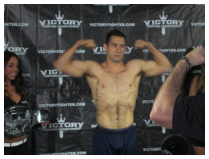

By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

The year just keeps getting better and better for former Imperial resident Jay Wood. The ultimate fighter won some fights, learned that he and wife Alisha (Large) are expecting another baby, and then Wood received a “really big fat belt” for winning a title fight over Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) veteran Kevin Burns in Omaha Dec. 15.

Wood was fighting at welterweight, 170 pounds at the Ralston Arena in front of 5,000 people at the Victory Fighting Championship. He won every round with a 50-45 final score. That earned him the title of Mixed Martial Arts Welterweight Champion for Victor Fighting.

Ultimate fighting is a combination of different martial arts, performed in a cage barefoot and with four-ounce gloves. It’s been around for about 20 years, ever since people started debating which martial art was the best. Turns out it’s a combination, Wood said.

He himself studies western boxing, judo, wrestling, Brazilian jujitsu (submission wrestling) and Muay Thai (a form of kickboxing). The 28-year old trains four to five hours a day, apart from his job as a personal trainer at Lifetime Fitness in Omaha.

It all began when the 2003 Chase County High School graduate wrestled in high school. He won two gold medals in the 152 weight class at the state wrestling championships.

Wood also wrestled in college, where he was an Academic All-American. He graduated from the University of Nebraska-Omaha in 2007 with a degree in journalism.

He started boxing while attending film school in New York, then coached young wrestlers while living in Minnesota after that.

Some of those parents asked him if he was interested in ultimate fighting. He began training in jujitsu, which is similar to wrestling. “I found out I was a lot better at that than at wrestling,” he stated.

About six months after he started training Wood won his first fight as a professional—he elected to skip the amateur status. He quickly submitted his opponent by putting a key lock on him, which Wood said can dislocate a shoulder. The opponent usually gives up quickly.

There are three five-minute rounds in ultimate fighting, or five five-minute rounds in a title fight.

The winner of a round is awarded 10 points by three judges. The loser of the round gets nine or less points. Judges base the points on the number of landed strikes, take-downs and aggression, among other things.

There is also a referee in the cage to make sure the rules are followed concerning types of strikes.

Wood has had eight total fights, with only one loss. That was in an unsanctioned fight on an Indian reservation, in which Wood said he and Alisha decided he will no longer participate.

Most of his fights last only one to two minutes, Wood said. He thinks he’s one of the top 50 ultimate fighters in the world, adding that most fighters can’t keep up with his speed. “If you can hang with me, you deserve to be there (in the ring),” Wood declared.

“Mentally, I have a stronger mind than anybody,” he stated. While “You can’t prepare for what the other guy will do, if you prepare yourself mentally and physically,” you have a good chance

to win.

There is definitely fear involved in ultimate fighting, Wood said, but “I always had a good mind set when competing.”

He said he’s always been aggressive, whatever sport he’s participated in. Interestingly enough, he said he detests fighting, and hasn’t been in a fist fight since age eight.

He has to carry a combatant’s license on his person. If Wood were ever involved in a fist fight, “I’d get in a lot more trouble than the average person.”

Wood said he hasn’t been injured in his fights, other than the occasional black eye. “A black eye is inevitable,” he laughed.

Besides the 10-pound belt he was awarded in the championship fight recently, Wood receives a purse to show up at a fight, extra money if he wins, and even more money if the fight “finishes in an exciting way.”

Wood explained that by pointing out a fight he won last March, where “I picked the guy up from the floor by his head and carried him across the ring by his head.” He got a Fossil watch and jewelry certificates for that maneuver.

In August he fought Shawn Westbrook in Omaha. “I beat that poor guy up,” he smiled. Wood purchased a Mercedes and a Cadillac after that fight for himself and Alisha.

Although he’s fought in Minnesota, Wood primarily accepts fights in Omaha, “because I have a good fan base there. The more people I bring in the more money I get.” He has a manager, an agent and area sponsors.

Wood is quietly confident about his capabilities, strength and success. You have to be if you’re an ultimate fighter.

What he’s really waiting for is a call from the Ultimate Fighting Championship accepting him as one of about 300 members, all professional fighters. If he doesn’t hear from the UFC, he’ll fight in July.

With three fights this last year, Wood said, “that’s enough.” He lost 40 pounds to make his 170 weight, and needs a break, he said.

At the end of the interview Wood said he’s looking forward to getting a call from Las Vegas offering him a fight there. But, the UFC call is foremost in his mind. “That’s the big one,” the Imperial native declared.