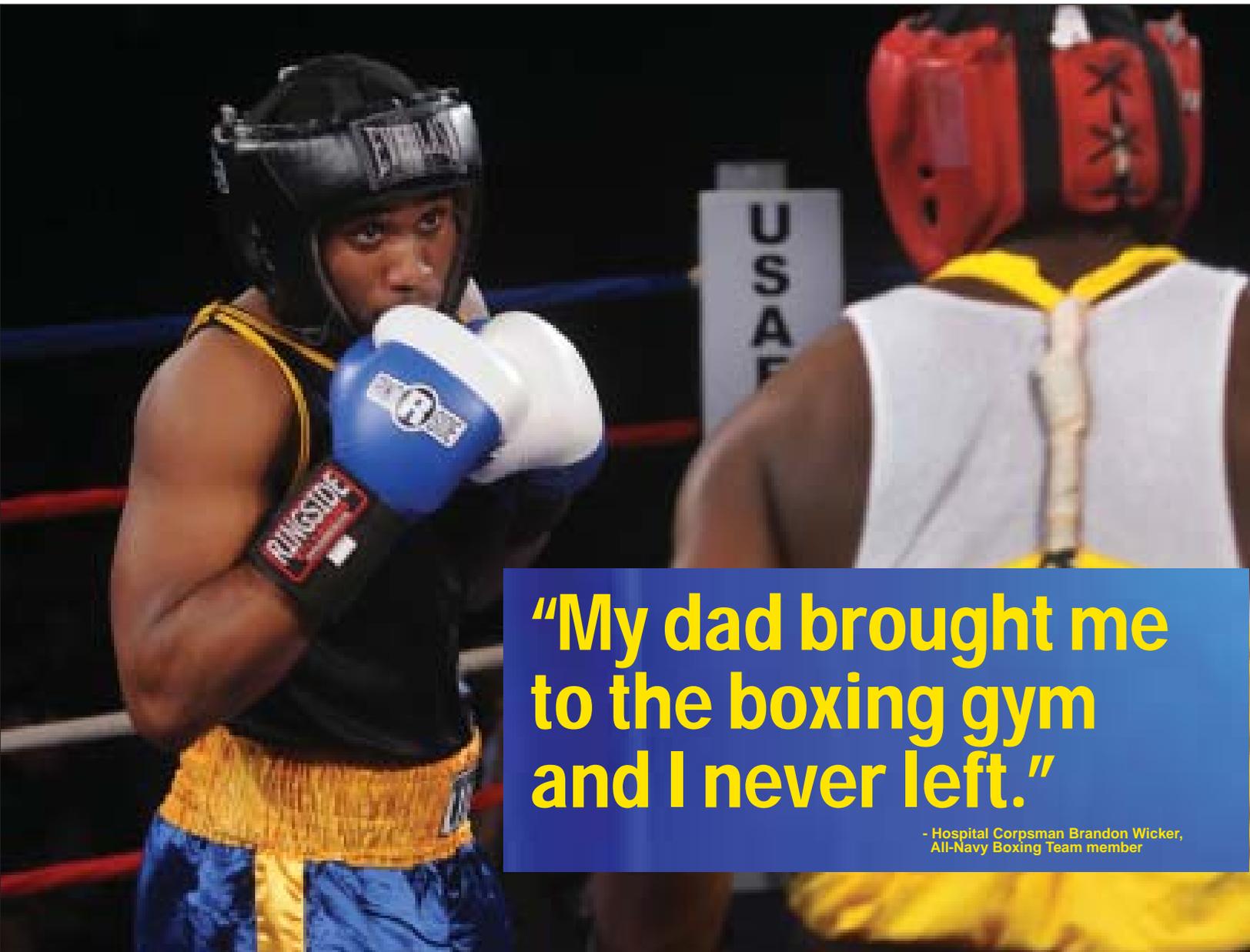


FIGHTING FOR REDEMPTION

Navy Corpsman Ready for Armed Forces Boxing Championship

A fighter makes his way between the ropes amid a cheering crowd. He receives some words from his coach as his boxing shoes meet the familiar canvas. He stares across to his opponent. Three rounds. Two warriors. One victory.

Hospital Corpsman Brandon Wicker takes the stage for his gold-medal bout in the 2011 Armed Forces Boxing Championship. Competitors from each branch of service fought in the finals Feb. 18, 2011 at Lackland Air Force Base. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Elliott Fabrizio)



“My dad brought me to the boxing gym and I never left.”

- Hospital Corpsman Brandon Wicker, All-Navy Boxing Team member

Hospital Corpsman Brandon Wicker fights Army Spc. Jeffery Spencer for the gold medal in the final of the 178 lb. weight class of the 2011 Armed Forces Boxing Championship. Spencer defeated Wicker 12-3. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Elliott Fabrizio)

This is where hard work, sacrifice and dedication pay off. This is where the hours of sweat and blood in the gym show. This is where redemption is found.

