

FEATURES

Adam Turner, Editor

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LOCAL MMA FIGHTER BATTLES INJURIES, SET-BACKS ON JOURNEY TO PROFESSIONAL CAREER

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RUSSELL HATCHER/
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PHOTOGRAPHY

Robert Bennett isn't your average young college student. The 24-year-old, fun-loving guy, who originally hails from Upstate New York, has experienced a lot in his young life. From near-death experiences to the birth of his daughter, Bennett has seen it all. But nothing is quite like the ride he's on now – currently two years into his amateur mixed martial arts career.

Chasing, then losing your dream

Growing up Bennett was a junkie for another sport – this one involved a round ball and a hoop, something on the other end of the spectrum from the trunks and gloves he dons now.

"You could find me out there at 2 a.m. working on my jump shot," Bennett said. "I loved basketball."

He loved it so much that after he graduated from Madison Central High School he chased his hardwood dream back to his roots in New York, accepting a walk-on scholarship from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, a division-III school in Geneva.

The dream wouldn't last much longer, though.

In a pre-season game for the Statesmen, after the coach emptied his bench to let the walk-ons play, Bennett found himself playing in his first college game. But, after going for a rebound, Bennett's legs were undercut by another player and he came crashing to the floor.

His knee completely blew out. Torn ACL. Torn MCL. And soon after, a torn away scholarship.

Bennett had surgery and began rehabilitating immediately.

"I didn't want to give up on basketball," he said. Sooner, rather than later, he would have no choice.

Within the year, Bennett was involved in a car crash with a buddy who was running on 36-hours without sleep.

Bennett wasn't wearing a seat belt either, as the vehicle slid off the road.

Knee completely gone

"I bleed maroon and having the school's support in a local event would mean the world to me."

Robert Bennett

again. "The doctors said I wouldn't be able to play again to the potential that I was, so I

decided to give up basketball, move back to Richmond to be closer to my family," Bennett said.

What looked like grim times for the youngster turned significantly better when three days after he returned to Kentucky, Bennett's daughter, Kennedy, was born.

"When she was born I decided to stay," he said.

A new sport

Hating the fact that he had to give up on his basketball dream, Bennett turned to the unthinkable – mixed martial arts – and when asked why he started his new dream, the answer was simple:

"I got picked on a lot in high school, so I had to find a positive outlet," Bennett said. "I saw it on TV one day and decided I want to do this."

So far in his short career, Bennett, fighting in both the middleweight and light heavy-weight divisions, has used his muay-thai and Brazilian jiu-jitsu skills to run off an overall record of 7-3.

Bennett obtained his blue belt in jiu-jitsu through the

➤ SEE BENNETT, PAGE B3



Adam
Turner

Each year, I eagerly await a certain day in late January with child-like glee and enthusiasm. Suddenly, I'm seven again and it's Christmas morning.

However, in this scenario, Christmas is a perverted, twisted day where all of my hopes are crushed and all my presents over-

whelming disappointing.

It is the day the Oscar nominations are revealed, and last Tuesday was that very day. As always, I ran down the stairs in my onesie pajamas, checked for the half eaten cookies and prepared to curse Santa's name to hell. Or so to speak.

But something very strange happened this year. As I dug into my "gifts," I was not met with overwhelming despair, but with surprise and even relief. A *Moneyball* Best Picture nod? It's what I've always wanted! A limited edition Woody Allen for Best Director?! Wow, neat! A Melissa McCarthy Supporting Actress nomination? Oh, I just love it! Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Jonah Hill, *The Muppets*, Rooney Mara, and so on. It felt an awful lot like satisfaction.

But inevitably, some darkness crept its way into my sunshine daydream fueled by my Oscar-induced high. And since nobody really wants to read about how happy something makes somebody, I will instead harp on the negative and rant against the Academy and what I didn't like about

this year's nominations.

