

BRINGING GOD TO THE FIGHT

Mount Pleasant man uses cage fighting as a way to share his faith

By **Maryellen Tighe** | Senior Reporter

Jody Bass is not new to the world of fighting. As a child, he admits he hit some rough spots, including run-ins with the law. But now he is teaching people to fight for a different reason — God.

"I had a change of heart and started seeking God," said Bass, a Mount Pleasant resident. "I decided to use my talents to help other people."

Five years ago, Bass, 30, started a garage ministry in Mount Pleasant. The barn is meant to reach out to other people who had a similar childhood. It's a ministry he has expanded into Faith Fighting, a Christian fighting and training group.

Bass moved the group into a barn located behind the home of the pastor of Potter's

House Family Worship Center in Mount Pleasant. The barn is still there, complete with a cage for fighting, Bass said. A year ago they moved into the current location of Faith Fighting, 1319 S. Mission St.

"We have fighters, we have guys who actually compete in cage fights, full contact," Bass

said. "The rest of them are just in it to learn to defend themselves and to get in shape."

About half of the 20 people who train with Bass are competitive fighters.

While he is not training his body at Faith Fighting, he is training his mind as part of Vessels of Honor, a four year ministry school. Bass doesn't plan to pastor a church once he is ordained, but he wants to give more legitimacy to the ministry part of his work.

"Since I was a teenager I've been doing the formal boxing stuff," Bass said. "The Faith Fighting' on the door (of our building) raises questions and I am definitely not bashful at all about sharing my faith."

Bass would like to see the mentoring portion of Faith

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It is easy to see the change in people's lives after their involvement with the group, Bass said. Two years ago he was placed in charge of 10 students who were struggling with grades and school. "The cool thing about it is ... a lot of those kids that were in that program were put out there and we had success stories," Bass said.

Eight of the ten students went on to have strong academic grades and one of them still trains at Faith Fighting,

Bass said.

Vincent Brewer has been working with Bass since before these students started training, and said the difference between Bass' gym and those of other trainers is huge.

He says he had temper problems and working with Bass offered him the guidance to turn his life around. He now has increased self esteem and wants to give back to the art.

"We've had a lot of people come and go, street fighters who think they're bad ass and that's not what it is about," Brewer said. "We had a few guys come in here where it literally saved their lives."

Bass acknowledges his training facility is different than most, and it's a difference he embraces. His guys face competition with an approach of their own.

"I think it adds something to it when somebody walks in wearing an 'I Love Jesus' hat and plays 'Jesus Freak' as their walk-in music and honors the person that he's fighting and afterwards can say, 'I honestly give glory to God for my victory or my loss,'" Bass said.

One of the key components of Bass' ministry is a desire for faith to reach into every aspect of his life and the lives of other people. He disagrees with what he calls "the seven mountain approach."

which separates all the portions of a person's life into separate mountains that do not interact.

"I make it a point to ask all the fighters if they want to pray. It is a very cool way to bring God into something that you wouldn't normally see," Bass said. "The believers need to be bold enough to stand on every mountain - even cage fighting. Why not? Everyone has a right to hear the good news."

Everything about faith fighting is key to who Bass is, a man who sees the connection between his faith and his business, Brewer said.

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Fighting become more central as his core groups of athletes grow. One athlete who is interested in helping is Lance Marlian. Marlian's curiosity about the group was sparked by that name on the door. He is a lifetime wrestler, but this is his first shot at training as a cage fighter.

"One of the main things that got me was the name," Marlian said. "When you think about cage fighters, you just think about big bad people who want to kick people's heads, but you get here and it's totally different."

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