

STARS AND STRIPES

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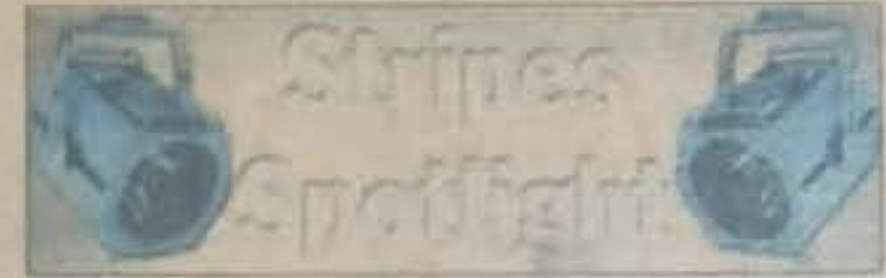
Quake kills scores in Central America

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Joining hands to honor Martin Luther King Jr.

Latrell Marchbanks, 3, takes his turn Saturday at making a handprint on a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. mural at the Martin Luther King Jr. community center in Bakersfield, Calif. The center holds an annual celebration in honor of the civil rights activist. For related stories, see Page 7.

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN, CASEY CHRISTIE/The Associated Press



Petty Officer 2nd Class Pablo Ramos, a *sensei* on board the USS Kitty Hawk, scoops up jujitsu honors as easily as he knocked down banana trees in his native Puerto Rico. **Page 4**

In the military

A Sasebo-based salvage vessel is to begin searching Tuesday for two Misawa F-16 fighters that crashed Nov. 13 into the Sea of Japan. **Page 2**

Every day, Petty Officer 2nd Class Sid Sandridge scours the Internet for the latest news from the courtroom where his nephew, former NFL player Rae Carruth, is on trial for allegedly arranging to have his pregnant girlfriend shot. **Page 5**



Yemen and the United States disagree on whether to try three suspects in the USS Cole bombing in absentia or wait to hold a trial until it is clear whether they have fled the country, sources say. **Page 3**

the States

Former President Reagan undergoes a 65-minute surgery to have a plate and screws inserted into his right hip to repair a fracture. **Page 10**



In the world

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat join peace talks in a final push for an agreement before President Clinton leaves office. **Page 18**

More than 70 American activists arrive in Iraq to deliver aid as part of the international challenge to the 10-year-old embargo. **Page 18**

Financial planners offer varying advice for gamblers

Stripes Money



Michigan State rallies to beat Wisconsin in rematch from last season's Final Four

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Sailor punches, kicks way to top

Yokosuka's star jujitsu black belt leads Navy team

BY STEVE LIEWER
Yokosuka bureau chief

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Once Petty Officer 2nd Class Pablo Ramos got into martial arts as a boy in Puerto Rico, the banana trees in his back yard needed a bodyguard.

The movies of Bruce Lee inspired young Pablo and his brother, Jose, so much they would go out back to practice their flying kicks.

Unfortunately, recalls Pablo's sister, Sandra Halfond, their father tended a garden of banana trees out back — bananas needed to feed the five growing Ramos children. Each tree produced only one bunch before it died.

"Once Pablo kicked the tree with the almost-perfect bunch with one single kick," she said. "Boy, was our dad upset! He chased my brothers to give them a good whupping, but he didn't catch them. By the time they came back to the house, he was already sleeping, and by the next day, all was forgotten and forgiven. We ate boiled bananas for a long, long time."

Today, Pablo Ramos, now 40, is a hospitalman aboard the Yokosuka-based aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk. By day, he is the soft-spoken fellow who gives eye exams, treats eye injuries and fills contact-lens prescriptions for the ship's crew. But in the evening, he dons a white robe and becomes Sensei Ramos — a sixth-degree black belt in sport jujitsu and coach of a U.S. Navy team he firmly believes is the best in the world. Last summer, he returned to Puerto Rico to be enshrined in the International Jujitsu Hall of Fame.

"Martial arts gave me the ability to grab the tiger by the tail," Ramos said. "It gave pizzazz to my life. It's an adventure, a real challenge. Without it, I would just be existing."

He says he likely will accept an offer to coach the Puerto Rican national team after he retires from the Navy, if he does not become an assistant coach of the U.S. national team. Sport jujitsu also brought love into his life. He is engaged to marry a secretary to the Puerto Rican Sport Jujitsu Federation, Marilu Mendez.

And he is a leader of a team of young men and women, most of them Kitty Hawk sailors, who represent some of the top sport jujitsu talent in the world. Last fall, the Navy squad thrashed the Japanese national team — regarded as second-best in the world, Ramos said.

"He's a great sensei," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Johnny Mantilla, 21, one of the team's hottest prospects. "He's more like a father ... outside our dojo, if you need advice, need a friend, he's there."

As a bookish, pint-sized 13-year-old growing up in a rough San Juan neighborhood, Ramos seemed an unlikely leader.



LIEWER/Stars and Stripes

Above: Petty Officer 2nd Class Pablo Ramos, left, coach of the Yokosuka-based U.S. Navy sport jujitsu team, demonstrates a kick on his team captain, Petty Officer 3rd Class Johnny Mantilla. Below: Ramos puts a hold on Mantilla. Ramos — a sixth-degree black belt — is coach of a U.S. Navy team he firmly believes is the best in the world.



