

Guilt by Association

*Judging Mark Shurtleff
by the company he keeps.*

By Lynn Packer *September 13, 2013*

Last Summer while still Utah Attorney General a red-faced, ecstatic Mark Shurtleff appeared in a promotional photograph for Salt Lake's SoulPro sports fashions. Shurtleff's friend and mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter Josh Burkman had just won at the UCCU Event Center in Orem.

In the photograph Shurtleff had his left arm around Tyler Thompson of Provo who has multiple arrests and convictions for DUI offenses. Shurtleff's other hand made a V-for-victory sign over Peter Couman, who has had multiple arrests for assault and drug possession.

The photo also shows one of Shurtleff's closest political and business allies, Sovatphone (Sov) Ouk, and Ouk's girl friend, Angie Santa Cruz, since deceased. At that time Ouk and his telemarketing company, Global marketing Alliance, LLC, had been cited by Utah's Division of



**MMA fight at UCCU Orem, August 25, 2012.
L-R: Peter Couman, Sov Ouk, Mark Shurtleff,
Angie Santa Cruz and Tyler Thompson .**



Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff at a cage fight event, 2012.

Consumer Protection. (Three months later Ouk reached an agreement reached with Utah regulators to step down as president, pay a \$50,000 fine, wind down and then terminate the company.)

It's not unusual for political candidates to play the play guilt-by-association game with their opponents. Republicans hammered presidential hopeful Barrack Obama for his associations with the Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Professor Bill Ayers. The GOP mantra: "If you lie down with dogs you get up with fleas."

Even today the heated Virginia governor's race prompted a polling expert to tell the *Richmond*

Times-Dispatch that “guilt by association may not be fair, but it sure is politically powerful.” Democratic candidate Terry McAuliff points to his opponent’s association with embattled Governor Bob McDonnell who is under criminal investigation amid pay-to-play allegations. In turn Republican Ken Cuccinelli is drawing attention to McAuliffe’s association with the failing, Chinese-funded GreenTech car project calling his opponent “three orders of magnitude below a corrupt used car salesman.”

But those examples are about associations the candidates had *before* they ran for office. On the other hand Shurtleff hung out with people--some suspected of bad behavior, others convicted of crimes--*after* he became the states’ top law enforcement officer.

His associations with Jeremy Johnson and Marc Jenson have been widely reported in the press. Less so his associations in connection with Utahns connected to MMA cage fighting. At the center of his and his friend’s interest in ultimate fighting is Utah’s Josh Burkman.

Joshua Ray Burkman: Fighter, Future Utah Gubernatorial Candidate



Shurtleff & Burkman wearing “The People’s Warrior” T-Shirts

Sov Ouk and Global Marketing. “Sov gave me an opportunity that not many fighters get,” Burkman said in an interview for an Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) profile. “The chance to pursue my dream to make it to the UFC without having outside distractions nothing was required from me he just gave me the opportunity and he believed in me.”

Last summer *Sports Illustrated* interviewed Burkman prior to his decisive and dramatic win in Las Vegas. Burkman beat then choked his opponent into unconsciousness in just 41 seconds to rack up his fifth win in a row.

Josh Burkman, 33, is an articulate, almost soft-spoken, but fierce MMA fighter who starred in baseball, wrestling and football for Utah’s Cottonwood High School. As a half back for Dixie State College he was an All-American and was recruited by the University of Utah. Instead he went into mixed martial arts where he has become a star.

“His next quest is to become Governor Josh Burkman of Utah,” his web site says. “I’ve got my slogan for 2024: Tough times call for tough people. Vote for Josh Burkman.”

Burkman has a political ally in Mark Shurtleff, someone who could show him the ropes should Burkman actually run. Meanwhile Shurtleff and a circle of friends hover near Burkman offering moral and financial support for his fighting career.

Burkman gives a lot of credit to

“People don't believe me when I tell them that I'd probably been in about 200 street fights before I even got into MMA,” he told *SI*. The magazine reported that in 2004 Burkman flunked a drug test when he tried out for a ultimate fighter reality TV show. “It might have been for marijuana. It might have been for steroids, or both,” he told *SI*. “I'd told a guy at the gym that I was going to be fighting bigger guys and I was out of shape. Basically, I was trying to cheat, just trying to get through it all.”

