

Mixing it up

North County fighter takes his sport seriously

By Michelle Johnson
Special to Today's Local News

VISTA — Johnny Hughes, of San Pasqual Valley, spends a lot of time on the ground at Martial Arts International, not because he's losing a fight, but because he's training for one — the King of the Cage match at Soboba Casino in San Jacinto.

The mixed martial arts (MMA) competition requires its competitors to be well-rounded fighters. Hughes focuses on his ground fighting game at Martial Arts International in Vista.

"It's a serious hobby," Hughes said. "I take it serious. You have to. The other guy is trained to fight."

MMA has proved its popularity with the success of Spike TV's reality show "The Ultimate Fighter." With celebrities like David Spade and Paris Hilton watching, it seems the sport is achieving mainstream status.

"The first guy I fought, I hurt him — broke his nose. It felt good actually."

Johnny Hughes,
Mixed martial arts fighter

MMA was legalized in California in December. Prior to that, fights could be held only on Indian reservations in the state. Although this may mean more MMA shows will be promoted, Hughes doesn't think it will change his game.

He still has to train.

It's July and the fight is in August. Hughes is in fight-training mode for two to three months before a fight. Dieting, Jiu-Jitsu and kick boxing are on Hughes' agenda.

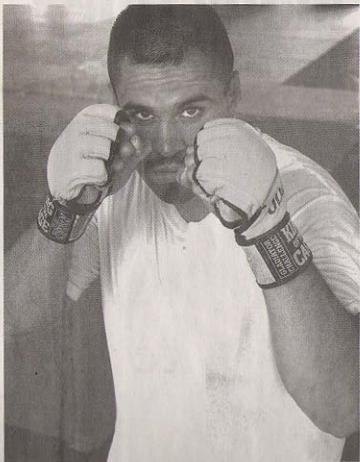
This means four-hour training sessions six days a week. As a husband and father, and with another child on the way, Hughes doesn't have the luxury of spending all his time

training for the sport.

Practice doesn't start until Hughes' shift treating wastewater at Valley View Casino is over. Then it's gym time. Hughes goes to the gym for a couple hours before brushing up on his martial arts. He spends 45 minutes of his gym time running.

After that, it is either stand up or ground training. Three days each week, Hughes trains with Team Quest in Temecula for his stand-up game. The other three days it's ground fighting with Team Magnitude under the direction of body builder/Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in-

Hughes A7 >



Hughes is training for the King of the Cage mixed martial arts contest in August. Hughes, who has been studying mixed martial arts for more than four years, has only two fights under his belt with a 1-1 record going into his next bout.