Drive: *Drive* was undoubtedly a polarizer. It topped many a critics' "Best Of" lists, but just as many hated it. For my part, I thought it was pretty great. It wasn't the best film of the year, but it was bold and startlingly unique. It was unlike any other movie out this year, in a good way, and in my book that should earn an Oscar nod. But alas, the Academy completely snubbed it. Best Picture? Snubbed. Best Actor for Ryan Gosling? Snubbed. Best Supporting Actor for Albert Brooks? Snubbed. Best Director for Nicolas Winding Refn? Snubbed. And on it goes. I somehow doubt the Sound Editing recognition is much consolation. It's not surprising, but it's definitely disappointing.

Ryan Gosling: Whether it was a matter of splitting votes or temporary blindness in the Academy, Gosling was passed up not once, not twice, but THRICE for his three

➤ SEE OSCARS, PAGE B3

Oscar nominations reward *Moneyball*, snub *Drive*

Extremely Loud is incredibly moving 9/11 drama

By KENNA TRENT
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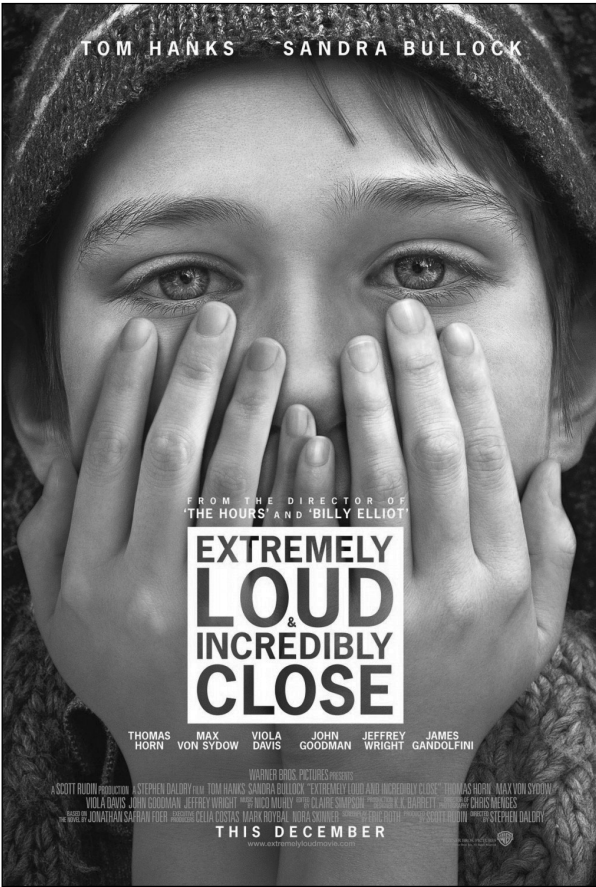
If you saw previews for *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, you probably caught on that the film is about 9/11. And depending on the personal feelings surrounding the topic, this is either going to be heartbreaking or heartwarming.

Unlike the films released shortly after 9/11, this film is not a 'hero' piece. There was a time for the in-your-face retelling of the event like we saw in *United 93* and *World Trade Center*.

However, it would appear we have passed that time and moved on to something much different. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a whole other monster. It takes our eyes off the buildings themselves and makes us look at what was inside.

Based on a book of the same name, *Extremely Loud* is the story of Oskar Schell (Thomas Horn) who lost his dad (Tom Hanks) in the World Trade Center on 9/11. A year after the attacks, Oskar ventures into his dad's closet to snoop around for memories of his father. In the process, Oskar knocks over a vase that breaks to reveal a small envelope. In the envelope is a key. In an attempt to stay connected to his father for as long as possible, Oskar sets out on a search all over New York to find the lock that the key fits.

This isn't easy for him. Oskar doesn't like talking to people he doesn't know, he also doesn't like bridges, planes, ringing sounds, public transportation and a variety of other everyday things. He feels 'panicky' quite often and is socially awkward. Through a series of flashbacks, we find that Oskar's dad was the one who helped him overcome these fears. Now, he has to do it by himself.



COURTESY OF IMP AWARDS

He meets some interesting characters on his journey, but home is where the real drama lies. Oskar keeps secrets (and some distressed voice messages from his dad) from

his mother (Sandra Bullock), and they don't have a sound relationship; not like Oskar and his father.

