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Martial artists hold seminar at historic JBPHH

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Fight fans at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam were given a special treat when a virtual who's who of professional mixed martial artists (MMA) held a seminar about the sport at Hickam's J.R. Rockers on Jan. 6.

The Fighters for Fighters Tour, presented by Armed Forces Entertainment and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, began its first stop of its Pacific tour in Hawaii by holding an interactive demonstration on the art of fighting that included grappling, striking and self-defense. Additional stopovers were scheduled for Guam, Japan and Okinawa.

At the JBPHH visit, service personnel were delighted to receive many one-on-one opportunities with the warriors of the octagon to get a firsthand view of life inside the cage.

Assembled by former U.S. Marine (1990-94) and active jiu-jitsu competitor Kurt Shroud, the notable group of MMA fighters included ex-local resident Eben Kaneshiro, Edward Dahlen III, Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) fighters Dustin Poirier, Nate Quarry and Tom Lawlor, and the No. 1 rated and undisputed heavyweight grappler in the world (www.grapplersquest.com) Joao Assis. Both Lawlor and Quarry were competitors in SpikeTV's "Ultimate Fighter" television series. Lawlor appeared in season eight, while Quarry was a member of the popular show's first season.

Longtime MMA fanatic, Construction Mechanic 2nd Class Alfredo Martinez from Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 303, said once he heard about the event, he knew that it was something he couldn't miss.

"When I walked in the room and saw these guys, I was in awe. I'm still star struck," Martinez said. "I'm a huge MMA fan. I've watched the sport since it started in '94. To come out here and grapple with these guys is amazing. It's a huge morale boost."

According to Shroud, this is the second Fighters for Fighters Tour that he has overseen. In April, Shroud and his group of fighters toured Europe and the Middle East.

As a former Marine, Shroud said that his idea for the tour came as a direct result of his four-year stint in the military.

With the growth in popularity of MMA, he said that he thought the tour would be an ideal source of entertainment to the many service personnel who are stationed away from home.

“Unless you’ve been stationed overseas, it’s very hard for people to grasp what an 18- or 19-year-old is going through. And also for career guys, who have families stateside and they’re somewhere else,” Shrout said. “Anything that makes it better is good. Out of the four years that I was in, I was deployed all but 17 months of it. I loved it when people came and visited. You could be in the PGA or a comedian, it didn’t matter.”

Shrout said that while selection of his fighters was based in part on their proficiency and prowess in MMA, strength of character was the most important factor in his assembly of the team.

Like all of his team-mates, Poirier upholds the group’s positive traits of dedication and commitment that also reflects those in the armed forces.

Only five days removed from his latest UFC fight – a win over Josh Grispi in UFC 125 – Poirier joined the team in time to begin the Pacific tour.

“It’s a great opportunity to come here and give back a little bit to people that give their lives to the military and our country. This is an opportunity that I could-n’t give up,” Poirier stated. “I have family that have been in the military their whole lives. My uncle is a master chief petty officer in the Navy. This (military) isn’t just a job that they go through. This is a lifestyle that they have to live every single day. It’s amazing that they go through that,” he said.

In addition to the seminar, the fighters also had an opportunity to visit the Pearl Harbor Memorial and the USS Bremerton (SSN 698) earlier in the day.

World jiu-jitsu champion Assis said that it was a dream come true to be in one of our country’s most historic spots.

“For me, this is an amazing experience,” Assis said. “I watch a lot of military channel. I love the war ships. When I was invited for the tour, I said, ‘man, I’m going to finally know all the places that I saw on TV.’”

However, while Assis said that he was blown away by the sites, he noted that nothing compared to rubbing elbows with the fighting men and women in the military.

“From warrior to warrior, I know how hard is my life, but I believe that their life is much harder,” Assis said. “To meet with them, at least once a year, is great.”
