

Army Resiliency Program Helped MMA Fighter in Cage and As Soldier

By Clifford Kyle Jones - NCO Journal

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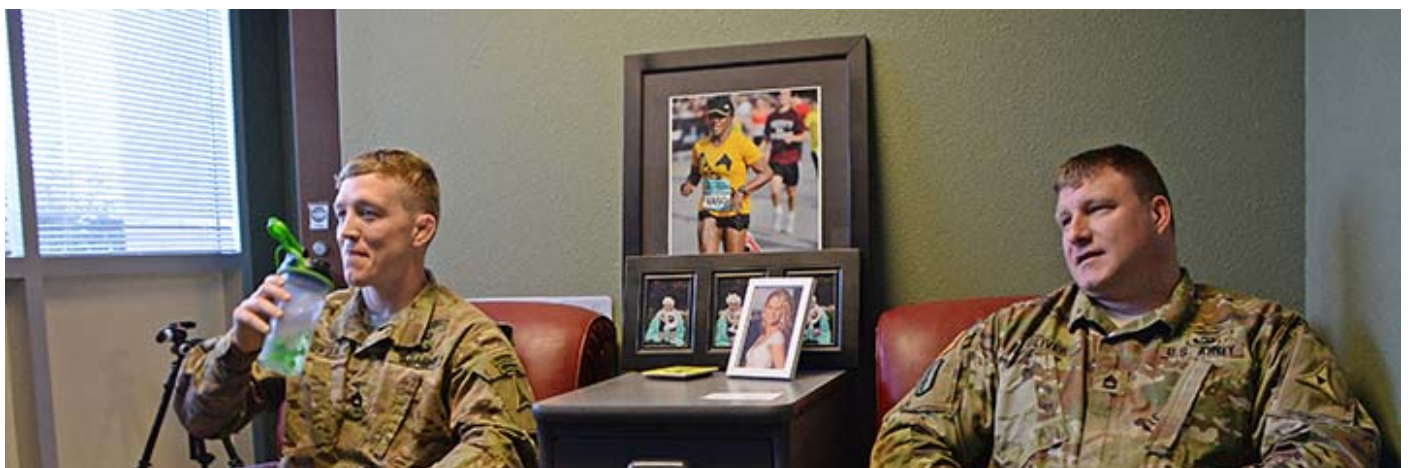
Sgt. 1st Class Colton Smith

After winning "The Ultimate Fighter 16," Sgt. 1st Class Colton Smith struggled to reach the next level in his professional fighting career. An Army program designed to build resilience is helping him get there.

Smith has been working with Bradley Williams, a Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Master Resilience Trainer performance expert, several months before he won "Ultimate Fighter" in December 2012.

Smith lost his next three Ultimate Fighting Championship matches, the last one in late 2014. Since then, he competed on the local circuit and signed with the World Series of Fighting last year.

"I've been on a win streak and a lot of that is due to my mental game, my mental program with the CSF2," Smith said.





Sgt. 1st Class Colton Smith and his corner Sgt. 1st Class Jeremie Oliver visited Bradley Williams, a Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Master Resilience Trainer performance expert at Fort Hood, Texas. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

The CSF2 is part of the Army's Ready and Resilient program. Through online services and consultations with Master Resilience Trainers and performance and institutional enhancement experts, the CSF2 helps boost the resilience and performance of Soldiers, their families and Department of the Army civilians.

During a recent consultation, Williams talked with Smith about his breathing and managing his heart rate. They also explored opportunities for biofeedback, in which a machine measures and displays a patient's vital signs so he or she can control the physiological responses resulting from high-intensity activities such as actual combat or mixed-martial arts matches.

"We've talked about breathing a lot before, but I never really talked about heart rate itself," Williams told Smith. "It's something that I've been diving into more with Soldiers, and it's certainly going to apply to fighting as well."

Williams recommended a book, "On Combat" by retired Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, that describes the psychological and physiological effects of combat on the human body.

"But combat isn't the only scenario where the body is doing all kinds of things under pressure," Williams said. Grossman "calls them different condition levels based on heart rate. He talks about Condition Black being potentially the most dangerous. When our heart rates get above 175, a lot of things go out the window — from our ability to process mentally, which obviously matters so you're making the right decisions in the cage; tunnel vision. ..."

"Oh yeah, I used to have that," Smith said. "For my first fights, it was actually a benefit, but the guys weren't at the same level." As his opponents' skill level increased, losing awareness of the whole octagon started to catch up to Smith. He had to work to calm himself to maintain regular perception.

The eyes can begin to skew depth perception and the ears can start to exclude some sounds and voices, Williams said. Depth perception is critical to striking targets and auditory exclusion can keep a fighter from hearing advice from his corner.

Smith has been checking his pulse and using diaphragmatic breathing — breathing from the belly — to reduce his heart rate quickly. He recently started yoga classes to boost flexibility and breathing control.

"My last fight, my vision was amazing and I could hear every single thing my cornerman said," Smith said. "Depth perception was probably a little off. As I watched the video, I should have been a couple inches further in and I would have been able to tag the dude a lot more."

Williams and Smith also talked about pre-fight routines and how to control them — maintaining a sense of calm while still keeping energy levels high, as well as preparing for the things that can go wrong and not letting them mess with Smith's mental preparation.

For this visit, Sgt. 1st Class Jeremie Oliver went with Smith to see Williams. Oliver is an instructor at the Fort Hood Combatives School, where Smith is the NCO in charge. During his last several fights, Smith has also had Oliver in his corner. Oliver has been taking care of logistics for the fights and anything having to do with commissioning or promoting the fights.

"It's been awesome," Smith said. "Instead of wondering what corner's going to take care of that, I know he's going to take care of it, so it's been phenomenal."

Williams wanted to explore how Smith's team can help him with his fight, and Oliver was eager for the advice.





Oliver met Smith when Oliver competed in the 2013 Fort Hood Combatives Tournament. Smith had already won “Ultimate Fighter,” so when Oliver advanced past intermediate matches he asked for some advice.

“I still remember,” Oliver said. “He said, ‘If your back’s up against the cage, you’re losing.’ ”

After that, they became friends, and when Smith needed help in the corner, Oliver volunteered.

“I organize all his training and get the other coaches on board,” Oliver said. “I get it from being an NCO — that leadership role of organization, pulling things together.

“When it comes to competition, the competitor shouldn’t have to worry about the little stuff — how we get to the venue, the route we take to the locker room, who’s going to wrap his hands, what time the photoshoots are, what time the interviews are,” he continued. “Even as far as our rehydration plan after weigh-ins — we have a very intricate, scientific setup when we go. After weigh-ins, I start a clock and I have all his supplements already mixed and all he has to do is drink them. He has a lot on his mind at that point. I can’t even imagine what goes through his mind. So I try to minimize some of that and make him as comfortable as possible.”

That help is one of the things that keeps Smith at his best in the cage. But it’s support that Smith, Oliver and the rest of the instructors carry over into the combatives school, as well, and they have all realized the benefits from the CSF2.

“It’s been extremely beneficial for myself and all my instructors,” Smith said. “I was really blessed to be in contact with the CSF2 program here at Fort Hood. That has brought my game to another level, as a Soldier as well. It’s unbelievable what they do for prep for [the Expert Infantryman Badge], for gunnery, for deployments, for Soldiers who are having trouble focusing before they go to a school like air assault.”