As usual, Sandra Bullock and Tom Hanks are wonderful. They both play the tragedy and comedy of the story perfectly because, well, they're pros; and the supporting cast is phenomenal as well with names like Viola Davis and Jeffrey Wright in the mix. A special mention has to go to Max von Sydow as well, who had absolutely no spoken dialogue in the story, but packed an emotional punch regardless.

Thomas Horn is a newcomer to film and, in fact, we may never see him again. He was a winner on Jeopardy's *Kids Week*, where director Stephen Daldry noticed him. In an interview, Sandra Bullock told audiences that he has so many other plans that he doesn't want to get into Hollywood stuff. Smart kid, no wonder he was on Jeopardy.

If you are crying just from thinking about how sad this movie is, good luck to you. But don't go into the theater thinking this is a slow and sad story. There is a lot of humor mixed with the tears. The story is by no means slow, either. Oskar does quite a bit of running to get anywhere he needs to go, and the audience is left breathless trying to keep up with how swiftly he thinks, acts and talks. Pair this with quick, blunt cuts and you will be glued to the screen so you don't miss anything important.

The whole movie isn't one big montage, though. When the story needs to labor deliberately, so will the camera. And when that happens, you're going to need some tissues.

As far as tear-jerkers go, this is one of the best. Unlike many other sad films, the purpose is not to make you cry. You won't leave the theater feeling unhappy; more like relieved and satisfied.

Verdict: A

A Gifted Man cures Friday TV blues

By ELISE SVOBODA
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TV medical dramas have a reputation of being intense and only about the medical mysteries within them. Most know medical shows like *Grey's Anatomy*, about the people whom, along with their own drama, save the day by saving lives. And *House* which features a cranky doctor

whose "genius" mind rescues lost causes with the assistance of his team.

But CBS began a new series, *A Gifted Man*, in 2011

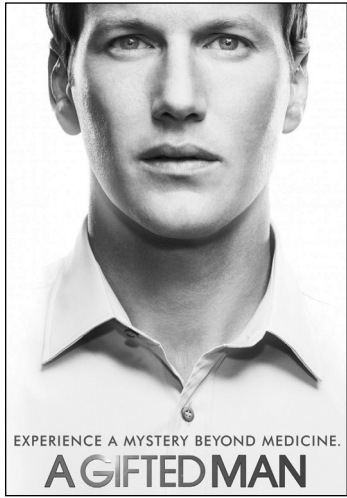
that offers a new plot for drama-lovers to absorb their minds with.

Patrick Wilson (*The Phantom of the Opera* and *Watchmen*) stars as Dr. Michael Holt, a talented, brilliant, cocky neurosurgeon with his own practice in New York who has the life most doctors dream about. After his ex-wife, Anna (Jennifer Elhe, *The King's Speech* and *The Ides of March*), dies, Dr. Holt begins to see her ghost as she encourages him to help him get over his selfish ways and work with her "special project:" a free clinic Anna used to be the director of before her death.

Throughout the course of the show, Dr. Holt learns how to balance working at his own practice and volunteering at the free clinic with the help of his assistant Rita (Margo Martindale, *Orphan* and *Secretariat*). Other members of the cast include Rachelle Lefevre (*The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Pt. 1*) as Dr. Kate Skypora, the clinic's new director and Eric La Salle (*ER*) as Dr. Edward Morris, a doctor Holt works with at his practice.

The show has received a number of mixed reviews by TV critics. Although it has an acclaimed ensemble of actors and crew, it lacks viewers because it airs on Friday nights.

But each week the medical cases are interesting, and the series has a whole lot of heart that shines through. Unlike other medical dramas out there, it just might cure your Friday night TV blues; catch the series at 8 p.m. on CBS.



COURTESY OF CBS

SeeFlik offers first online film festival for college crowd

By ADAM TURNER
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Everyone loves YouTube. No matter what age or where you're from, you've likely wasted hours skimming through the millions upon millions of viral videos uploaded to the web every day.