At that point Burkman seemed to rediscover his Mormon faith and healthy living. “It was embarrassing and it was a bad thing, but it was one of best things to happen to me,”

Burkman told *SI* about flunking the drug test. “It made me start to live somewhat of a healthier lifestyle, looking at my diet and starting to do things the right way.”

Burkman began advocating the use of a cleansing, fat-burning nutritional supplement as a way to get down to his fighting weight. He pitched the product Isagenix, sold by multilevel marketers and lauded in a 2007 news story broadcast by Utah’s KTVX News. A web blurb for the product says Burkman went from 202 pounds to 183 in nine days and still, as Burkman was quoted “had unbelievable energy.”

Utah’s top ultimate fighter has also had brushes with the law. In 2010 he was convicted of driving on a suspend license. And last year he was arrested in Salt Lake on a charge he had deserted the US Army in about 1999 after serving seven months. He told the arresting officer it was a misunderstanding on the Army’s part. Nonetheless he was returned to Fort Sill, Oklahoma where he was discharged. The Army won’t say what type of discharge he received and Burkman is not responding to phone messages.

Also in the circle of Burkman supporters are three men associated with the now-defunct Harry O’s night club in Park City: Dimitrios Deslis, his brother Konstantine (aka Kosta) and Peter Couman. Burkman was said to have worked as a bouncer at Harry O’s and, after he gained fame as an MMA fighter hosted one of its Saturday Night Live events in 2010.

Dimitrios Deslis has since left the night club business for ultimate fighting. He’s now vice president of business development for Las Vegas-based World Series of Fighting. His brother, Kosta, also went to Nevada but stayed in the night club business. He’s the senior marketing manager for the Angel Marketing Group which does work for the MGM Grand Hotel.



Mugshot Gallery: Dimitrios Deslis, top left, then clockwise: Kosta Deslis, Peter Couman and Josh Burkman.



Recording artist Robin Thicke entertains at Harry O's during 2009 Sundance Film Festival.

Couman is the Deslis brothers' cousin and has, among others, a business tie to Sov Ouk. Couman and Ouk formed the Utah company Spoc LLC. Both decline to explain what business Spoc conducts.

Couman and his cousins have a long list of arrests among them, including for public intoxication, assault, and witness tampering. But none of them was arrested in connection with a 2009 case involving an incident that occurred at Harry O's on the last

day of the Sundance Film Festival that year. The matter involved a beating that was investigated by Park City police and, according to a federal court record, the FBI. The story is detailed in police records and a lawsuit that was pursued in Utah's federal court.

The federal civil case was brought on behalf of the alleged assault victim, Timothy Reynders of Palo Alto, California. The case, eventually settled out of court with an accompanying confidentiality agreement, accused Peter Couman and Dimitrios Deslis with fraud, racketeering, false imprisonment, extortion and assault. The police report says Kosta Deslis was also involved but he was not named in the civil suit.

Reynder's company had sought a contract with Harry O's to manage sponsorships and coproduce events at the night club during the Sundance Film Festival. His company, Entyce Group LLC of Nevada, was to pay a fee in exchange for managing events, such as Snoop Dog and robin thicke concerts, and sharing in ticket sales. It was a complex arrangement and as the film festival wound down each side accused he other of breaching the contract.

Witnesses agree that the last night of the festival Couman along with Deslis's security guards took Reynders to Harry O's basement and locked the door to the room behind them. Reynders' lawsuit explains what happened next from his perspective: Couman demanded that Reynders pay several hundred thousand dollars. According to the complaint Couman grabbed then choked Reynders, punched him in the head, threw him against a brick wall, then kicked Reynders, the alleged victim losing consciousness during the encounter.

Reynders was freed after police responded to a 911 call. No arrests were made but the matter was investigated by a Park City detective who concluded crimes had been committed and should be prosecuted. The case was referred to the Summit County Attorney who declined to prosecute. Park City police also believed money skimming was going on at Harry O's, suspecting managers of pocking cash off the books. The matter was referred to a state agency but not pursued.

Two years later, after Harry O's continued to be a magnet for arrests involving rowdy behavior, the owner of the Memorial Building which housed the club changed the locks under what the local paper called "police protection." *The Park City Record* in its April 29, 2011 edition said a crowd of onlookers watched "as the future of Main Street's biggest, most raucous nightclub was put in doubt." "It brought big-name music acts, including classic rock and hip hop

artists, to Park City, and it often had an especially noteworthy lineup during the Sundance Film Festival.”