After a 12-3 loss in the championship round of the 2011 Armed Forces Boxing Championship, Hospital Corpsman Brandon Wicker will again represent the All-Navy boxing team in a quest for a gold medal and a team victory. The 5-foot-7, 178 pound fighter will travel to Camp Pendleton, Calif., in the end of January as one of ten All-Navy boxers participating in the yearly event.

“He was a good fighter, but I felt

like I could’ve done more to win,” said Wicker of his opponent in last year’s championship. “I don’t like to lose, but it comes with the sport. I took it with a grain of salt. But you know you have to work hard, come back, and win this time.”

This will be the third year representing the All-Navy team for the Taunton, Mass. native, who started boxing after originally trying to play football as a child.

“I started boxing at 12 after my father tried to sign me up for Pop Warner football,” said Wicker. “Unfortunately, the officials said that I would have to

lose at least 10 to 20 pounds first. So my dad brought me to the boxing gym and I never left.”

Wicker will take a slightly different approach to this year’s tournament than he did last year.

“I’ve got to be busier when I’m in that ring,” Wicker said. “Last year I was waiting too much for something to happen, waiting for that perfect punch. I can’t wait like that, that’s how I got beat.”

Throughout his 10-year boxing career, the Corpsman has recorded an impressive 43-14 record and won numerous awards, including a 2004



Hospital Corpsman Brandon Wicker upper cuts Army Spc. Jeffery Spencer in the 178 lb. weight class during the gold-medal bout in the final of the 178 lb. weight class of the 2011 Armed Forces Boxing Championship. Spencer defeated Wicker 12-2. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Elliott Fabrizio)

Jr. Olympic International Championship gold medal, a 2004 Jr. Olympic National Championship silver medal, a 2005 Jr. Olympic National Championship bronze medal and was the 2006 Ireland invitational champion.

“His boxing skills are excellent,” said Steve Carbajal, All-Navy Boxing Team coach, who has 32 years of boxing and coaching experience including six as the Navy coach. “He has an extensive background in international competition. He has done very well for us. And hopefully this year we can get a gold medal in his weight class.”

As a coach of military members, Carbajal looks for traits in addition to excellent skills inside the ring — traits that he says are apparent in Wicker.

“As a Sailor, he is excellent,” Carbajal said. “He was a team captain last year and will be a team captain this year. His leadership skills are really good. He’s very responsible, punctual and a great athlete to coach.”

Carbajal, who has coached various age groups throughout his career, finds it especially rewarding to teach military members like Wicker.

“To coach Navy fighters, and all military — Army and Marines — the attitude and work ethic has no comparison,” Carbajal said. “It’s an honor for me as a contract civilian to coach at that level.”

Wicker likens the sport to his military service in many ways.

“The biggest similarity is the core values of honor, courage and commit-

ment,” said Wicker. “These traits are needed to succeed in both professions.”

For Wicker, boxing is a passion and a large part of who he is.

“It’s something I love to do,” said Wicker. “I can’t explain it, it’s just a great sport with a lot of history and I want to be a part of that history one day. Now that I’m in the Navy, I’m boxing to keep what I’ve already accomplished and for what I’ve worked for all these years.”

The Corpsman would like to eventually turn his years spent in the ring into a career.

“I want to eventually be a professional fighter,” Wicker said. “It’s important to gain the experience now — learning and growing.”

The love he has for the “Sweet Sci-

ence” is similar to his love for the Navy and his career as a Hospital Corpsman, which he found after advice from his father.

“I love my job,” Wicker said. “When I joined the Navy and when I picked my job at MEPS the recruiter gave me two options. One was a culinary specialist and the other was a Hospital Corpsman. Before I picked my job all I could hear was my dad saying, ‘If you do anything don’t become a cook.’ That’s how I became a Corpsman.”

It was through his service in Navy Medicine that he eventually found his way to the All-Navy boxing team.

“I found out about the program in corps school from one of my instructors after a discussion about boxing and my experience in the sport,” Wicker said. “He gave me the paper work needed to do it and motivated me to do so.”

A common practice in sports is to compare an athlete to others in order to define their style. For Wicker, Carbajal says this is not necessarily an easy task.

“He’s got his own unique style,” Carbajal said. “He’s not that big for the weight class he’s in, because he’s a little short for 178 pounds. I don’t know who I’d compare him to. He’s good on the inside and a real slick fighter, kind of like Bernard Hopkins. He’s real aggressive and has good defensive skills. He’s kind of a combination of everybody. You can’t pinpoint a boxer he is similar to because he uses pieces from everybody.”

Wicker and the rest of the All-Navy Boxing team will represent the Navy at the Armed Forces championship, hosted by the Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Jan. 31 to Feb. 3.

“I want to go in there and just leave it all in the ring,” Wicker said. “As far as the fight is concerned, it’s in my hands. I want to win to make the Navy proud and to bring that gold medal home where it belongs.” 🇺🇸

Culinary Specialist Seaman Julio Lopez, left, warms up with Hospital Corpsman Brandon Wicker before the start of his match during the All-Navy Box-Off at Naval base Ventura County. The All Navy Box-Off includes boxers from the Navy Boxing Team and other local boxing organizations.

(U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Donald Walton/Released)

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