

Walls gears up for Gladiator Challenge

Written by Stacy Taff

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DELPHOS — Professional boxer Mike Tyson once said, “I’m scared every time I go into the ring but it’s how you handle it. What you have to do is plant your feet, bite down on your mouthpiece and say, ‘let’s go’.”



These sentiments are echoed by Ryan Walls, Delphos native and local Mixed Martial Arts

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(MMA) fighter who went professional last year.

“The anxieties before a fight, everyone gets them; it’s just how you handle them,” he said. “You’re always going to be nervous and scared, always thinking in the back of your mind ‘what if something bad happens?’ or ‘what if it’s all for nothing?’ You’ve just got to block that out and get through it, just like in everyday life.”

Walls’ MMA career has taken him all over Ohio as well as to several other states but on March 24, he will head to San Jacinto, Calif., to compete in Gladiator Challenge at the Soboba Casino Outdoor Arena. With his big fight looming, Walls looks back to how he got here.

“I’ve been fighting since 2009. I got into it mainly as a means to improve myself physically and mentally,” he said. “My stepbrother Craig Wreede and I started out taking private lessons with Shane Lear up at Lear’s Martial Arts and then about six months later, I entered a fight just to see if I had what it takes. I had a decent amateur career with a record of 7-5. This fight in California will be my 14th fight and I know nothing about my opponent. A lot of highly-paid professionals started out in Gladiator Challenge, so this could be a big break for me if things go well. That is the ultimate goal; to get into one of the big organizations like UFC or Bellator. It’s why I’m doing this.”

Walls, who was a wrestler in high school, says his favorite part of fighting is the training leading up to it.

“You’ve got to love training to do this. I love pushing myself, seeing what my limits are and seeing how I can push past them for next time and get better,” he said. “I weighed 315 when I got out of high school and now, just walking around I usually weigh between 225-235 but I drop down to 205 when I fight. Some people think that’s crazy but it’s not like I’m 6’5” with an 80-inch reach. I don’t fight heavyweight. My goal is to start fighting at 185 and that’s going to require a lot of work. Even to get down to 205 makes me feel great but we’ll see if I can manipulate my body even further. It’s not just about fighting, I love the discipline that’s involved. I have to watch what I eat, how I train, what I do with my spare time. It’s given me a goal, something to work towards. It holds me accountable.”

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In order to attain his goals, Walls keeps to a disciplined schedule, rising at 7 a.m. daily to start training. From 8-9 a.m. during the week he trains with Lear at Lear's Martial Arts and on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, he travels to St. Mary's to train with Jody Poff. On the weekends, he squeezes in any extra training he can.

MMA has grown in popularity over the years and is now just as regulated as boxing with rules, equipment, blood tests and medical evaluations. While many still view it as a barbaric sport, Walls says it's all about the competition.

"It's not that I have any malice towards my opponent, it's comparable to wrestling in the sense that it's all about the competition," he said. "It's about how one prepares themselves to be better than the next person. Every loss is a mistake you can learn from. The one-on-one competition is great, because if there are any mistakes made, they're my mistakes.

"It's a tough sport. Thankfully I'm at a point where I train with a lot of guys who have that sense of commitment who want to be there every day. There are some haters, sure, but oddly enough we fighters get along pretty well."

In addition to his MMA career, Walls is a manager at Elida Health Foods and coaches wrestling for his alma mater, Delphos Jefferson.

"It's nice because during the day I work in a health-oriented business, so everything I do ties in together and that helps me in all aspects," he said.

Even though he ultimately faces his fights alone, Walls says he wouldn't be where he is without the people standing behind him.

"There are a lot of people who have helped me get to this point, like Shane Lear who's been helping me since day one. Then there's Jody Poff and all the guys I train with," he said. "Zach Metzner has done a lot for me too, as well as Jeff Schwieterman. Without guys like that I

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probably wouldn't be where I am today, or as successful as I am. I also need to thank my family and friends have also been very supportive.

"I owe a special thanks to my wife, Niki. I'm away from home quite a bit, so she takes care of a lot of the house work that I neglect and she does an amazing job getting my licenses and my sponsorship things together, she's almost like my manager."