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Mixed Martial Arts Bill Passage A Victory For Martial Artist Kevin Parker

[***By David Freedlander***](http://www.cityhallnews.com/newyork/articles.by.Author-7.html)

Mixed martial arts, or the “ultimate fighting” combination of boxing, wrestling and karate has been lambasted by critics. But a bill legalizing the combat sport was passed Wednesday by the State Senate, thanks in part to the efforts of lead sponsor State Sen. Kevin Parker, who has been known for getting into a few altercations of his own over the years.

“I am exactly the best spokesman for it,” Parker said Tuesday, as he prepared for the bill to go to the floor. “You need somebody who understands martial arts, which I do.”

Parker said that he has achieved the rank of “First Don” in a Korean-style martial art form called Tang Soo Do Moodukkwan, the most famous practitioner of which is Chuck Norris.

Last year, Parker was accused of felony assault for getting into an altercation with a New York Post photographer, and in 2008 an aide filed charges against him claiming that he pushed her during an argument. In 2005, Parker faced charges after he was accused of assaulting a traffic agent. Those charges were dropped when he agreed to undergo anger management training. He is awaiting trial on the 2009 incident.

Parker has maintained his innocence in these incidents, and said the fact that he is a practitioner of martial arts should show people “that these incidents are without merit.

“Somebody with my training certainly could inflict more injury than what you saw there,” he said.

The vote in the Senate was one of the more non-partisan votes this session, with a mixture of both Democrats and Republicans in support and opposition. And all said that having Parker’s name on the bill would not detract from its passage.

The Assembly version is currently before the Ways & Means Committee.

“I don’t know Senator Parker, and I don’t know what motivates him to support this bill,” said Assembly Member Bob Reilly, one of the most vociferous critics of legalizing the sport. “People mention that [Parker is a sponsor] to me, and laugh, given some of his history. But this will be passed or fail based on its merits.”

Reilly added that, “the sponsors in the Assembly, interestingly enough, are very gentle souls. [Co-sponsor] Steve Englebright is a very cultured man. Who is the sponsor is of little or no interest to me.”

Backers of the bill say that legalizing MMA will bring much-needed revenue to the state, as well as help bring the sport out of the shadows. They point out that the sport is widely broadcast on television, and they argue that the sport has received some much needed safety enhancements over the years and is now safer than other violent sports.

“To the peaceniks in my body, it is interesting to me that those colleagues have not put forward a bill to ban wresting, or to ban boxing or to ban hockey,” Parker said.