

3 NCOs Earn Spots on U.S. Olympic, Paralympic Teams

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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For three NCOs, there was reason to celebrate this weekend. But not merely because it marked another year of independence for the country they defend as U.S. Army Soldiers. For this trio, there were berths on U.S. Olympic and Paralympic teams to commemorate.

Staff Sgt. Michael Lukow and Sgt. Elizabeth Marks earned spots on the U.S. Paralympic team competing at 2016 Summer Paralympics beginning Sept. 7 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, while Sgt. 1st Class Joe Guzman was named to the Team USA Boxing coaching staff competing in the 2016 Summer Olympics beginning Aug. 5 also in Rio. All three Soldiers are part of the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program based in Fort Carson, Colorado.

Lukow earned his spot on the U.S. archery team by edging out teammate Timothy Palumbo for the final recurve open men's slot last week at the U.S. Paralympic Team Trials in Chula Vista, California. Lukow will be one of seven Americans competing at the Paralympics.

"At the moment, it's very bittersweet," Lukow said after his win. "I would much rather be going with Timmy than beating him out for the slot. But, I am really looking forward to representing the

U.S. in Rio. It's been a long hard road to get here. It's really just bittersweet at the moment.”

Marks was named to the U.S. swimming team Sunday after three days of competition at the Team Trials in Charlotte, North Carolina. The competition was highlighted by Marks' win in the women's SB7 classification 100-meter breaststroke. She finished the race with a time of 1:28.04, just .01 off the world record. It was a fitting end for a momentous week as Marks was earlier named the recipient of the Pat Tillman Award for Service. Marks will accept the award July 13 during the live broadcast of the 2016 ESPYs on ESPN. She will be part of a 31-member U.S. contingent at the Rio Paralympics.

For Guzman, the Olympics are familiar territory. The current WCAP assistant boxing coach was part of the coaching staff for Team USA Boxing at the 2012 London Olympics as a trainer. This time around, he will be a full-fledged coach. Guzman will be part of a staff, which includes Billy Walsh and Augie Sanchez, that will try to bring home the first U.S. gold medal in boxing since Andre Ward won at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece.

Guzman has been a WCAP coach since 2008. Before his foray into coaching, he was an accomplished boxer in his own right. Guzman was a three-time All Armed Forces champion and won a silver medal at the 2007 World Military Championships. He qualified for the Olympic Trials in 2008, but his career was cut short by a knee injury.

Also during the weekend, WCAP distance runners Spc. Shadrack Kipchirchir and Spc. Leonard Korir made the 2016 U.S. Olympic Team by finishing second and third, respectively, in the men's 10,000-meter run at the Track and Field Team Trials in Eugene, Oregon.

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic teams will be finalized this month.