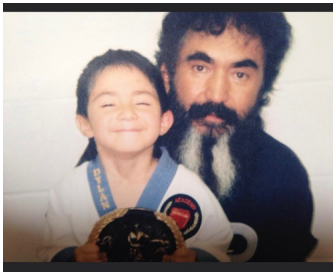


National lights shine on Gallup martial artist

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
Friday, 01 December 2023 05:52



Dylan Vargas talks martial arts career, accomplishments

From winning the title of Youngest Grand Champion at six years old to opening his own martial arts studio while he was still in high school, Dylan Vargas is a name known around Gallup. And now he's got another title under his belt: a member of the 2023 U.S. Sports Karate Hall of Fame.

This marks Dylan's fourth entry into a martial arts Hall of Fame. He flew out to Houston, Texas to accept the award Oct. 7.

In an interview with the *Sun*, Dylan explained what this latest achievement means to him.

"Being inducted, especially into this latest Hall of Fame, has just reached new levels and

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heights for my career. I've met so many great people. It's really an experience I hold fondly," he said.

Charlie Vargas, Dylan's dad, got emotional talking about everything his son has achieved.

"I can't even say [how proud I am] without tearing up," Charlie said. "It's been amazing. Words can't even express it."

BIG BEGINNINGS

Dylan started his career in martial arts at a very young age. He was a shy kid, and his parents enrolled him in the sport hoping it would boost his confidence.

"When I was three, I was just very shy, non-sociable. We would go to family functions and holiday get-togethers with the family and I would not associate with anyone," he explained. "I was always hiding around my parents. ... So my mom and dad enrolled me in martial arts to try and break me out of that shell and it was just perfect."

Charlie remembers those early days of martial arts fondly as a parent.

"All the other kids, even the teens, would move around a little bit and fidget, [but not Dylan]," Charlie said. "He would be as still and stiff as a board because that's what he was told to do. Everything they said he took it overboard and did exactly what they said...."

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Fast forward almost 20 years later, and martial arts is a permanent fixture in Dylan's life.

He attended Gallup Catholic High School, and when the school struggled to put together extracurricular programs, they recruited Dylan to teach martial arts when he was in eighth grade. He taught grades K-8.

Once he moved on to high school at Middle College High School, he opened those classes up to the general public. Two years later in 2016, he needed to open a small studio of his own because more and more people wanted to attend his classes. At this point, he was teaching about 50 students as a junior in high school.

Fast forward seven years, and he's now teaching classes of about 200 students of varying ages. He's moved his studio to three different locations over the years as his classes have grown in popularity. Currently, he teaches classes in the Rio West Mall.

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

When he's not teaching others his craft, Dylan is still out winning awards. He has won 1,167 trophies and awards, 81 Grand Championship titles, and 117 World Karate Championships.

He's already done a lot in just 22 years, but as for the future, Dylan doesn't plan on going very far.

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“I’ve always heard my entire life from friends and even family members ‘what are you going to do in Gallup? Why don’t you move to Albuquerque or Phoenix, you’ll have more opportunity,’” Dylan said. “I’m thinking ‘I’m sure I could, but I want to do it here. I can do it here.’ Just because Gallup is a small place doesn’t mean big things can’t happen.”

Just because he wants to stay local doesn’t mean he doesn’t have big dreams though. He said he plans to keep doing what he’s doing and seeing what opportunities come his way.

Hollywood is one of Dylan’s big dreams. It came knocking in 2021 when an opportunity to work with actor and martial artist Bob Wall landed in Dylan’s lap. Wall often starred in movies alongside martial arts legend Bruce Lee, and he wanted Dylan to play a young Bruce Lee in a sequel to 1973’s *Enter the Dragon*.

Dylan accepted Wall’s offer and shaved his mustache in preparation to start filming in March 2022.

However, it wasn’t meant to be. Wall died on Jan. 30, 2022, and the movie was halted. Dylan said they may pick the idea back up again someday, but right now there are no concrete plans to move forward.

“We’re keeping our fingers crossed. If the Lord permits it, then it’s right at the time,” Dylan said.

As for now, Dylan is keeping busy by teaching martial arts and self-defense lessons to the Gallup community. He also plans to keep competing, and hopefully, winning more awards.

By Molly Ann Howell
Managing Editor