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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

When the cage fighters entered the octagon in March, a capacity crowd filled the National Guard Armory with a fevered pitch of enthusiasm for fights that provided technical skill and excitement.

June 29, promoter Dave Rine has put together another card of fights that is expected to be just as exciting.

The event has been billed "Summer Heat," and expectations are high after the last show's success.

A celebrity fighter will also be on hand to sign autographs and meet fans. Dave "Caveman" Rickels recently won the \$100,000 Bellatore Challenge and will be fighting for the Bellatore Lightweight World Championship in late July.

The native Kansas will be on hand to watch the 12 pankration bouts, 13 amateur MMA fights and five professional bouts.

Fighters will make their way to Liberal from Dallas, Oklahoma City, Colorado Springs as well as Amarillo, Woodward, Anadarko, Salina and more.

"The fighters coming are really good," Rine said. "The amateur guys have a lot of experience."

There are not a lot of 0 and 0 guys fighting each other. We have some , but not many. We have a lot of guys with three to eight fights under their belts. It will be interesting.”

The more experienced fighters makes for a more technical fight, providing the crowd with a better product.

The experienced local fighters have been able to earn wins in the octagon through a focus on training at Rine’s American Freestyle Karate and building their cardio.

The additional experience in the cage has also been a building block for the next fight, and with the program starting with youngsters in the pankration fights and moving up to the amateur ranks of MMA. Then, there is a chance to make the move to the professional level.

“Right now I have 10 pankration fighters,” Rine said. “We also have 10 adult fighters. I have high expectations for all of them. We do expect to win. I do have one guy that is new. He is fighting a guy with three fights. I am a little concerned on that one. The rest, I am not too concerned.”

That confidence level has come from the success that Rine’s fighters have had in the cage. The local fighters have been dominating in the win-loss category in the last two events, and Rine continues to try to find the best competition and bring it to Liberal to challenge his fighters.

In the pro ranks, Liberal’s Robert Madrid will be fighting Joey Eisenbraun from Colorado, and Rine said it could be a very entertaining fight.

“That could be quite a match,” he said. “Eisenbraun is big and strong. They fight at 125 (lbs.), but he looks like 160.”

Rine’s connections with the Bellatore trainers landed the “Caveman” in a personal appearance.

"His trainer, Andy Zerger, is one of my karate black belts," Rine said.

Bellatore is right under UFC, and Rickels, a native of Derby, has proven that Kansas fighters can make the move to the next level.

Rickels will attend the weigh-ins the night before the fights, which will be open to the public, and he will be available to have pictures with fans and sign autographs.

Mario Munoz will be looking for a signature win as a pro after his stunning technical knockout in the first round over Robert Jones.

"Mario looks good," Rine said. "He is strong and just about at weight right now. "He is looking for a signature win, one that puts him over the top."

Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door. For advanced tickets, stop by RAFK at 2281 N. Grant. Tables are also available and include a meal.

For more information, cal 626-KICK.

Cage fights return to Liberal, 'Caveman' to make appearance

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