



Jayda "Lil Killah" Bailey throws punches while sparring at Young's MMA gym in Bangor. PHOTO BY RICK MCHALE

(Printed from url=https://www.ellsworthamerican.com/sports/other-sports/bucksport-wrestler-sees-her-future-in-the-ring/)

Bucksport wrestler sees her future in the ring

September 16, 2015 by Taylor Vortherms on Other Sports, Sports

BANGOR — Most teenagers can't say they have been punched in the face by a professional fighter.

Jayda Bailey isn't like most teenagers. The 15-year-old aspiring mixed martial artist spent her summer training in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with her Ultimate Fighting Championship

idols. Holly Holm — a UFC fighter slated to face women's bantamweight champion Ronda Rousey in November — spared Jayda no blows while sparring.

“She gave me a double-bloody nose,” Jayda says. “It was amazing.”

Jayda, a Hermon High School sophomore who wrestles with the Bucksport team, developed a passion for mixed martial arts three years ago — around the time Rousey began soaring into national prominence. With women's MMA on the rise, Jayda is part of a growing group of female fighters challenging gender stereotypes regarding toughness.

But in the early stages of this trend, Jayda's peers don't exactly understand her involvement in the sport.

“She's different, so people will razz her at school,” says Jayda's father, Jassen Bailey. “Even fighters get bullied a bit.”

Jayda describes herself in school as “awkward” and “that little, quiet kid who people think it's OK to pick on.” But for three hours a day, six days a week (except during high school wrestling season), she escapes to MMA gyms in Bangor and Augusta, where she transforms into her alter ego, “Lil Killah.”

“It's like I have a second life,” the 5-foot-3 fighter says inside Young's MMA gym in downtown Bangor. “I come here, and I'm a totally different person.”

Jayda has been involved in martial arts since age 5, when Jassen enrolled her in taekwondo classes for self-defense skills. She stuck with it for years, though she says its formal style never really “sparked an interest” in her.

Jayda tried out more conventional sports throughout her childhood in search of that spark. Jassen laughs while remembering his daughter on the basketball court, looking as smooth as a kid trying to throw a medicine ball.

“I've never been athletically gifted,” Jayda says. “I'm shocked that I've actually found a sport I have a future in.”

At age 12, Jayda began training at Young's, where she discovered boxing, kickboxing, grappling, wrestling and jujitsu — all the disciplines that comprise mixed martial arts.

She became hooked.

Young's MMA owner and coach Chris Young says Jayda has developed into a well-rounded fighter over his three years training her.

“She's very unique. That's for sure,” Young says. “You don't see a lot of kids — I don't need to say girls — putting the kind of time she puts into this. I have professional fighters on my team who don't put in as much time as she does.”

Jayda quickly advanced from children's lessons to adult classes, where she practices with fighters twice her age. UFC fighter and Bangor native Emily Kagan noticed Jayda's potential and used her connections to get Jayda into the exclusive Jackson Wink MMA Academy in

Albuquerque. Jayda spent eight weeks training with, and getting beat up by, UFC fighters.

"I was this little fan girl among all these pros," Jayda says. "It was inspiring being around fighters who actually made it. My dreams became real."

Jayda's ultimate goal is to become a UFC fighter. She plans to continue honing her skills in the individual techniques before her 18th birthday — the minimum age at which she can enter an MMA cage match.

Jayda's jujitsu coach in Augusta, Jarod Lawton, says she has the potential to "go all the way."

"It's just a matter of time," Lawton says. "She has all the ingredients to become a professional fighter."

One of those ingredients, Lawton says, is having a supportive dad. Jassen drives Jayda to every practice and across New England regularly for competitions.

"It has become everything I've ever wanted to do," Jayda says. "I've started caring less about what people think about it. Everyone has their own judgments."

Jayda's maturity makes it easy to forget she's only 15. But the mention of Ronda Rousey instantly pulls away that veil, exposing a giddy teenager.

"Oh-oh my God," Jayda says. "I swear, I do everything in the name of Rousey. I'm obsessed."

The arm bar — a Rousey classic — has become Jayda's favorite move.

Until Rousey, the UFC didn't even have a women's division. Its president, Dana White, had always maintained he would never allow women into the sport. Rousey changed his mind.

In late 2012, White, who happens to be a Hermon High School graduate, announced the formation of a women's division and installed Rousey as its first champion — a title she has yet to relinquish.



Jayda kicks an opponent while sparring at Young's. PHOTO BY RICK MCHALE

Young says it's no coincidence women have started to outnumber men in some of his classes in recent years.

"They're starting to realize that this isn't just a sport for men anymore," Young says. "It's girls like Jayda who are paving the way."

Still, the UFC isn't exactly inviting to women. The company offers only two women's weight classes — strawweight and bantamweight — compared to the men's eight.

And the sight of scantily clad ring-card girls always confused Jayda as a kid.

"I'd see them on TV walking around in high heels, a bra and underwear," Jayda says, "and I remember thinking, 'Why aren't they in the cage fighting?'"

This kind of one-dimensional representation of women hasn't made things easy for female fighters. Jayda says she has heard every reason for why girls shouldn't fight, ranging from "they're not strong enough" to "girls shouldn't mess up their pretty faces for that."

Jayda takes a deep breath. She has yet to suffer any serious injuries from MMA, but those words appear to have left an impression.

"People assume girls aren't as tough as guys," Jayda says. "We can do what they can."

Jayda says the first punch she ever took to the face stung for a couple seconds, but she got used to it.

"Your face builds up a tolerance," she says. "It sounds so much worse than it really is."

As for delivering blows — Jayda says that gets easier, too.

"First, you feel apologetic," she says. "Then, you feel empowered."

Jayda has heard the phrase "hit like a girl" used as an insult so many times growing up, she came up with a standard response years ago.

"Thanks," Jayda will say. "Maybe you can learn to hit like that someday."

Jayda has won martial arts tournaments across New England. Most notably, she is a two-time "Black Fly" Brazilian jiu-jitsu champion — an annual state tournament in Rangeley.

Before competitions, Jayda says she will stare down her opponent, refusing to break eye contact. Everything else — the crowd, her nerves, her timid high school self — fades away.

"Just breathe," Jayda will think to herself. "Remember all the people who told you that you couldn't do it. Then do it."

Jayda says winning those tournaments — hearing her name booming over the intercom while receiving a gold belt — often reduces her to tears.

"It's just like, I went through all that hard work and actually accomplished something," she says. "For a half second, you feel like you're important."

Jayda plans to return to Albuquerque next summer to train among the best of the best. And while most teenagers won't go on to become professional athletes, Jayda Bailey isn't like most teenagers.

To sponsor Jayda, visit her website at lilkallah.com.



Jayda poses with her martial arts championship belts.
PHOTO BY RICK MCHALE

 Bio

 Latest Posts



Taylor Vortherms

Sports Editor at The Ellsworth American

Taylor Vortherms covers sports in Hancock County. The St. Louis, Missouri native recently graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism and joined *The Ellsworth American* in 2013.

[LOAD COMMENTS](#)