

No art in mixed martial arts

Other combat sports like boxing and tae kwon do have dignity, tradition, and honour, but the unadulterated violence of MMA has no cultural value at all



DEREK BATES

Sports
Commentary

The world of sports is welcoming a vicious newcomer to the mainstream: mixed martial arts (MMA). This new combat sport has taken all the rules, honour, and tradition out of the classic combat sports and produced a ruthless blood-bath to poison viewers' minds.

Even worse, the rise of MMA has coincided with the decline of a great and ancient sport: the sweet science of boxing. Where are the good old days when two people would clobber each other using just their fists while wearing padded gloves? Boxing is a fantastic sport because it takes physical endurance and strategy to defeat your opponent, not just a strong arm. Boxers spend months training their mind and bodies to prepare for a single fight, and, ignoring some notable exceptions, it's a sport steeped in tradition and excellence.

MMA, on the other hand, is a no-holds-barred, virtually rule-free environment in which two men or two women pummel each other using the method of their choice.

Now, I personally don't see the appeal in watching two half-naked men wrestle for three five-minute sets, but this "sport" has set records in pay-per-view sales and sky-rocketed to one of the most watched events on TV.

You aren't going hear someone, 20 years down the road, say: "Remember that time when (insert tough guy's name here) put a 30-stitch cut on the chin of (insert unfortunate victim's name here) back in '08?"

This bastardization of more traditional martial arts is a dangerous trend. When I took tae kwon do, the worst thing I did to someone was bow at him. Glorifying and rewarding the best way to make someone else bleed or faint is a complete departure from what martial arts are all about—discipline, honour, and respect.

Often, popular sports are reflective of the cultures that foster them. This is another reason it concerns me that MMA has gained such prominence in

our culture. Many sports, including football and hockey, involve an element of violence. However, mixed martial arts crosses the line from sport into brutality. Sports today put too much emphasis on violence in general, and I just don't see the point.

You aren't going hear someone 20 years down the road say, "Remember that time when (insert tough guy's name here) put a 30-stitch cut on the chin of (insert unfortunate victim's name here) back in '08? That's was a great match!" Rather, we'll likely still be reminiscing about the Patriots' perfect season, Kobe's 81 points in 2006, and the Stanley Cup the Flames won in '08. Okay, maybe the latter is only wishful thinking, but you get the picture.

Violence now holds a place near and dear to the North American heart, and the ramifications of this trend are clear. As athletes get bigger, stronger and faster, these assets will be used to hurt rather than to compete against other athletes.

While it is unlikely that sports like boxing will completely die out, I cringe at the rise of such lowly pursuits as MMA into the mainstream of North American athletics. The departure from respect and honor that are such integral part of sport—and traditional martial arts in particular—may mean a major shift in the sports of the future.

Cardinals and Blue Jays should both be Rolen with glee over Glaus-ome trade



PAUL OWEN

Sports
Commentary

It's rare for a trade to satisfy all parties involved, but that's exactly what Monday's Troy-Glaus-for-Scott-Rolen swap accomplished for the Toronto Blue Jays and St Louis Cardinals.

The Cardinals add some much-needed power in the form of Glaus, who has never hit less than 29 homers in a season where he's had 500 at-bats. And while Glaus' plantar fasciitis and general foot, knee, and back pain will never go away—*Globe and Mail* baseball writer Jeff Blair has said that he's "seldom seen a guy move around in such discomfort and still play"—at least they should be minimized by getting away from the turf at Rogers Centre. Moreover, he has put up typical per-at-bat numbers in each of his two seasons with the Blue Jays, despite battling his old-man syndrome, so barring it getting significantly worse (something the dirt and grass at Busch Stadium should prevent) he should be good for the same over the next two years in St Louis—a team that had only two players hit 20 dingers last season.

The biggest gain for the Cards, however, may be that they were able to trade Rolen for a player of equal value with a similar contract at the same position. After Rolen butted heads with manager Tony La Russa for the last season or so since La Russa benched him in the 2006 playoffs, the Cards must count themselves lucky to have gotten out from

under him in such good shape rather than having to trade him for prospects or lesser value.

North of the border, the Jays get a hopefully more durable third baseman in Rolen, someone who will also greatly improve the defence on the left side of the infield. The rotator cuff surgery Rolen underwent in the off-season was proclaimed 100-per-cent successful by Dr James Andrews, baseball's leading orthopedic surgeon.