But despite its popularity, there's no questioning that 90 percent of what's available on the site isn't exactly of the highest quality. No beating around the bush: Most of it is garbage. This is fine for a quick laugh of course, which is likely what led you to YouTube in the first place, but those looking for more substance from their online entertainment need look no further than the new video site SeeFlik.

SeeFlik is the first online film festival for college students and alumni that are film school majors or have an interest in creating film and/or television content. Based out of Los Angeles and spearheaded by CEO Larry Meli, the website provides burgeoning young filmmakers a quick and easy outlet for their work to find an audience and some recognition. And for those uninterested in creating movies themselves, hundreds of quality short films are available to stream and enjoy at any time.

Meli explained where the original inspiration for the site arose:

"My wife and I were invited to NYU's internal film festival where they showcased the best work from all the students from [my son's] particular class," Meli said. "We spent a weekend watching 25 different short films. Guess what? They were pretty good. Some of them were really great. Great acting, great directing, great writing, good editing and production values.

"So over a dinner in Chinatown, we hosted this dinner for a number of the students and I said to them, 'Why haven't you all entered any online film festivals? You did some great work!' And they looked at me and said 'Well, there aren't any.' To not have any version of an online film festival seemed to be well overdue."

Meli's solution was SeeFlik, the first free online film festival for students.

"Unlike all of the other film festivals—Sundance, Trifecta, etc.—our applicants pay no fee," Meli said. "They enter online, they demonstrate that they are a full-time college student or alum and they upload their film online so it becomes quite a painless process."

SeeFlik just closed its first biannual competitions. One competition being Fan's Favorite, an American Idol-style contest where viewers can vote on their favorite films on the site, and the other a more traditional judging panel filled with in-

dusty veterans.

"Amongst the seven judges that we picked for this first competition, their films have either been nominated or received 20 Academy Awards, so they're really high-end screenwriters and producers," Meli said.

The results of each competition are set to be revealed in late March, where the winners will split \$50,000 of prize money and a showcase for talent agencies and studios. The next competition is set to begin this February, so users will be able to upload and stream a whole new set of short films on the site.

"We've gotten very good responses," Meli said, noting the 375 films currently available on SeeFlik. "Especially in tough economic times, having an outlet for these students to have their work get noticed and showcased in Hollywood is going to be an important tool for them, we hope, to fast forward their career."

One last fact that sets this film festival apart from the rest is the connections it has formed with colleges across the country.

"It's open to any film school student anywhere around the country, but in order to one, get the word out properly, and two, learn from and listen to what we call our 'Friends of SeeFlik,' we decided we'd have a more formal relationship with some of the schools listed on our site," Meli said. "Those are schools that have said we really like what you're doing, we support it, and want to publicize it to our students."

One such chosen school is our very own Eastern Kentucky University.

However, John Fitch, professor in the broadcasting and electronic media department, said for the time being, legal issues are preventing Eastern students from uploading their hard work.

"SeeFlik is offering a good opportunity for our students and our department, but our legal counsel won't sign the contract," Fitch said. "These are some of the best film schools in the country, so for us not to be a part of this is ridiculous."

Fitch said he hopes for the issue to be resolved sooner rather than later.

Ultimately, Meli hopes SeeFlik will help prepare young filmmakers for their future careers.

"I think part of the task for a good filmmaker is to understand how best to market their film, so we encourage a fair amount of that, posting it on your Facebook page and Twitter to gain a critical mass," Meli said. "So this is a good exercise not only as an opportunity, but also pretty much what they're gonna have to do in their professional lives to get noticed."

So whether you're an aspiring Scorsese or simply in need of some new online movies to absorb, SeeFlik may have just what you're looking for. Who knows? You may even see an Eastern student's work on there someday. Check it out today at www.seeflik.com.

Photosharing site Pinterest grows in popularity thanks to social networking

By TAYLOR PETTIT
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We are a visual generation; we are the Internet generation.

This dual set of traits leads many people to make a hobby out of what can seem like an overly simplistic task – saving and archiving images online.

