

## Fighters don't disappoint at Michigan's first pro MMA card

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By MARVIN GOODWIN □ Of The Oakland Press

ROYAL OAK — The clock struck midnight at the first Michigan sanctioned professional mixed martial arts show at the Royal Oak Music Theatre. □ □ In fact, promoters were on the verge of an all-nighter as the final match ended at 12:19 a.m. Sunday. □ □ But if the sold-out crowd of some 1,700 spectators crammed into the historic theater sought blood, batterings and bravery, they got it. □ □ “Obviously the people came out to support it, which is wonderful,” said Greg Ahrens, who along with cohorts Matt Flynn and Carlos Llinas promoted the show. “It humbles me that we had such a big crowd.” □ □

A crowd which came to see such stalwarts as Angelo Popofski, who'll have a “show and tell” session with his seventh-grade students at Walnut Creek Middle School in Walled Lake when they return to class. □ □ Popofski needed only 47 seconds to beat Brad Johnson of Lansing by submission in their middleweight (185-pound limit) match, as he thrilled a host of well-wishers, including Aimee, his wife, as well as some Walnut Creek students. □ □

“I saw some (students) when I was walking around,” smiled Popofski, who fought professionally in Michigan for the first time in his 10-year pro career. “I can't even tell you how good it feels to be here. Being here for you guys is probably one of the biggest joys of my life.” □ □

Popofski took Johnson down with a body slam, only to have Johnson reverse and put Popofski, still grasping Johnson, on his back. But as Johnson tried to raise up, Popofski held on and applied the force to his arm and the tap-out came seconds later. □ □

“I was able to put pressure on his elbow and tendons,” Popofski said. “In this sport, the guy on the bottom can be aggressive.” □ □

At least three fighters spilled blood during their matches, but none more than Don Richard, a 257-pounder from the Flint area. Richard suffered a broken nose after Ray Lopez of Howell popped him in the face seconds into the match. Richard got Lopez in his grasp and flung him to the mat, pounding him with both fists, while blood spilled from his nose and mouth. Soon, blood was over both fighters, the cage surface and cage-side state inspectors and TV commentators, who tried to protect themselves from the splattering droplets. Richard continued punching until he caught Lopez with a rear naked choke hold to end the match at 3:05 of the first round.

“I looked down and saw his face and I knew he was in trouble, too,” said Richard, who was bloody but unbowed. “He got me with a straight left. It was good to get the victory, but I got a messed up face.” And a messed up hand, as postfight exams also revealed a broken hand. But it was all in a night’s work for Richard, who was proud of his work. “Tenacious, never give up,” he crowed. Myles Jury of Hazel Park KO’ed David Herlein of Muskegon, a last-minute replacement, in just 48 seconds after landing a kick and a strong right hand that put Herlein on the canvas and at Jury’s mercy. Herlein also ended up with a bloody mouth.

In the main event, Brad Burrick of Roseville — the reigning King of the Cage middleweight champ — had the momentum against Caleb Grummet of Lake Odessa before Grummet squirmed out of Burrick’s grasp, and applied a guillotine that succumbed Burrick at 3:50 of the first round.

“That’s how we do it,” said James Lee, who helps train Grummet as well as several other bout winners, with the Mash fight team. In other bouts, Dan Langbeen of East Detroit beat Anthony Gott of Midland at 54 seconds of the first round. Gott suffered a deep bloody gash over his left eye. Bo Harris of Mount Clemens earned a disputed victory over Chucky Mady of Windsor, who was absorbing punches on the mat. The referee stopped the bout, but Mady, as well as Llinas, complained it was stopped too soon. Mike Roberts of Coldwater beat Tyler Francis, and Daron Cruickshank of Inkster applied a rear naked choke hold to Brett Biederman of Canada, ending their match at 2:58 of the second round.