



Retired 1st Sgt. Rafael Ramos, left, poses with his son, Staff Sgt. Alexis Ramos, at the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program boxing gym in Fort Carson, Colo.

Father, Son Exemplify Army Values as NCOs, And In the Boxing Ring

Referee famed for tagline 'No one is more professional than I' a driving force for enlisted son

By Pablo Villa

NCO Journal

Father-son pairings in the Army aren't uncommon.

But not many share the unique success of Staff Sgt. Alexis Ramos and his father, retired 1st Sgt. Rafael Ramos. Both are accomplished noncommissioned officers. And both are polished in the world of pugilism.

As an assistant boxing coach for the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program headquartered in Fort Carson, Colo., Alexis Ramos has a hand in the preparation of the Army's elite boxers as they vie for a spot on the U.S. Olympic team. For those qualifiers from WCAP's winter sports teams, that preparation reached fruition in February during the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

Meanwhile, WCAP's summer teams are building up for their own runs to the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The younger Ramos — along with head coach Staff Sgt. Charles Leverette and assistant coach Staff Sgt. Joe Guzman — is part of WCAP's NCO staff that is laying the groundwork for the Army's boxers.

Alexis Ramos is also an accomplished boxer in his own right. He's a three-time champion of the All-Army and Armed Forces tournaments, the military's U.S. Nationals qualifiers, feats that culminated with a berth in the U.S. trials for the 2008 Olympics.

He says his success in the sport and throughout his Army career can be attributed to determination and perseverance, traits that he has learned and honed as an NCO.

"I've been through a lot in my short career," Alexis Ramos said. "I've had to fight through that. So I think 'resilience' is the biggest word that I try to teach everyone. You can overcome anything if you put your mind to it."

He also has benefited from the knowledge and life experience gleaned from his father, he said.

"I can relate back to when I was a kid and used to see everyone talking to my dad," Alexis Ramos said. "I can relate to the way he used to deal with all those situations when he was progressing throughout his career. And I'm very glad that I had that experience."

From humble beginnings to the Hall of Fame

That experience lifted Rafael Ramos to a first sergeant position and a command sergeant major nomination in 1997. But he gave up the chance to become a sergeant major and retired after a 21-year Army career as a communications specialist and as a medic to allow his son, Alexis, and daughter, Marelyn, to graduate from the San Antonio high school they enrolled in during the mid-1990s. The elder Ramos, a native of Puerto Rico, has remained in San Antonio since leaving active duty and has worked as a clinical research associate in addition to his other, more high-profile job in the ring.

During the past 20 years, Rafael Ramos has developed into a top-flight professional boxing referee, evidenced by his mention in the 2013 book *Third Man*

in the Ring, by Mike Fitzgerald and Patrick Morley, which takes a closer look at the world's best boxing officials. He began officiating fights in 1987 at the request of then-Olympic boxing head coach Hank Johnson, who also coached the installation's boxing team at Fort Bragg, N.C., where Ramos was stationed. This came after a stellar amateur career in three weight classes while in the Army. Ramos was also a taekwondo natural, taking up the sport while at Fort Bragg and winning a silver medal at the North Carolina state tournament in 1986.

His success inside the ring as a fighter and official culminated in 2012 when he was inducted into the Puerto Rican Boxing Hall of Fame, a remarkable accomplishment considering his humble beginnings and struggles to learn the English language before joining the Army. Not a year later, Ramos is one of three who will be formally inducted into the San Antonio Boxing Hall of Fame on March 1 during a ceremony at the Alamodome. After the ceremony, Ramos will perform his officiating duties as part of the fight card featuring a rematch between super middleweights Julio César Chávez Jr. and Bryan Vera.

"I was fortunate that they inducted me," Rafael Ramos said. "But for me, the emotions were so great. My family was there. My friends were there. Peers came out from everywhere."

"As an NCO, I tell the people that you always can look forward and you always can be great if you dedicate yourself to do it. Dedication is everything."



Staff Sgt. Alexis Ramos, left, assistant boxing coach for the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program, trains with Staff Sgt. Reyes Manuel Marquez at the WCAP boxing gym at Fort Carson, Colo. Ramos has experienced success in both the Army and in the sport of boxing, a familiar feat in his family. His father, Rafael Ramos, retired as a first sergeant in 1997 and was inducted into the Puerto Rican Boxing Hall of Fame in 2012. The elder Ramos works as a professional boxing referee. (Photo by Pablo Villa)

If you're going to be a Soldier, you've got to become a good Soldier and be dedicated to become the best of who you are. And that's what I did."

NCO values a boon for boxing

While both Ramos men have been indefatigable when the gloves are on, they both credit their time as NCOs as the catalyst for their success inside the ring.

For Alexis, the opportunity to work closely with Soldiers came after his father's initial hesitance.

