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Alliance MMA acquires management company Suckerpunch Entertainment



Alliance MMA — the only current mixed martial arts organization that is publicly traded — has acquired Suckerpunch Entertainment, one of the top management companies in the business representing several top fighters including current UFC featherweight champion Max Holloway.

Alliance MMA is a publicly traded company on NASDAQ that just recently purchased a number of regional mixed martial arts promotions as well as an

online ticketing agency and a live streaming service for the organizations under its umbrella.

According to Alliance MMA president Robert Haydak, adding a management branch to the company was just a logical step and it didn't take him long to target Suckerpunch as a brand he wanted to add to the business.

"Taking a look at Alliance MMA, we're constantly looking for different revenue streams in the MMA space that provide value to our shareholders and Alliance MMA. We identified Suckerpunch a while back, Brian (Butler) and the other Bryan (Hamper), I've had a relationship with for a number of years when I was leading CFFC (Cage Fury Fighting Championships) and I always recognized those guys as really solid guys. Guys in the industry that had a great reputation and always took care of their athletes first," Haydak told FOX Sports when announcing the new partnership with Suckerpunch.

"It's the same mindset we have at Alliance MMA that we want to look after the athletes first. We try to treat them like family as much as possible so the guys at Suckerpunch really embodied what we were looking for at Alliance MMA. We feel there's a tremendous value to Alliance MMA but also to our shareholders as well."

Brian Butler started Suckerpunch Entertainment in 2007 while working with former UFC lightweight champion Jens Pulver as well as former UFC and WEC star Jeff Curran before expanding the company to manage dozens of fighters competing in promotions all over the world.

Now Suckerpunch Entertainment handles a slew of current UFC fighters including Holloway, former strawweight champion Carla Esparza as well as Felice Herrig and several more as well as a stable of up and coming athletes competing on the regional circuit.

While the last nine years have been very successful for Suckerpunch, Butler says teaming up with Alliance MMA was the next natural step to stay ahead of where the MMA industry is moving as a whole in 2017 and beyond.

"I think everybody's seeing there's so much change in the sport today with the UFC being sold and acquired and just the popularity of the sport. It's at a point now where there's going to be a shift in the tide of the business and five years from now I think it's going to be a completely different landscape," Butler explained when speaking to FOX Sports. "So joining Alliance more of a not staying stagnant and not sitting and waiting and reacting. I want to be out in

front of the business instead of sitting and waiting to see what's going to happen.

"It's an exciting time in MMA and having Alliance come along and put some organization to the regional side of the business. It's something that we wanted to be a part of."



Bryan Hamper and Brian Butler from Suckerpunch Entertainment

Butler says a big part of the attraction teaming up with Alliance MMA was the network that the newly formed organization has been building on the regional fight scene. Alliance MMA has purchased several notable organizations including Cage Fury Fighting Championships, Shogun Fights and many more while building a network to help athletes gain the most exposure through the various promotions to eventually get noticed by the UFC or other top flight MMA organizations.

"The best part about it is there's going to be a real structure for the athletes on the rise whereas before it was really hodge-podge, mom and pop and luck of the draw. Now there's a system like the NCAA so it's really great," Butler said.

Bryan Hamper, a partner at Suckerpunch Entertainment who helps scout and recruit new talent to the organization, believes this new partnership is a natural fit for the management company as well as the growth of the fighters on the regional scene under the Alliance MMA umbrella.

“Signing up and coming talent and developing prospects into contenders has always been my focus at Suckerpunch. Under the Alliance umbrella we are going to be able to focus on cultivating talent and aligning prospects with top level regional shows to showcase their abilities and get the exposure needed to get to the next level. We believe the Alliance model is the future of MMA,” Hamper said.

As far as how Suckerpunch Entertainment operates, Butler says nothing much is going to change for his athletes and how they are managed, but now he just has a lot more tools at his disposal to help build their brand thanks to the team at Alliance MMA.

“On a day-to-day basis, nothing will change. We’re still going to operate as Suckerpunch Entertainment, we’re still going to scouting out new talent and we’re still going to manage the fighters that we manage,” Butler said. “The fighters aren’t really going to notice anything.

“The one thing that I am looking forward to is just having a more expansive network with everybody in the industry on the national and regional level that will help us direct and funnel our true prospects to the UFC or to Bellator or any other major organization in a much more efficient manner.”

Haydak doubled down on that statement by also noting that Alliance MMA is much more than just an organization building regional promotions under its brand name.

“We have an infrastructure, we have assets in house now, we have our own production team, we have our graphic designers, we have a social media team. We have all the assets in house to not only help the athletes Suckerpunch has now but also the athletes that come on in the future,” Haydak said.

“We all know the marketability of an athlete will help propel his or her career that much faster and those are some of the assets Alliance MMA has today that we bring to Suckerpunch athletes.”



Kamil Krzaczyński-USA TODAY Sports

One question that will certainly come up due to this new partnership is the potential conflict of interest between an MMA promotion and a management company housed under the same ownership. There have been numerous instances in the past where a promotion is headed up by a manager, who also represents fighters competing in that same organization.

Butler is quick to answer that charge by noting that each organization owned by Alliance MMA is still independently operated. According to Butler, the benefit of the new partnership is allowing Suckerpunch to have access to those network of promotions to ensure the fighters are getting the best possible opportunities nationwide rather than just locally.

“The reality is every promotion and every company under the Alliance brand is still independently run by the people that run it. I don’t have any control or say the promotions just the promotions have no say about who we manage,” Butler said. “The reality is the business is about networking.

“The reason why Suckerpunch is so successful and we’re able to keep our fighters busy is because we have a strong network and we have good relationships with people. What Alliance MMA is doing is kindling a relationship with everybody in the network that has the same goal.”

Haydak also noted that currently a very small percentage of fighters represented by Suckerpunch are actually competing in organizations owned by Alliance MMA. At the same time, Haydak says that Alliance MMA is being

very transparent with this new partnership so there is no conflict of interest now or in the future.

“Currently right now less than 3-percent of Suckerpunch roster is competing in the Alliance so it’s not like there’s an overwhelming number or anything like that and it’s not going to be our focus,” Haydak said. “When you look at the MMA industry, it’s not a secret that a number of promoters also represent athletes. We’re acknowledging what we’re doing and we’re also being very transparent in taking a proactive stance that we want to do right by the athletes.

“We’re transparent as you can get. We’re a publicly traded company. There’s no smoke and mirrors.”

Haydak says that adding Suckerpunch Entertainment was the next logical step for Alliance MMA but the new company isn’t finished with acquisitions by any means. The company hopes to continue growing and adding value to all of the brands under their ownership from the in house production company to the medical staff they’ve brought on board to make it easier for athletes to get the necessary check ups completed before fighting.

It’s all part of the Alliance MMA mission to grow the sport from the ground up and make everything better for the athletes who compete in the sport.

“If it brings value, then we’re going to give it a look,” Haydak said. “Simple things like in house we have medical coordinators, so whether they’re fighting within Alliance or a Suckerpunch athlete, we know it’s a tedious process and it’s often times for fighters it’s a pain. So we’re trying to make it easier for fighters and let them focus on the task at hand.

“We’re always going to look to add value for the promotion and for our shareholders.”

<http://www.foxsports.com/ufc/story/alliance-mma-acquires-management-company-suckerpunch-entertainment>