From the traditional right click and save, to the now archaic Photo-bucket, image hoarding and sharing is commonplace.

But Pinterest has added a social aspect that changes the game. The interesting aspect about this corner of the Internet is the combination of photosharing, commenting and social networking done all in one place.

Pinterest.com offers boards for types of images, with whatever your heart desires.

Although there is an overwhelming wealth of images that reflect a *Good Housekeeping*-esque appeal, Home Décor and Craft Projects, boards are only limited to one's imagination.

Each user defines themselves by the boards created.

A schoolteacher may archive classroom design ideas. A graphic designer may collect fonts and infographics. Everything from boards dedicated to fashion to the ever-classic memes, exist.

But what makes this site different than other photo sharing sites is that the main point is to share.

When the user connects a Pinterest account to Facebook, it becomes possible to follow your

friend's "pins."

According to the website's mission, sharing these common images can reveal a link among complete strangers who share an interest.

The more sharing, the more inspiration and a greater multitude of options become available.

A strong connection to Tumblr can be seen, as many pins are reposts of original content from blogs.

As said before, the one negative of the website is the obvious demographic of the users. If DIY projects and recipes for low-carb brownies aren't your thing, more digging is required to make the website worthwhile.

The growth of the website is obvious, which creates some problems. A few months ago, an invitation was needed to join. Now it is open to anyone with a Facebook account. The mass traffic because of exposure on Stumbleupon has caused frequent glitches. But Pinterest's recent partnership with Facebook has improved the technical issues.

The greatest advantage of the website is being able to directly link to websites from their original host site. Therefore, creators get the credit, as much as possible, and going back to find more great photos is always possible.

The extreme individualism of the website is one of the most impressive things overall. Despite the aforementioned overwhelming "girly girl" feel, great content is abundant and worth trying out. So log on and pin away.



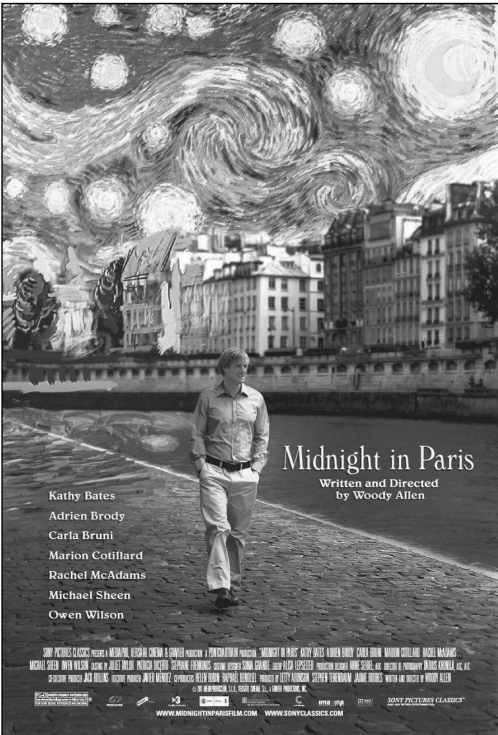
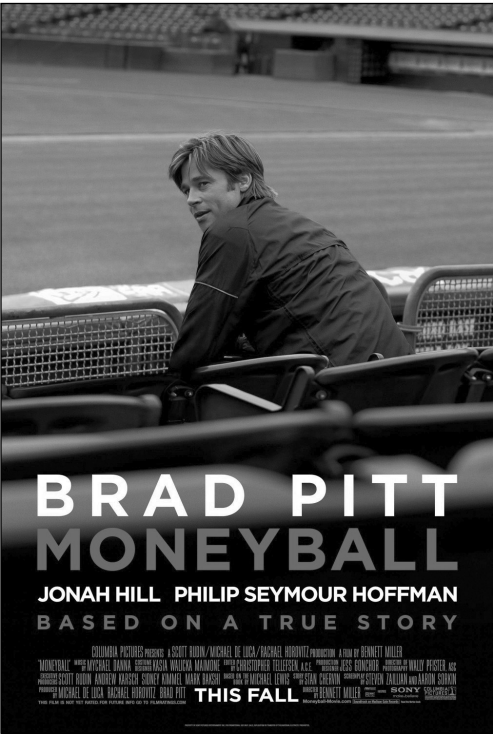
OSCARS

