

Former Hatter wrestler Hancock to fight in MMA event at Mohegan Sun

By Richard Gregory Published 9:45 pm, Tuesday, October 17, 2017

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Dean Hancock in action during a training session at Champs Boxing Club in Danbury Oct. 17, 2017.

DANBURY — Dean Hancock has been competing in combat sports nearly all his life.

He started karate when he was only 5, and by the time he was a teenager was a second-degree black belt. In middle school, he joined the Danbury Youth Wrestling Association, and as a senior at Danbury High School in 2007, he placed fifth in the 160-pound class to help lead the mighty Hatters to the Class LL state title.

All the lessons he learned over the years in those sports will certainly come in handy on Friday, when Hancock steps into the ring at the Mohegan Sun Arena for his bout in the Bellator 185 mixed martial arts competition.

The 28-year-old Hancock, who boasts a 2-1 professional record, will face Long Island's John Beneduce, also 2-1, in a lightweight prelim fight.

"He's a Jiu Jitsu specialist, so I'm going to try and keep it on the feet and and get it done," Hancock said during a public workout at Champs Boxing Club on East Liberty Street Tuesday night. Hancock has been working on his boxing technique with the coaches at Champs, and also trains at Glover Teixeira's MMA gym across town on Beaver Brook Road.

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"The wrestling background helps because, if you're a better wrestler, you can dictate whether the fight takes place on the feet or on the ground," Hancock said. "It's a big advantage having that experience. Danbury is such a strong team, and I learned a lot in that room. I might not have been the best wrestler, but it all meshes out here."

Injuries have kept Hancock out of action for about a year.

"I had my shoulder fixed last summer, so this is my first fight back," he said. "I'm excited. It's my first fight healthy."

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All of Hancock's fights have been at the Mohegan Sun, where he always has had a lot of support from the local fans.

"It's cool having everybody there and seeing the T-shirts in the crowd," he said. "The support is big, and it feels good to have everybody behind me."

The main event of the evening will feature Alexander Shlemenko (52-9-0) against Gegard Mousasi (42-6-2) in a middleweight bout. Tickets are available on the Ticketmaster website. Anyone purchasing tickets online should type "Hancock" in the "Enter Offer Code" box. The preliminary fights are scheduled to start at 7 p.m. Friday, with the main card set to begin at 9 p.m.

rgregory@newstimes.com; Twitter @DanburySports

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