"I was a 98-pound weakling," Ramos said. "I remember going out, getting pushed around on the streets."

It didn't pay to be a smart runt in a macho culture where boxing was king. Then he and Jose, his kid brother, saw *Enter the Dragon*, Bruce Lee's martial-arts classic.

Pablo and Jose signed up for classes in both judo and jujitsu. Pablo's life would never be the same.

"I was a very shy kid. (Martial arts) helped me to come out with real confidence, but at my own pace," he said. "I was showing how to break boards, how to kick high. (The other boys) respected that. It helped me to measure up, to be even with them."

Through high school, he studied jujitsu, an aggressive, athletic art that emphasizes kicks, and judo, a more artistic form that emphasizes throws. By the time he graduated, he had earned first-degree black belts in both.

With his new physical confidence, Ramos joined the Marine Corps in 1979. Basic training is legendary for its rigor, but five years of martial arts had honed Pablo's mind and body.

In one exercise, the drill instructor made every recruit hold buckets of sand in each hand, arms straight out from his side.

"Everybody quit. At the end, I

reer in San Diego and Yorktown, Va., before coming to Yokosuka in April 1999.

Even with the successful career path, he also practiced the martial arts. He competed whenever he could and frequently won. Besides numerous state and regional titles, he claimed the national taekwondo championship in 1996.

His biggest accomplishment, though, came in September 1997 when Ramos fulfilled a dream he'd had since he saw his first martial arts movie. He traveled to western China and was one of the few Americans to compete in the Wushu Festival at Shaolin temple in Henan province. It is the world's most famous martial arts tournament, held in the place where martial arts are believed to have originated.

Like his hero, Bruce Lee, Ramos won — first the middle-weight championship and then the grand championship.

"It was just like Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon*," Ramos said, still awed. "To be able to emulate him and persevere ... it was an incredible feeling."

As he moves into middle age, Ramos is making his mark as a sensei. Three evenings a week, the team aboard the Kitty Hawk takes to the mat in Yokosuka's Thew Gym. When the ship is out to sea, they roll out mats in the Kitty Hawk's hangar bay.

Last year, Ramos' group won a local tournament in Yokosuka, then a regional meet involving teams from all over the Kanto Plain. In July, they traveled to Asaka for the All-Japan championships. Unknown upstarts, they stunned everyone, Ramos said. Team members won two weight classes and placed third in two others. They won the team championship.

"Now the U.S. Navy team is the No. 2 team in all the world," Ramos said proudly.

Next month, his top competitors will travel to Nitro, W.Va., for the U.S. national team tryouts. He's got one day marked on his calendar now: Nov. 26, 2001, the day of the next world championships in Aikita, Japan. Ramos plans to go as a coach and as a competitor. Even at 40, he thinks he can win. No one could call the 6-foot-2, 210-pound Ramos a weakling anymore.

"We're waiting to match up with the U.S. team," Ramos said.

Stripes Spotlight



Name:
Petty Officer
2nd Class
Pablo Ramos
Age: 40
Location:
USS Kitty Hawk,
Yokosuka, Japan

Like his hero Bruce Lee, Petty Officer 2nd Class Pablo Ramos has harnessed the fighting force within himself. A sixth-degree black belt in sport jujitsu, Ramos, a sensei, or teacher, leads a team aboard the USS Kitty Hawk, scooping up honors as easily as he knocked down bananas in his native Puerto Rico.

"We're going to win it. We're the best in the world ... we just have to prove it."

In April, though, he is scheduled to leave the Kitty Hawk for a new billet. He still will head the U.S. Navy squad, but Mantilla will take over the team in Yokosuka.

His former students have spread out around the world and started their own Navy jujitsu clubs — Virginia, Naples, Guantanamo Bay and San Diego. His nephew, William Halfond, now a junior at the University of Virginia, took up the sport as well.

"Tio Pablo (Uncle Pablo) became one of his heroes," said Sandra Halfond, William's mother. "When our son began taking martial arts classes, his concentration on academics increased. He became more self-confident in his peer group. He would no longer get into fights in school. These are the same things that happened to my brother Pablo when he took up martial arts."

Jose, two years younger than Pablo, didn't stick with martial arts. Instead, he became a championship bodybuilder, a model and a cop in Puerto Rico. He died in a shootout in 1993.

"Jose was my buddy. He's the one I used to beat on when I was a kid," Pablo said with a laugh. "He used to tell me I was going to be a champion someday."

With marriage, retirement and a coaching job in his future, Ramos' life is about to take another turn. But martial arts is the constant — it made him what he is today, and it will be with him for the rest of his life.

So the banana trees better watch out.

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was the only one standing," Ramos said.

He breezed through the agility drills so easily, the drill instructor sent him back to the barracks to clean it up. There wasn't anything he could learn.

Ramos spent three years in the Marines as a diesel engine mechanic. But he wasn't advancing as fast as he'd hoped, so he transferred to the Navy in 1982. He started out as a dental technician, then became a corpsman.

Later, he went to college and earned a degree in health care management, specializing in optometry. He spent most of his ca-



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