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COMBAT MEDIC FIGHTS HIS WAY TO ALL-ARMY BOXING CHAMPIONSHIP

By Sgt. Dale Sweetnam
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LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq -- Pound for pound, Spc. Adrian Orrostieta is now one of the best boxers in the Army.

Just a few months ago Orrostieta was bandaging wounds and stabilizing sprains for Soldiers in Iraq as a combat medic in the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade's 412th Aviation Support Battalion. Now he is now considered the best boxer in the Army's 141-pound weight class after winning his matches in the 2008 All-Army Boxing Championships at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., in January.

"Winning All-Army was a great experience, and an eye-opener for the skill level that I have," said Orrostieta.

Orrostieta fought his way through the Army championships and then on to the Armed Forces Boxing Championships at Camp Lejeune, N.C., earlier this month. The specialist's dream winning the tournament ended with a loss to a Marine competitor, but he says he wasn't fazed and is looking forward to a planned rematch.



U.S. ARMY PHOTO

Spc. Adrian Orrostieta, a combat medic for the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade's 412th Aviation Support Battalion poses for a picture in the gym at the all-Army boxing tournament at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., in January. Orrostieta's win at the tournament makes him the Army's current best boxer in the 141-pound weight class.

“I am going to get my rematch from the loss I took in the Armed Forces Championship,” he said. “He is ranked 10th in the nation, but I’m going to get my win against him in the national tournament in March.”

Orrostieta may have lost his match, but the Army continued its dominance in armed forces by winning their 17th consecutive team championship at the armed forces championship. The team’s dominant performance in the tournament illustrates the kind of Army boxing tradition that now includes Orrostieta.

He made his impression in Army boxing quickly, but his competitive boxing future didn’t materialize until the last minute, when a fellow Soldier walked in to his office and told him he should sign up.

Boxing for the Army had always been an aspiration of Orrostieta’s, but being deployed made things a little more complicated at first, said Sgt. 1st Class Danielle Whitaker, Orrostieta’s platoon sergeant.

“(Being a boxer) was his goal, but being that (the unit’s) mission is first,” said Whitaker. “The focus was not on sending him to All-Army boxing, but the command supported it and he was able to go.”

Orrostieta says he’s grateful to all the Soldiers in his unit who helped him.

“My chain of command and fellow Soldiers have all been very supportive about me trying out for the team,” he said.

After rushing his application, Orrostieta was in, and now it looks as if boxing will be his life for the next few years. With his win in the All-Army championships, Orrostieta has secured a spot in the Army’s World Class Athlete Program.

He’s definitely ready for the rigorous training program he will be exposed to at Fort Carson, Colo., said Whitaker.

“He worked out twice a day (while in Iraq),” Whitaker said. “He would work out until he was about to pass out.”

Following the national tournament in March, Orrostieta will return to his home station in Germany, where his chain of command will sign the paperwork and send him to Fort Carson to train full time.

The transition to Army boxing will be an easy one for Orrostieta, says Whitaker, because he regularly scored higher than 350 on his Army physical fitness tests.

“He’s a driven young man,” he said. “He’s focused, and he’s going to do well in Army boxing.”

“I box for the excitement,” Orrostieta said. “You see all the hard work you put into this sport paying off in the ring.”

The 12th CAB is a U.S. Army Europe unit headquartered in Ansbach, Germany.



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