

Mutual Combat: A solution to New Bedford's violent crime and gangs?

When I was in high school in the 80's, I boxed at Manny Burgo's House of Champions in New Bedford. Growing up with only a mom, it was a much needed rite of passage for me – keeping me out trouble and providing structure and goals to my life. As boxing gym's disappear in places like New Bedford, so do outlets for young men to release their anger and street violence fills the void.

One of New Bedford's biggest problems when it comes to youth and gang violence is the lack of things to do and a place to release stress and aggression. I'm a firm believer that boys and men in New Bedford turn to street violence, stabbings and shootings, because they don't know better and have no other outlets. Is it time to bring mutual combat – a fight among two people that is supervised by the police – to New Bedford? Other cities in Massachusetts with gangs and high violence? It's not as outrageous as it may sound and already happening in places like Seattle, Washington.

I first learned about a "Mutual Combat" law in 2012 when Superhero "Phoenix Jones" was being harassed on the street in Washington State. The police showed up and Phoenix Jones evoked 'Mutual Combat'. At that point, the police asked the other man if he agreed to fight. When the man said yes, the police became referees. Here's the video:

The law in Seattle, and possibly other parts of Washington, basically allows fighting as long as there is no risks to property or non-fighting bystanders – probably why the police referee the fight. Here's a look at the law:

SMC 12A.06.025

Fighting.

A. It is unlawful for any person to intentionally fight with another person in a public place and thereby create a substantial risk of:

1. Injury to a person who is not actively participating in the fight; or
2. Damage to the property of a person who is not actively participating in the fight.

Full law details **here**.

There doesn't have to be a law on the books for police to consider mutual combat. in 2014, Actor Zac Efron was in a fight on Skid Row in Los Angeles and **police dropped all charged because they considered it mutual combat**.

I'm not proposing mutual combat on New Bedford streets. What I'm proposing is an official MMA/boxing ring where people can have mutual combat under the supervision of volunteer police officers. We pay police officers a ton of money per hour to stand at construction sites, why not pay them the same money to allow two gang members to settle their beef with their hands instead of with guns? Put the rings in the local Boys & Girls clubs and other recreation centers and just maybe the young men will decide to take advantage of other things like sports, art and other activities.

If done correctly, the outcome of mutual combat can be a strong bond between the opponents. If you've ever been part of a martial arts program that includes sparring, you understand the brotherhood that goes on between training partners. Supervised mutual combat can result in more friendships and less street violence.

What do you think? Post a comment!