

Local Fight Coverage with Briggs Seekins Punching People in Bookstores: The Fight Scene in Ithaca

If you are like me, you have always felt that there was just not enough physical violence in bookstores. I have always been a really big reader, so even as a youth I would often gravitate to bookstores. But from the start, the lack of tolerance for rough-housing always made me feel completely alienated and unwelcome.

Fortunately for anybody in the Ithaca area who has ever dreamed of having the opportunity to do some fighting in a bookstore, there is the Ultimate Athletics Gym, located in the former Borders in the Shops at the Ithaca Mall. I am aware that many young people read the *National Police Gazette*, so I will tell the younger crowd that a Borders was kind of like a Walmart for books back in the days before you could have every book you wanted to read, ever, on a single little book-sized electronic gadget.

But if your memory is longer than several years and you like to read books, you no doubt have memories of spending rainy Sunday afternoons at Borders, and no doubt much of that time, like me, you really wished you could be doing some proper punching or throwing.

This is a large, fully-outfitted fight gym: they have a boxing ring, an octagon, lots of mat space. The heavy-bag section is more or less in the same section the poetry books used to get stacked.

It is also the home gym of some of the top professional mixed martial arts fighters in the Northeast.

Dedicated Professional Athletes Denied Opportunity to Compete at Home in New York State Due to Fallout from Sordid Democratic-Party Sex Scandal in Albany!

The Southern Tier of New York State is home to some of the most accomplished and dedicated mixed martial arts athletes in the world. In addition to Endicott native, current Ithaca resident, and UFC light-heavyweight champion of the world Jon Jones, the area is the home base for some of the biggest rising stars in the sport.

Ultimate Athletics is the home base of Team Bombsquad, the top mixed martial arts camp in the entire northeastern United States. This was the professional launching ground for wunderkind Jones. And current Bombsquad fighters include last season's Bellator \$100,000 featherweight tournament winner Shahbulat Shumhalaev, Bellator bantamweight contender Anthony Leone, and highly rated bantam and flyweight prospects Aljamain Sterling and Evan Vezev.

But the gym is full of talented young guys trying to turn professional and chase their dreams. This is what America is supposed to be all about, why Teddy Roosevelt had to fight the Spanish War and everything. But unfortunately, the young guns of the Bombsquad live dead smack in the middle of New York, one of only two states left in our country that maintain archaic, Victorian-sensibility-driven bans against professional mixed martial arts fighting.

So in New York, venues go unbooked, communities go without the cash influx that an event of any size would bring. In the middle of the worst economic stagnation since your grandpa whooped the Nazis, communities throughout New York State are forced to pass up the revenue-generating engine that professional mixed martial arts events would represent.

If you know fighters and trainers, though, you know they are paying the true cost for this oppressive infringement on their rights as Americans. These guys are forced to drive hours on the weekend to get a fight, and then forced to fight hometown fighters in front of hometown judges. I know fighters who have taken terrible and unjust blemishes on their records due to "home-cooked" decisions.

Let's be clear: mixed martial arts fighting is not illegal in New York State because of a lack of support within the rank and file of New York State citizens. We've already established that

most people would like to have more fighting in their lives, especially at bookstores. But for several years running now, bills to legalize MMA have died in Assembly committee, even as they had widespread Assembly support.

It seems that the hand behind keeping MMA illegal in New York is none other than Assembly boss-man Sheldon Silver. In recent years, it has been speculated that Silver's obstruction of MMA has been a result of his connections with the Culinary Workers union, who have carried a Vegas-based feud with the UFC-owning Fertita brothers east to New York.

But now this week a story in the *Daily News* reveals the real problem might be that feminist groups have Silver by the short hairs as a result of his disgraceful mishandling of the Vito Lopez sleazy sexual-harassment affair.

According to this theory, some of the most focused and respectable young men I know are currently being forced into a terrible professional disadvantage in order to placate some shadowy feminist cabal who are angry over some middle-aged scumbag politician who was harassing people's daughters and wives.