CONTINUED FROM B1

star-making roles in 2011. This was *his* year. He has always been a talented actor; now he is an “it” actor. But despite fantastic, award-worthy performances in *Drive*, *The Ides of March* and *Crazy, Stupid, Love.*, Gosling was sadly overlooked this year. A single teardrop should be seen gently falling down the cheek of every female and movie fan in the country.

Michael Fassbender: In a similar scenario to Gosling’s, Fassbender is a young, fresh-faced actor who really blew up last year. Performances in *X-Men: First Class*, *Jane Eyre*, and *A Dangerous Method* certainly shook the waters, but his fearless role in *Shame* brought the tsunami. Here was a true talent emerging. But the Academy passed, opting for surprises Gary Oldman and Demián Bichir in the Best Actor race instead. Perhaps he simply did not show enough skin in *Shame*. Actually, from what I’ve heard, that’s impossible.

50/50: I totally adored this underrated cancer comedy starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Seth Rogen. JGL deserves recognition, but it was always a long shot given his stiff competition in the Best Actor slot. But would a Best Original Screenplay nod have killed them? If a movie starring Jonah



PHOTOS COURTESY OF IMP AWARDS

Hill can be one of the frontrunners this year, why not one of Rogen’s?

Super 8: J.J. Abrams summer movie hit was universally praised by critics, loved by audiences, and was one of the most heartwarming tributes to cinema this year (the Academy loved movies about movies this year i.e. *The Artist* and *Hugo*). Yet I’ve heard literally no mention of the film at all come award season or even any disappointment about it being snubbed. Have people already forgotten about one of the best films of last year? Or is the idea of a sci-fi film being nominated still too ‘out there’ for the Academy? Either way, it’s a shame really.

And the rest: No love for *The Adventures of Tin-Tin*? Harry Potter? *Bridesmaids* in the Best Picture category? Why am I seeing *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* when I should see *The Ides of March*? Where are you David Fincher? And for the love of god, how could you pass up Ryan Gosling?

But I digress. Even with all of these disappointments and snubs, this was overall a pretty great year for movies! Rejoice while you can before your favorite inevitably loses to Meryl Streep in every category.

BENNETT

CONTINUED FROM B1

world-renowned Gracie Academy, and has a level two muay-thai degree. He also has trained his jiu-jitsu with professional MMA fighter Jorge Gurgel.

Six of Bennett’s seven wins have come way of knock-out, but he says his jiu-jitsu skills aren’t to be overlooked. “My striking is so natural, so it looks like it might be the strongest part of my game,” Bennett said. “But my jiu-jitsu probably is my strong point, because I train it every-day.”

Most days, his training starts with 600 kicks in 15 minutes. Then on to sparring and grappling sessions and then onto full round fights.

Bennett said that even though he’s started back up his night classes at Eastern where he’s in pursuit of a general education degree, his practice time is limited, but it’s not rare for him to have a three or four hour workout.

“I just have to find the time whenever I can,” he said.

Bennett also juggles sometimes as many as three jobs. He’s worked on Eastern’s campus for the intramural department, at the bookstore and locally at JC Penney.

He’s also a full-time father and husband – he just got married last December to his wife Brandy, after they dated for two years.

Bennett gets most of his practice at Underground MMA, a gym in Richmond. But hopes to open up his own place.

“Right now in Richmond, we don’t have a place that primarily focuses on jiu-jitsu,” Bennett, who created his own team, Madison County Academy of Jiu-Jitsu, said. “I want to start my own place someday.”

A fight with death

A few months back, Bennett scored maybe his most meaningful victory yet – saving his own life, after an armored truck collided with his motorcycle.

When he felt himself go down, Bennett said his instincts channeled his MMA training, and his body reacted exactly the way it should have if he was being hip-tossed in the octagon.

