

“It Means More to Teach”

Written by Story and photos by Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
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This writer has written many stories in the last 10 years about the exploits and talents of 14-year old Dylan Vargas. None are more important to me than the overall skills this young man demonstrates in other fields, rounding out his thirst for knowledge and accomplishments that seems never-ending.

His Second Degree Black Belt and the accumulation of 745 trophies and 49 World Championships he has garnered in the last decade are very impressive, but his short life so far has not depended on these accomplishments alone. Dylan is also an awesome student, holding a 4.0 GPA as he finishes his eighth-grade year, and holding two Regional Science first place awards. He was unable to attend either of the last two state science events because of a conflicting schedule with the U.S. Martial Arts Grand International tournament. He won both titles, though.

When talking of the physical side of his life with martial arts, one must mix into this his long love of baseball, and a new passion, golf. He keeps in great shape by practicing his karate moves daily and with isometrics, building a six-pack of abs on his slight frame that many older athletes aspire to have, but few accomplish.

He is also an accomplished musician, as his first entry in the Country Showdown last year proved, when he beat out the competition in Gallup and then almost won a regional contest in Prescott, AZ. His musical skills are inherited from his mom and dad, Cindy and Charlie. Cindy

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won the Country Showdown in 1995, and Charlie played with the Elektro Katz and Sudden Impact before starting his own band. Looking for a young guitar player, Charlie found that his own son had the ‘professional feel’ he was looking for and named the band, Dylan Vargas and the Black Belt Band. Mom and dad are part of this band with their only child and have picked up Tim Martin and Philip Romero to round out the Classic Rock sound they play.

According to Charlie, the band is currently working on an original CD, with four tracks laid down presently with five more to go. Charlie also reported that after Dylan performed in Prescott, the family received a call from “America’s Got Talent,” but it was about the time Cindy’s mom died, which put that plan on the back shelf. There are videos of Dylan on YouTube showing his performance in Prescott. Several people in Las Vegas, connected to the MMA world, have mentioned the possibility of a ‘reality show’ that would feature him, but are waiting for a couple more years to pass while taking videos of Dylan in competition and singing the national anthem at the start of the World Championships.

That said, Dylan is working hard at teaching the skills he has learned to others. His friend and Karate instructor, Joe Mandaragan of Joe’s Karate Club in Grants, has put Dylan in charge of teaching private Weapons’ classes to his students – there are 10 weapons at which he is skilled: Nunchucks, 3-Sectional Staff, Bow Staff, Kama, Rope Kama, Tomfa, Sai, Sword, Whip Chain, and Escrima. Barbara Kozeliski, the principal at Sacred Heart School, has also chosen Dylan to teach a Karate class at the school, where the only other athletics they have are basketball and cheer.

The teaching has become more satisfying than the winning, according to Dylan. “It means more to me to see my students win than it does for me to win,” Dylan said.

His instruction paid off on March 27-28 when four of his students went with him to the Grand International tournament in Albuquerque. All returned with medals or trophies.

Five-year old Damiano Kozeliski received two first place trophies for Forms and Fighting, seven-year old Cross Malcolm earned a medal for Fighting, 11-year old Daniel Guillen and his 13-year old brother Isaiah (pictured below) captured four trophies and two medals between them: Isaiah for firsts in Kata and Sparring and a third in Bareknuckle Koshiki, and Daniel for a second place in Sparring, though the latter also competed in Forms and Chambara. The Guillen brothers had trained previously with the Sanchez Academy for about five years.

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“Dylan taught us about take downs, mounts, and put us in different positions,” said Daniel, while Isaiah said their instructor taught them “Tae Kwan Do and new weapon forms.”

Their mother, Jennifer Guillen, added that she is happy with the instruction, “The boys are doing really good, and having fun.”

Vargas commented that his students “did awesome. They all showed heart and respect, and never gave up.”

Which sounds very much like another young man, who hopes to start his own MMA Academy this summer, appropriately named after himself, Dylan Vargas.

“The coaches teach us sportsmanship and I like the hitting and counter punches,” said the JFK Mid School seventh grader.

The ancient sport, started as an Olympic event in BC 688 though it wasn’t called boxing until 1719, is no stranger to the High Desert Plateau, where regular bouts were scheduled at Kitchen’s Opera House in the last part of the 19th century and well into the 20th century.

Updates on the National match will be available in the next issue of The Gallup Sun.