

Danny Zaino takes karate lessons seriously

Story and photos by Tom McCurdy

At first appearance, Danny Zaino looks like another Rocky Balboa. He has the narrow eyes, the square jaw and the broad shoulders.

That is not the reason Black Knight karate master Ed Brown nicknamed him the "Italian Stallion," however. Brown proclaims Zaino achieved the label because "he knocks people out."

That's exactly what Zaino has been doing in the last year, when he is not on duty as a member of the 591st MP Co. In that time frame, he has captured a first or second place in five separate karate tournaments, building an award collection consisting of five trophies and a plaque.

Fighting as a green belt in the art of Go-Ju, Zaino won first place in kata exercises at last year's Fort Bliss/Black Knight Karate tournament. He took a first in kumite (fighting) in the Battle Star Karatika competition and a second place in kata in the same tournament. He finished second in kumite in the Andrews Karate Championships and brought home a first in kumite and a second in kata from the Sun City Internationals.

National recognition

In addition to these local tournaments, the Italian Stallion also finished sixth in kumite at the Dallas/Fort Worth Nationals last year. This tournament is one of the largest and most important karate tournaments in the United States.

This is all quite impressive for a man who didn't become interested in karate until he was 17 years old. The now 21-year-old Zaino owes part of his success to his best friend back in Florida, Keith Bryer.

He explains, "Keith was teaching classes at the time in the local YMCA. I saw how much enjoyment he was having with karate and decided to try it for myself." That was four years ago, and Zaino has no intention of quitting now.

"After I joined the Army," Zaino said, "I was sent



Sparring maneuver



ITALIAN STALLION SCORES WITH SIDE KICK—Danny Zaino (l) attempts a side kick against black belt Alfred O'Neal during a practice session in the Japanese Garden. O'Neal and other black belts on the Black Knight team have been instrumental in helping Zaino perfect his skills.

to Korea where I learned under the supervision of Mr. Wong (a sixth degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do, the Korean style of karate)."

Zaino obtained the rank of red belt in Korea, but when he came to Fort Bliss and joined the Black Knights, Brown forced him to start at white belt, the lowest level.

Brown explains, "If I would have let him start with us as a red belt, he would have embarrassed himself. There was so much that our red belts knew that he didn't, it wasn't funny. I'm not saying the instruction he got in Korea wasn't good, it just wasn't the same instruction given by the Black Knights to practitioners with the rank of red belt."

Zaino has gotten his rank back in the year and a half he has been in the Black Knight system. Black Knights are promoted only once a year. He thinks he will achieve his brown belt in the upcoming six months, or maybe a year and a half.

He credits his success to his superiors, the black belts on the team. "Master Brown, Bernard Samuel, Alfred O'Neal, Ed Adams and the others have been very helpful. They continually teach me how to improve through examples. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't be nearly as successful as I have been. They are definitely some of the best instructors in the Army."

Zaino's success has paid huge dividends. Brown said, "I told Zaino what I wanted and expected from him. I told him if he took a first place in this tournament or that tournament, I would insure that he would go to a sport's clinic. Promises are for losers. Guarantees are for winners."

That is exactly what happened. Zaino returned

just two weeks ago from a 14 day clinic in which he and a few other Black Knights toured Southwest high schools in Texas and Oklahoma.

"We visited at least 30 schools," Zaino said. "Everyone was very interested in what we had to say, except for one school in one of the larger cities. Kids from the city don't generally accept the Army too well, which is exactly what happened."

However, in Amarillo we practically took over a whole school. Everyone wanted to know more about karate and the Black Knights in particular. We weren't recruiting. We just tried to instill in their minds that there is more in the Army than basic training. If you are interested in Karate, we have that. If you like basketball, we have that too. Athletics, and TDY travel in conjunction with athletics, is there for the taking."

It's like the television commercial states. Be all that you can be.

Danny "Italian Stallion" Zaino is doing exactly that, and much, much more.



Close contact eye gouge