“I put my shoulder low and rolled out of it,” Bennett said.

Then, an on-coming truck barely missed him, as he popped up from the road.

“Without the reaction that I had, I probably wouldn’t be here,” he said.

A bright future

His early success has landed him in Around The Octagon’s top 10 rankings in both his weight classes for all Ken-

tucky amateurs, and Bennett also holds a title belt in each class – he’s the current Imperial Fighting Alliance Middleweight champion, an organization out of Tennessee, and the Kentucky Fighting Challenge Light Heavyweight champion.

The two titles came within a month of each other, back in September and October of last year. And just a week ago, in Corbin, Bennett successfully defended his middleweight title, knocking out his opponent in 30 seconds.

The future is bright for Bennett, with two title fights lined up this year – one for Feb. 18 in Louisville and the other is pending for March or April. Two wins will likely propel Bennett into the professional ranks of the sport.

“The process of making the pro jump can be different,” Bennett said. “You can declare yourself a pro, sign your papers and boom. Or be offered a contract. Or go to a tryout.”

“I’d like to go the contract route, for my wife and daughter’s sake. That way it’s guaranteed money and you’re covered from injuries. The problem with going independent is that there is not stability in the work. You end up taking any dogfight you can just to pay the next bill. That’s not the fighter I want to be.”

The hard work in and out of the ring have paid dividends for his future professional career.

Belator Fighting Championships has already offered a six-fight contract to Bennett but he said he wants to win those next two fights first, before signing.

Last year, he was even contacted by Dana White, the president of Ultimate Fighting Championships after he went on a five-match, under one minute, knockout spree. Bennett was offered up a small low-level contract, but at the time it wasn’t right for him.

“I’ve taken every avenue I can, and put all my work ethic to the grind to get where I’m at,” Bennett said.

Changing the landscape of the sport

been mentoring out-grappled a kid twice his size.”

He also wants to further the expansion of MMA here in Richmond, and get the local support behind the sport that is taking over.

“People don’t realize the talented fighters we have at this school and this area,” Bennett said. “We want to get the sport out there.”

Bennett said his dream would be to fight in an event here in Richmond, and doesn’t understand why the city, unlike the rest of the state, hasn’t sought one out.

“Last year alone, Kentucky had over 80 sanctioned MMA events,” Bennett said. “That’s the most in the country, even more than Vegas. And this year we’re shooting to have 90 or so...I bleed maroon and having the school’s support in a local event would mean the world to me,” he said.

Bennett said he thrives on having a support system behind him, and having a cheering section in his corner makes him fight harder because he doesn’t want to let anyone down.

He attributes that to hW’s focus.

“Before my fights in the locker room, I’m joking around, laughing, singing Justin Beiber songs,” Bennett said. “But as soon as it hits three minutes before my fight that switch flips on.”

His wife, Brandy, who’s only missed one of his fights, said because of that change in his attitude she doesn’t worry about him while he’s in the ring.

“He knows he better come back alive,” she said.

The toll the sport takes on your body, can quickly build up and Bennett said he’s thought about calling it quits a couple of times — most notably after his winning streak came to a crushing halt in his first title fight: a 30 second knockout loss.

“I’ve thought about it yeah, but if you don’t think that, I don’t think you’re human,” Bennett said. “But the old saying goes pull yourself up by the boot straps and get it. I love this sport. So if you want to do this lets do this.”

His other option is to quit, which would make him 0-2 in the dream department.

But this time, Bennett is here to stay.

“I just can’t walk away.”



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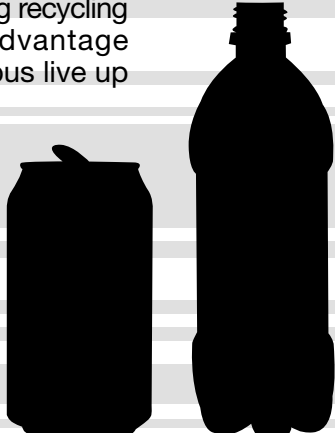
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