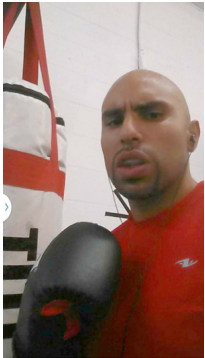


## Fighting for all the right reasons

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun  
Friday, 12 January 2018 07:22

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### MMA fighter Ryan Benavidez turns his life around

ALBUQUERQUE – When life gets you down, you can either run from the fight or hit back with all you got. Striking back is what Albuquerque hometown mixed martial arts fighter Ryan Benavidez did.

I had the fortune of meeting Benavidez while visiting Duke City, where we struck up a conversation. Growing up, Benavidez was raised by his grandparents. With no mother or father figure to offer guidance and stability, he soon found himself turning to drugs and alcohol. Mainly, Benavidez says, he was addicted to marijuana. He started smoking pot when he was a sophomore in high school and even began to sell it. Thankfully he never got caught.

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“I’ve been wanting to quit pot but I couldn’t, it’s a controlled substance and you get addicted. You do get the withdrawals, and you lose your mind,” Benavidez said.

He hated this life that had taken him over, he wanted help but could find no one to help him. He said he was at the end of his rope with no hope in sight. He began to believe all the negative emotions stirring inside of him.

“I was tired of being a loser, couldn’t get a job, had no aspects of wanting to become anything and wanted the help so bad,” he said.

His help came one day in the form of key. It was a simple weight room key that was left behind at a friend’s apartment complex where he would watch people exercise. Benavidez said that was quite literally the key to changing his life.

“My friend lived at a gated apartment complex where there was a weight room,” he said. “I usually had to wait outside the gate for someone to open it and sometimes I would sit there for hours to just get in.”

Benavidez believes his prayers were answered that day.

“Finding that key was a game changer, I believe it was meant for me because no one has ever left their key and no one asked about a lost key either. I started working out, I didn’t have to go to rehab, and working out at the gym was my rehab.”

Now 29, Benavidez’s life has fully transformed. It’s been four years without marijuana or drinking. Weighing in at 260 pounds before his transformation, he’s now at 160 pounds and has been training to be an MMA fighter at a mixed martial arts studio, Invictus Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and Muay Thai Training Academy, in Albuquerque.

Albuquerque is known as the “Fight City,” and fighters come from all over the world to train at

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the academy. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and Muay Thai consist of kick boxing, throwing elbows and knees, and MMA. Benavidez says MMA is blowing up here in New Mexico and the training consists of determination, focus, and positive thinking.

“It’s all determination, I thought it would never come to this in my life,” he said, “When I got into shape, I was in a professional status and I met some guys who were in amateur fighting. I see them training and hitting the pad. They inspired me. They told me to just go for it.”

Besides the physical aspects of training, Benavidez says good eating habits and positive mental thinking are big parts of it. His diet consists of lots of water, along with “clean” foods like tuna, chicken and lots of greens. He avoids “dirty eating,” and greasy foods. High endurance cardio, lifting weights, and positive thinking is just a part of it.

“It’s a learning process, not just the physical aspect but the spiritual sense,” he said, “ I never gave up, you have to vision it, see it and then live it. You have to believe it and you can accomplish whatever you dream of. Don’t ever let negative thinking come your way, we are the masters of our destiny, we all have choices, you live and learn and you have to aim high. Just being free and sober and thinking for me is the best part.”

Benavidez hopes to turn professional and be a role model to kids, to give a good word and something positive.

“I would love and hope to go professional one day, otherwise just be a mentor to those who want to do the art, to tell them to be healthy, stay off drugs, and don’t give up and don’t use that as a crutch as to why they don’t succeed in life. My father was not in my life, I had to learn how to be a man to make it on my own. ‘Am I mad at the world?’ No, I feel I am much better for what I have been through.”

Benavidez’s cites his grandparents as inspirations, as well as his MMA idols, Holly Holm and Albuquerque local Diego Sanchez.

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