But perhaps the biggest winners in this trade had nothing at all to do with it.

While Rolen's defence should be outstanding—he's a seven-time Gold Glover in the National League—because his injured shoulder is his non-throwing one, it's at the plate that Andrews' diagnosis is most important to the Jays. When healthy, Rolen far surpasses Glaus in every conceivable offensive category except power and will give the Jays a better approach against right-handed pitching, against which they were dismal last season.

Of course, both Glaus and Rolen had asked for trades from their respective teams—Glaus to help his body and Rolen to get away from La Russa—so both got what they wanted out of it.

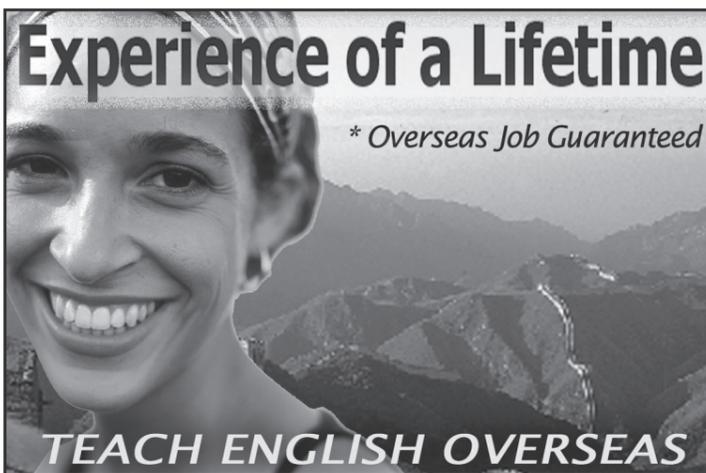
But perhaps the biggest winners in this trade had nothing at all to do with it. Balbino Fuenmayor and Kevin Ahrens aren't exactly household names, but the duo have the most to gain by the Jays' acquisition of Rolen. Glaus' contract was up after 2008 (though he had a player option for

2009 that he probably wouldn't have exercised), and with the Jays in "win now" mode until 2010—most of their veterans are signed until then, as are GM JP Ricciardi and manager John Gibbons—Glaus' impending departure would have forced Ricciardi to look for another offensively inclined third baseman to help the team compete in '09 and '10. On the open market, this would probably have meant a long-term deal.

Which brings us back to Fuenmayor (who turns 20 in November) and Ahrens (19 in April). The duo played third base and shortstop respectively for the Gulf Coast League Jays in short-season rookie ball this summer. Both are major league prospects despite their young ages, and Ahrens—who has been compared to Chipper Jones based on skill set, switch hitting, and body type—is projected to slide over to third.

With Rolen locked up over the next three seasons, that will allow the two youngsters to advance through the Jays' minor league system at the hot corner until after the 2010 season. At that point, it should be much clearer as to how they will work out as big leaguers, and they won't have to worry about any veterans taking up space at their allotted position. Moreover, there will be an opening for them on the big club should they be ready to take it over. And, with Rolen in place, the Jays will have no reason to rush the development of their prospects, giving the young men ample time to adjust to the various levels of professional baseball.

So while the Jays and Cards may be happy with the outcome of their recent deal, it's a pair of teenagers who have the biggest reason to smile.



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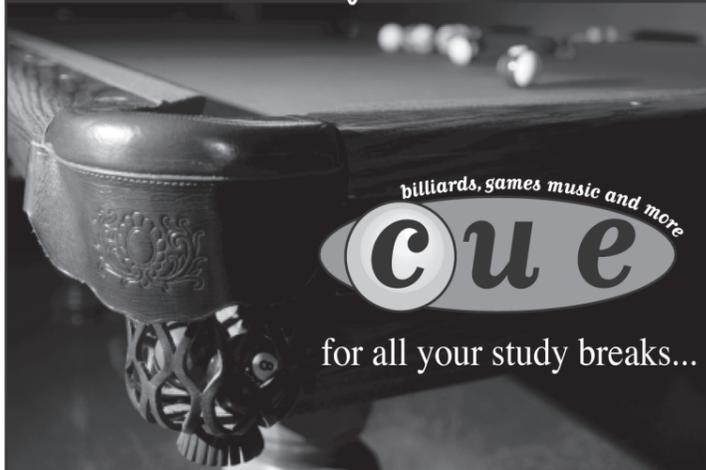
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