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Tyndall Airman named 'USAF Female Athlete of the Year'

By Carol Carpenter
AFNORTH PA

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – When she was just 5 years old, Karrie Warren was already learning to hit softballs in her family's Fort Lauderdale, Fla., backyard. The balls were pitched patiently, one after the other, by an encouraging father who saw something special in his little girl's extraordinary ability to connect a bat with a ball.

No one could have predicted then where these childhood practice sessions might lead. Nearly three decades later, a huge payoff occurred.

Now 32, and a member of the Air Force and a security and requirements supervisor at Tyndall's 601st Air and Space Operations Center, Master Sgt. Warren has been named the U.S. Air Force Female Athlete of the Year for 2009.

The trim-and-fit Airman won this distinction, not only because of her ability to play an exceptional game of softball, but also because of her remarkable physical fitness and leadership skills both on and off the field.

"I was shocked, but very honored, to have won this award," Sergeant Warren said. "I strive to do my best whether it's at my job or in sports, and to even be nominated is something I will treasure for the rest of my life."

The prestigious award was announced at the Air Force Fitness and Sports Awards luncheon in Orlando earlier this month. Presenting the award were Maj. Gen. (select) Timothy Byers, an Air Force civil engineer at the Pentagon, and Michael Bensen, deputy commander of the Air Force Services Agency.

The able sergeant was lauded at the ceremony for several major athletic accomplishments, including leading the Air Force women's team to the full-services Armed Forces Women's Softball Championship title. She was also praised for serving as captain of the Armed Forces All-Tournament team, which took second place at the 2009 Amateur Softball Association National Championship.

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Additionally, she led the Tyndall AFB women's softball team to second place in the 2009 World Softball Tournament, and they played this year at the Pac-Wide Softball Championship in Korea. For doing well at both events, the team was designated the 'All-Tournament team.'

Col. Randy Spear, 601st AOC commander, praised Sergeant Warren for her notable achievements. "It is an honor to have one of our own recognized for such a prestigious award," he said. "She is an exceptional athlete, not only on the field, but at her job as well."

Getting to this point has not been fast or easy for the dedicated athlete. She has, in fact, spent most of her life honing her ability to play softball, as well as advancing her personal physical fitness goals along the way.

Recounting her early years learning the game, Sergeant Warren said that in addition to countless hours of informal practice with her father, by age 9 she was playing on organized local teams with other girls her age.

Later as a teenager, she was an enthusiastic player on various school teams and amateur leagues, some of which had her and sister team members traveling to other states and regions of the country to compete against similarly organized teams.

She recalls those early years on softball fields as very good ones, spending every playing season with her entire family—father, mother and two brothers—cheering her on from the stands, often the loudest and proudest fans in the crowd.

"My two older brothers weren't all that interested in sports, so my father held out hope for me, his last child," she said with a smile. "He drove me to do my best, and I've always tried to follow his advice."

She feels fortunate that her father, who died two years ago, was able to watch her play on Air Force and Armed Forces teams in previous years. "All his early effort paid off," she said, adding that her mother and brothers continue to offer much proud support.

As an adult, she quickly realized that any sports ability can be enhanced by other kinds of physical fitness, so she developed the habit of making plenty of time for regular exercise. Today she runs two miles four times a week and weight trains three times a week, using a regimen intended for male athletes.

She is also careful about eating a healthy diet, mostly choosing foods such as baked chicken or fish and lots of vegetables. "I admit I love fried foods, but I try to avoid them, except in small portions," she said, adding that nutritious food is essential for the "mind, body and soul."

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3-3-3 SOFTBALL

A typical day for Sergeant Warren includes getting up early, showering and eating breakfast—usually oatmeal and a banana or whole wheat toast and eggs. Then she heads to her job at ‘America’s AOC,’ where she’s in charge of security and directs the installation of computer and other equipment.

Three days a week she gathers with fellow Airmen for organized physical training – better know to Airmen as PT sessions, and the other two days she takes advantage of the AOC’s fitness center to work out on her own. “My unit stresses physical fitness, and my personal motivation is that I want to feel and perform the best that I can,” she said of her rigorous exercise routine.

Although she is single, doesn’t have children and can usually find sufficient time after work for active pursuits, she thinks all Airmen, regardless of their situation, can and should carve out time for a sound fitness routine. She believes it should be done not only for individual health and well-being, but also to meet the current and new Air Force PT standards that go into effect in July 2010.

“If you are already fit, you won’t have a problem with the new standards,” she said.

But her first love – softball – is the main part of her fitness routine that keeps life especially interesting and fun.

A longtime center-left outfielder, she points out that while she has improved her batting and fielding abilities over the years, she doesn’t see herself as the best player on any given team. “I’m not the best player, but I do try to be a smart player,” she said. “I don’t make the big power plays; I just look for holes to place the ball and get on base. The others bring me in.”

Looking ahead, she realizes that eventually she will have to retire her bat for good. “How long I play will depend on my work schedule,” she said. “And at some point it will be time to welcome a new round of younger players to the game.”