

Mixed martial arts specialists being groomed in S. Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Twenty-six seconds. That's all it took for Corey Carlson to win his first mixed martial arts bout this summer.

Now the 24-year-old South Lake Tahoe resident is training for a match at MontBleu in Stateline this fall. A date for the cage fight has not been set. Also in the ring will be Ryan McCarthy and Paul Hubbell of South Lake.

The trio train at Escobar Training Grounds in their hometown.



Corey Carlson stretches before he spars at Escobar Training Grounds. Photos/Kathryn Reed

"I love the shape I'm in," Carlson says.

He lost his first two bouts in the 170-pound division. Now he fights at the 155-pound level. Between diet, taking cardio

workouts seriously and being more disciplined he got into better shape and dropped the weight he needed to be more competitive.

Standing, talking to him he doesn't look imposing – especially with his boyish smile. Then the video of his win in Reno is played. Abs of steel, biceps that bulge and legs of iron. Don't mess with this guy.

Being in great shape, proper mindset and accurate execution is what will take him to the level he aspires to – the Ultimate Fighting Championships in Las Vegas.

Mixed martial arts have been around a little more than a century, with the popularity in the United States having taken off more recently. It's practically a free-for-all in the ring. Boxing, wrestling, jiu-jitsu, karate and judo are all allowed.

Competitors wear boxing gloves and are bare foot. Punching the other guy while he's down is OK. Kicking is common.

A full round is 3 minutes, with three rounds being a full match. If a knockout isn't scored, then the winner is determined based on points.

Carlson trains just about every day. When he's not at the gym, he's on his bike or running. Having reconstructive ACL surgery 18 months ago after landing a kick the wrong way has not slowed him down.

Escobar Training Grounds – better known as ETG – is not the typical gym.

Cory Escobar, who owns the facility with wife Dori, likes to call it a school instead of a gym.

“Every day you are being taught,” Escobar says. He's hobbling around with a cast on his leg – the result of a water skiing accident.

Escobar grew-up in this lifestyle with his dad having a gym in South Lake in the early 1990s. He lived here from 8- to 13-years-old, and then moved back at 18. The 30-year-old opened the gym four years ago, but this is the third location because they needed to expand.

Three distinct areas are set up, with the front being where adult martial arts classes are going on. In the center is the regulation-size boxing arena. Behind it is where kids as young as 3 are learning karate. When they are done the sparring class takes over the mats. This is where Carlson is.

Most people are not on the competition track. Instead it's about embracing the challenge of martial of arts.

Dori Escobar mostly teaches kids, with some adult karate classes. She has seen her students take the discipline and respect aspects learned at ETG and have them transcend to the classroom in terms of improved grades.

"Respect is a big one. We work a lot on moral integrity," she said.

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