The paper wrote that Konstantine Deslis, the club’s manager at the scene, accused building co-owners Kenny Griswold and his wife of interfering with the business. Griswold and his wife owned an interest in the building and Harry O’s. Griswold was a Southern California’s developer and entertainment entrepreneur and president of Park City’s Wolf Mountain ski resort which took out bankruptcy in 2011 while leasing the resort as The Canyons. Deslis told the *Record* reporter that the Harry O’s situation was a “microcosm of what happened to The Canyons,” a reference to legal wrangling over control of the Snyderville Basin mountain resort that involved Griswold.”

A reader comment posted on the Park City paper’s web site said, “Finally the crooks who pocketed all the money and never paid their workers are being booted out of PC. Good riddance to all the skanks and dirtbags that came from the valley. Good riddance to the greek mafia who threatened people.”

Another one of those charged in the Harry O’s-related assault vicil suit was Hollywood film director and actor Mars Callahan. Six years earlier Callahan had directed the movie *Poolhall Junkies* which was shot in Salt Lake City. One scene showed the Salt Lake Temple. The film had big-name stars like Rod Steiger, Christopher Walken and Mormon actor Ricky Schroeder. Clint Estwood’s daughter Alison had minor role as did Harry O’s Dimitrios Deslis.

The \$4 million film did not enjoy critical acclaim, the worst review coming from *The Deseret News*. “*Poolhall Junkies*” is the cinematic equivalent of a train wreck. As much as you’d like to turn away from this complete and total misfire, you can’t take your eyes off it,” wrote critic Jeff Vice. “You also can’t help but feel embarrassed for everyone involved in this billiards-based dramatic thriller, especially the cast. It makes you wonder if some blackmail material was used to get people as talented as Chazz Palminteri, Christopher Walken and the late Rod Steiger (all former Oscar nominees or winners) to appear in it.”

Footnote: Buoyed by his dramatic win in Las Vegas Burkman will meet Steve Carl for the World Series of Fighting’s 170-pound title in the main event on Oct. 26 at the Bank United Center in Coral Gables, Florida. Shurtleff declined comment for this report and isn’t saying whether he’ll be there along with Burkman’s circle of supporters. But just this week Shurtleff notched a huge win of his own when the U.S. Department of Justice told Shurtleff’s attorney it has dropped its criminal case against the former attorney general.

Note: After this story was published Burkman returned my call. “I definitely was not a deserter,” he said but acknowledged the story was technically correct. He said he got a general discharge from the army for “failure to adapt.”

Responding to rumors that Mark Shurtleff was seen partying after his June Las Vegas victory Burkman said he did see Shurtleff at the fight. “When I was getting interviewed Mark was, like, saying ‘Hey Josh, good job, you’re going to be the champ, you’re going to be the future governor, we love you!’”

Burkman said since getting married and having a child he no longer attends fight after parties. “That stuff doesn’t get me

anywhere.” “My life has changed dramatically over the past few years. I have never been around Mark Shurtleff when there has been partying or drinking but then again I have not been around parties for a lot of years.

He said Shurtleff has given him good advice about politics and family. “But after my fights I do not go to parties, he said. “I’m trying to become world champion. Mark and I have a very good relationship but it definitely not about ever going out and drinking together.”

What about those you and he associate with who do drink and have had alcohol-related arrests?



Josh Burkman: No longer parties and Shurtleff may merely drink Rockstar.

“Some of those people you talked about (in the story) Sov, and Peter Couman, and Dimitri, He said. “I know Dimitri does not drink any more. He stepped away from that party life. It’s like you said, it’s a perfect description, if you lay down with dogs you’re going to get fleas. Definitely, the people that surround you are a reflection of who you are. Sometimes that’s what Mark Shurtleff explained to me, in politics, you get connections with all kinds of people.”

Burkman said his own advice is that “you ought to be careful about who you hang out with because you are associated with who you are around. Whether Mark Shurtleff was drinking in Vegas or not, or whether he was just hyper, or whether he was drinking RocksStar (energy drink), I don’t know. But obviously the people that he was around, I know that they drink. Be careful about the people you associate with especially if you are in the public eye.”