The *National Police Gazette* became the most important American publication of the late 19th century when it stood at the forefront of championing the then illegal sport of professional prize fighting. Without the important reporting and promotional efforts of the *Gazette* the sport might not have survived to flourish and make America great via such legendary champions as Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali.

As a fight writer in today's era, I can only hope to follow in the footsteps of those literary giants from another era. Follow me online at Briggsfighttalk@twitter.com and on YouTube and look for my regular boxing columns on BleacherReport.Com.

Briggs Seekins is a Bleacher Report Featured Columnist.

Angelo Zuccolo 1940—2013 Remembering the Long-Time BCC Theatre Director

Anyone who knew Angelo Zuccolo well will have mixed feelings about him. But for everyone whose ego was not bigger than Ange's, their ultimate impression would—on balance—come out positive. Long-time Binghamton High School English-and-drama teacher John Kellogg, for example, had a long-running feud with Angelo that started when Kellogg invited Ange to talk to his students and Angelo ended up peppering his comments to the teenagers with dirty jokes. This was also an example of the apparent contradictions others perceived in him. Angelo could be prudish and bawdy, intellectual and anti-intellectual, show both a rigid reverence and ambivalence toward a religion, and simultaneously have the highest esteem yet lack of respect for the craft of theatre. Angelo Zuccolo would be the first to tell you he wasn't perfect, a fact he understood as he made a life-long effort to grow and improve. But with all his foibles, Angelo brought something to the Greater Binghamton area it did not have, yet needed desperately.

For 30 years, from 1971 to 2001, Angelo was the director of the theatre department at Broome Community College, where he created his own

personal fiefdom paid for by the taxpayers and a few ticket sales. It was money well spent. Angelo made it a point to bring "the flavor and spice of Off-Broadway" to Binghamton. That meant providing a place for the community to see and participate in cutting-edge, avant garde theatre. By the early '70s, Southern Tier Summer Theater was no more. There was the Civic Theater, which sometimes collaborated with the SUNY-Binghamton theater department. But those were mostly conventional, mainstream productions. There was no place locally that was an outlet for the type of work being done in New York's Off-Broadway golden age, when the scene's four brightest lights—Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, Lanford Wilson, and Binghamton's own Leonard Melfi—were at the top of their game. And certainly there were no such shows in the area performed and worked on exclusively by people from the community. Angelo changed all that.

For Angelo, bringing the flavor and spice of Off-Broadway to Binghamton also meant recreating backstage the anarchic chaos that might have been present when these brand-new, exciting works were first created. Angelo's approach was more about finding the deeper connection to a character than it was to such mundane things as learning all the lines or rehearsing extensively—what some might call adequately. The nervousness of an actor who felt unprepared was to be put to use in giving the character energy. So it's no surprise that "The Actor's Nightmare" was one of Angelo's favorite plays to stage. But what Angelo lacked in attention to

the technical aspects of the craft, he made up for in encouraging the emotional and familial connection one had for the material and one's compatriots. Any actor will tell you there's a family atmosphere that develops on any production. But for Angelo, this aspect was sacred and an integral part of doing good work.

In retirement, Angelo took it easy, wrote books of poetry, taught Italian part time at BCC.... But what he set in motion continues today. Tim Gleason, a graduate from Angelo's program—among others—started the KNOW Theatre in 2006 and makes sure there's still a place where community people can work on and perform the cutting-edge theatre of today.

We kept in touch with Angelo over the years and it was him we contacted first when the thought came up to do a series on Leonard Melfi—which remains our most talked about to date. Angelo put us in contact with Leonard's brother John and the rest is history. A year ago Angelo provided a section for the last part of the series in which a few of Leonard's many friends offered remembrances. Our editor ran into Angelo several times over the last few years and on one occasion Ange gave him a book of his poetry, inscribing it "With very best wishes to a fine actor!" Our editor hadn't acted in over 10 years. But on the day Angelo died he received a phone call. He'd won a role in the next Doug Bush film production. No doubt, as he works on his performance, he'll bring with him Angelo's primary lesson: Whether you're ready for it or not, your mission is to bring out the purest expression of your character.