ashlee Lichtenberger said. "Our goal is to have a home playoff game next year. We'll become better."

Perrydale: Pirates score first 24 points during win

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"(This win) means a lot," C.J. Marsters said. "We've tried so hard, practiced so much and busted ass. We've been preparing for a game like this. A lot of hard work went into this."

Bailey scored three touchdowns on a rainy afternoon that saw Perrydale take a 16-0 lead into the half.

"This was better than (beating) Dufur," Bailey said. "This could have been our last game and it wasn't. That's just a great feeling. We wanted to pound it until they weakened down and finally, just finish it off."

Despite some ball security issues, the Pirates won with relative ease over the Spartans.

"The kids played really hard," Perrydale coach Chris Gubrud said. "As coaches, that is all we ever ask. On defense we played assignment football and our guys really kept to the scheme except for maybe two or three plays. I'd like us to tackle a little bit better, but other than that, I'm really pleased."

Marsters made his pres-



Marsters

Pine Eagle on defense.

"C.J. was all over the field on defense," Gubrud said. "He was wreaking havoc all day long. This was his best defensive game of the season for sure."

The Pirates will play at No. 3 Wallowa on Friday in the quarterfinals of the state playoffs.

Wallowa went 6-2 overall and 4-0 in Special District 1 play.

"We don't know a lot about them but we know the drive is really long and we have to stay focused and be ready to play the moment we get there," Bailey said.

Wallowa defeated Pine Eagle 48-8 on Oct. 2.

Gubrud said the Pirates must be ready to execute at a high level if they want to advance.

"No matter who we play,

they're going to be very good," Gubrud said. "We'll have our work cut out for us. But we'll put our best foot forward and the only thing I can guarantee is that we'll put out a great effort."

As the Pirates turn their attention toward Wallowa, ball security and tackling will be among the main focuses during practice.

"We need to understand and value the football," Gubrud said. "A yard isn't worth a fumble. We have to cover it up when we get in traffic. We want to give ourselves a chance to score on every possession and not just hand it over to them."

As Perrydale hopes to continue its run to a state title, Marsters said the Pirates can't let success get to their heads. Instead, players hope their drive and determination will lead them one step closer toward their ultimate goal.

"We have to just keep our heads down and keep grinding," Marsters said. "We have to stay true to ourselves and play hard like we always have. We have to stick together."