

Camp Pendleton team wins Armed Forces Championship Fight Series

Contributed by By Sgt. James M. Mercure , Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton
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The nation's warriors from all different branches of service met to battle in an octagon ring at Camp Pendleton's Paige Fieldhouse for the Armed Forces Championship Fight Series, March 6. Like most conflicts since 1775, the Marines were the last ones standing.

"You could see the excitement in the Marines' eyes," said Paul Higgins, the AFCFS emcee. "The Marines reflect what they do in real life to what they do here. The other services were great, but the Marines just wanted it more."

After a full day of demolishing teams from the Army, Air Force and Navy, two Marine teams, one from Twentynine Palms and one from Camp Pendleton, faced off for the main event of the night. Ending with a Camp Pendleton team overall victory of 24-12.

"My guys walked right through the other services' teams," said retired Gunnery Sgt. Corey Bennin, Camp Pendleton team's coach. "It was clear we had an advantage early on. I don't think they were ready for the caliber of fighters they were facing, he said."

The free event featured team matches utilizing Amateur Pankration League rules, that are similar to high school wrestling dual matches. Techniques used during the fight are scored either one, two or three points, depending on execution, effectiveness and difficulty, according to the APL's Web site.

For experienced fighters like Cpl. Isaac Holbrook, a Camp Pendleton team fighter, being in the octagon just comes naturally.

"I've been doing martial arts for about ten years now and its great being able to do this for a living," said Holbrook. "When I was grappling the other Marine, I knew it was going to be a war, and I did what I had to do to come out on top."

Camp Pendleton fighters are taken through some pretty intensive training, said Bennin. Although the Marines train for about six months,

Bennin believes that if the fighters train for longer they could cross the threshold from amateur to professional.

Marines assigned to the Camp Pendleton team are from various units on base and given permissive temporary assigned duty orders to train and become more proficient fighters.

Although Bennin knows his Marines are stellar athletes, two days after their victory the training schedule picks up where it left off.

“I was happy with their performance, but a win doesn’t always mean they’re ready for the next level, they were just the better fighters that night, so we have to keep training,” Bennin concluded.