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U.S. MMA Champion to Open Sports School in Luhansk

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Jeff Monson

U.S. mixed martial arts (MMA) champion Jeff Monson has announced plans to open a sports school in the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic, the RIA Novosti news agency reported Tuesday.

Monson hade announcement during a visit to the region, where he discussed the proposal with local authorities as well as running training sessions for athletes and visiting a children's home, RIA Novosti reported.

"We hope that in September we can open a free sports school for children aged 18 and under," said Monson. "Despite the state of the economy at the moment, sport is what unites people. It's not important if you're white or black, man or woman. I hope that the school can be a small springboard for these children and will take their minds off the war," he said.

Monson also revealed that the Donbass branch of the Putin-backed Night Wolves motorcycle club would help to set up the school. Vitaly Kishkinov, the head of the Night Wolves' Donbass

branch, said that Monson wanted to see what was happening in the area "with his own eyes," the Kommersant newspaper reported.

U.S.-born Monson gained Russian citizenship in 2015 and has fought in the ring under the Russian flag. He has previously proclaimed himself as "feeling at home" in the country, and has spoke of his desire to join the Russian Communist Party.

Fierce fighting between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russia separatists took place in the Luhansk region in 2014 and 2015. Whilst the conflict has largely died down, low-level violence is still widespread.

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