"He didn't want me to join the Army," Alexis Ramos said of his father. "He wanted me to go to college. He said if I wanted to join the Army, he wanted me to do it as an Army officer. I was initially going to live up to his wishes. That's why I joined as a reservist. But as I continued in my Army career, I saw that relationship of the enlisted Soldier and the NCO. There's a reason why they call us the 'backbone of the Army'. We deal with Soldiers every day, and I like that. I like dealing with Soldiers. I like that one-on-one. I like being able to be that mentor, that counselor for Soldiers and helping them through problems."

That desire to mentor and train makes the role of coach a natural fit for the younger Ramos, who took an interest in boxing in high school, despite his father's wishes against it. Rafael Ramos didn't offer his son a blessing to take part in the same brutal sport he participated in for so many years until he found his son in the backyard of their San Antonio home engaged in a boxing match with several friends in attendance.

"We called them 'backyard championship fights,'" Alexis Ramos said of the makeshift bouts. "We'd invite football players, and we'd just go at it. We even created a belt. For a while I had it, which was cool for a 119-pounder fighting all these guys. But one day, my dad walked into the backyard, and that's where he brought me into boxing. He said, 'Oh, you want to fight? OK, let's do it.'"

Alexis trained under Wilfredo Esperon, a friend of his father's who was an Air Force veteran and was nationally ranked as an amateur boxer.

After enlisting in the Army in 2005, Alexis continued his training. He credits his first NCO, Staff Sgt. Shawn Sullivan, with encouraging him to continue chasing his boxing goals while also instilling in him what it meant to be a Soldier. Ramos' time under Sullivan further engrained the impact that a positive, professional NCO can have on his Soldiers. The elder Ramos says he has seen his son evolve into that figure.

"As an NCO, he's moving really fast," Rafael Ramos said. "He's dedicated himself. He's very professional. That's what I like to see from my son, because he puts his mind to a goal and he's going to accomplish it."

For now, that goal is helping his fellow coaches and fighters prepare for a potential position on the U.S.

Olympic team. He'd like to dispel notions that being a part of WCAP, the program that trains and promotes nationally and internationally ranked athletes, is an easy assignment.

"A lot of people kind of get this negative image of WCAP, like, 'That's all they do? That's a cake walk,'" Ramos said. "But when they come over here, they realize that we are Soldiers first. We still get tasked out. If our command needs us, we return to units and deploy as needed. And you've got to realize that, at the same time, WCAP is a selection of the very elite. At any one time there's only between 70 and 100 Soldiers. It's not a lot of people, a very small percentage. We continue our athletic training, our academic training and Soldier careers in addition to competing for our respective sports."

As such, Ramos strives to be the best Soldier he can be and continues to forge his own path, even if it appears to be one that's been traveled before.

"My dad, he's left a hard road. But I would say you can't always try to achieve what they've achieved," Alexis Ramos said. "It seems like I'm following in his footsteps, which I am. But I wasn't trying to measure up to him. I was trying to go on my own path. It just happens to be that both of us love boxing and so it ended up this way. But I would say just do your best, follow your own footsteps and aim above the mark so you can always reach the standard."

'No one is more professional than I'

Standards are something Rafael Ramos maintains steadfastly when he steps inside the ring.

Ramos has officiated a multitude of fights on five continents and has built a reputation as one of the best referees in the sport because of his control, knowledge of the rules and fairness. He was the third man in the ring for the March 2010 superfight between welterweights Manny Pacquiao and Joshua Clottey at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas. Ramos also officiated the 2009 *Ring* magazine and ESPN fight of the year between lightweights Juan Manuel Marquez and Juan Diaz in Houston. His most recent big-name main event came in June 2013 when Mikey Garcia defeated Juan Manuel Lopez to defend his featherweight title.

But no matter who is in the ring when he's refereeing, Ramos always has one final message for the combatants before they touch gloves.

"When I give my instructions to the fighters, you're gonna hear me say: 'No one is more professional than I,'" Ramos said. "That comes from the NCO Creed. That's how I honor the Soldiers — the active-duty, retirees and the fallen Soldiers. That's why I do that."

It also came as a request from Alexis, who wanted his dad to present an homage to NCOs and Soldiers in front of the hordes of boxing fans who might be taking in one of his fights.

“I asked him as, one, an NCO myself and, two, as him being a retired NCO, and for Soldiers in general, if he would be able to say that before the fights,” Alexis Ramos said. “All the great referees have their own tagline. But I think representing the Army and representing the NCO Creed every time he steps out was something that a lot of people would recognize and a lot of Soldiers would appreciate it.”

And how does Rafael Ramos handle the pressure created by the angry glaze of lights, high-profile fight-

ers and an audience of millions? His answer is one that applies to his son’s NCO career and all Soldiers looking for success.

“Because I was an NCO, I know we put the mission first,” Ramos said. “We forget everything around us, and we dedicate ourselves just to that mission or to that fight. Just like all NCOs, we have to do whatever it takes to accomplish the mission. So I focus, and that’s what I do. That’s how I do it. That’s how all Soldiers do it.” ■



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

