



Local Fight Coverage with Briggs Seekins

The Russians Are Coming

Cornell University brings some of the leading intellectual talent from around the world to Ithaca, NY. That's what they tell me, though I have to say, as somebody who lives near the campus, the Cornell student population consistently trails our local deer herd when it comes to intelligent behavior while crossing the road in front of oncoming traffic.

Meanwhile, Team Bombsquad, located at the Ultimate Athletics gym in the Pyramid Mall, attracts promising mixed martial arts talent from around the globe to our small Southern Tier city. In the past few years, successful professional fighters from South America, Europe and Asia have all come to town to train with the same team that launched superstar Jon Jones into the UFC.

In the past year, the top international fighter to train in Ithaca has been last season's Bellator Featherweight tournament winner Shabbulat Shamhalaev, known as Shah to his Bombsquad teammates.



Courtesy of russianchicagogmag.com

Shabbulat Shamhalaev

Shamhalaev is actually a native of Dagestan, a federal subject of Russia located on the Caspian Sea. Bordering Chechnya to the west, it is a conflict-torn region where street fighting is a way of life. In one of his Bellator promos, Shamhalaev calmly explained through a translator: "Where I am from, if a man challenges you in the street, you must fight him like a dog until he is no longer standing."

That's the kind of quote that sells tickets, but the fighters of Dagestan are hardly unrefined barbarians. The fighting arts are practiced at an extremely high level in the small, mountainous republic. There is more combat sports skill per capita in Dagestan than anywhere else in the world.

When I interviewed Shamhalaev last winter he proudly told me that in the 2012 Olympics, 10 medals were won by people in Dagestan in judo, wrestling and boxing. Five were gold. To put that in perspective, Dagestan has roughly the same population as Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont combined, with less than three million people.

Lead Bombsquad trainer, and former wrestling standout for Union-Endicott High School and Ithaca College, Ryan Ciotoli told me that he first learned about Dagestan when he trained

with the Russian national team in 2003. "It's where most of their top wrestlers are actually from.... Even a lot of the other Eastern European countries recruit wrestlers from Dagestan to come wrestle for them."

Shamhalaev rated his own wrestling as "poor," though Ciotoli qualified the statement: "He's judging himself against top guys in the world. He's got the skills of a NCAA national qualifier, at least."

You pretty much can't grow up in Dagestan without being a pretty fair wrestler, but Shamhalaev's strength is definitely knocking people out with his fists and feet. During his successful run through last year's Bellator tournament, featured on Spike TV, he showcased some of the finest striking seen in any Octagon in North America last year. All three of his wins were by stoppage.

Primo Bellarosa, a former national champion in Muay Thai with years of international experience, sounds like he's taking about a chess grandmaster when he describes Shamhalaev's standup game: "He rarely makes a miss. He makes you miss and pay for it.... He's a thinker in the cage. He'll kick low, kick low, then look low and go high. He'll throw a punch just to see what you'll do. He'll study your defensive tendency and feed it, knowing how you'll react and what he will do to counter."

Although Shamhalaev won the Bellator \$100,000 tournament, he ultimately lost in his bid for the Bellator world title, getting caught in a choke against champion Pat Curran. He's scheduled to return to Ithaca next week, to start another run for the championship.

Shamhalaev is at the front of a mini-wave of Russian talent set to hit the Southern Tier. His teammate from Russia, Imanol Gamzathanov, is already in town. Ciotoli told me more Russian fighters are on the way to Ithaca.

Like most people of my generation, I spent every night of my childhood wondering if the Russians were going to nuke us. Later, I was stationed as an infantryman with the Third Armored Division in Germany, tasked with defending the Fulda Gap against a potential Russian advance.

But all of that was a lifetime ago, pre-Glasnost. In today's era, our children need only worry about dirty bomb attacks from terrorists, deadly mystery viruses and continued economic and environmental collapse.

But when Southern Tier children hear that "the Russians are coming," they can smile and feel safe, knowing that it merely means our local MMA talent pool is growing deeper. Once again, fighting is making the world a friendlier place.

JUSER

(continued from page 3)

no arborist, championed the Crusade. The offending trees had been allowed over decades to grow around the power lines, threatening damage. NYSEG responded by trimming only the hazardous branches, leaving trees that curl sometimes in the shape of a "C" resting on its back around the lines. Rich David told the *Police Gazette* he has no plan to replace the trees, and could offer no solution.

Despite a popular Democrat as the outgoing mayor, the party headquarters is tucked away by the railroad on the outskirts of the city beneath the remains of a heavy-metal bar whose stage was graced by Paul Di'Anno, Great

White, Wesley Willis, and Incantation. That's where I met Teri Renna and her campaign manager Joe Merrill. Merrill already has one failed election under his belt from his 2009 bid against the Party Mayor. Renna has spent the last decade in city council, though Binghamton City Council brings to mind the old saying about tits on a mule. Renna is also the owner of Environ Systems in downtown, which almost certainly serves some purpose to someone. Renna is Milquetoast as Milquetoast can be, but was the only choice after Tarik Abdelazim got greedy and ran a year early for Broome County Executive.

Tarik would have made a terrible County Exec. It's no leadership position, it's bean counting. Tarik would have made a great mayor. He has drive, he has ambition, and he seems to genuinely care. Tarik acted as Deputy Mayor for most of Ryan's administration. The lack of viable Democrats is one more way Tarik let down the people of Binghamton in 2012. Voter maps showed Binghamton an island of blue in a Broome County sea of red. In all likelihood, Tarik could enter the election now and still win by a landslide. That's the race I'd like to see, because Douglas Walter Drazen Jr. is wasted on this election.

Grim humor makes Drazen steeple his fingers and titter wickedly. He is third-generation Binghamton. Drazen Sr. was the preeminent fur dealer until weekly protests by punk rockers shut down his store in the '90s. Heartless old ladies still remember him fondly. Drazen Jr. takes great exception to accusations of spoiler, not only against David's previous campaign but against Naima Kradjian in 2005. Drazen received more votes than Kradjian, and had she backed out of the race we could all be speaking Drazen by now.

Drazen speaks passionately; spit flies as his excitement grows. Well-practiced speeches go on for several minutes before reaching a denouement, and he collapses, spent, into his leather chair. Drazen is easily the most interesting candidate, but for all the wrong reasons. Speaking very highly of himself at every opportunity, Drazen cites past victories and laments how far the city has fallen after all the work he's done. He takes personal credit for the city's current term-limit law, which he argued for and won in 1994, though he knew at the time he would not be a popular man for his actions. We spoke mainly about Rich David, whom Drazen calls "Rich Davis," because "he's never had an original idea in his entire life, so he doesn't deserve to have his own name." David claimed to be unaware of the significance of the name, or of the name itself. David believes the public is tiring of Drazen's "juvenile behavior." Drazen has the personality David and Renna are lacking, but that personality is "supervillain." Win or lose, Drazen promised to make the next four years interesting. I'm looking forward to seeing the fire he lights.

Read Paul's novel "The Salvation Shark" at www.printisbetter.com.

Limerick of the Month

A certain young fellow from Ransome
Had a dame seven times in a hansom.

When she shouted for more,
He said from the floor,
"The name, miss, is Simpson not Samson!"
Like to submit a limerick? Write letters@
policegazette.us. Maybe we'll use it!