

Pacific Beach boxer fights for her place in the 2020 Olympic Games

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Danyelle Wolf, Pacific Beach's three-time national championship fighter, trains for the Olympics.

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Danyelle Wolf

It had been four years since Danyelle Wolf, Pacific Beach's three-time national championship fighter, had been in a boxing ring. That is, until this past January, when her boxing coach, Basheer Abdullah at Arena MMA gave her some news: Wolf's weight class had been added to the 2020 Olympics. It was time to get back in the ring.

"For so many years when I was just doing boxing, I had to fight to keep my spot on Team USA, but I had the confidence to do it, because I really felt like, 'This is mine,'" said Wolf. "But after being out of the game for so many years doing martial arts ... I just didn't feel like it was mine anymore."

There were plenty of worries surrounding Wolf aiming for the Olympics — the fact that she only had five weeks to prepare for the Olympic qualifiers and that she was newly recovered from surgery after dislocating an arm and tearing her labrum while training overseas in Thailand. Wolf says choosing to get back in the ring was a "mental battle with myself."

But she took the chance, loving, as she says, "a solid challenge" and ended up winning all three bouts of the U.S. Olympic qualifying event in Las Vegas in March. Despite being almost 10 years older than most of her competitors at 35, and having spent all of the last four years training in martial arts, not boxing, Wolf once again proved the value of a strong and stubborn drive.

"I do humbly take credit for talking her back into boxing," said Abdullah with a laugh. "If I didn't believe she had an honest shot at making the team, I would not have asked her to come back. I would have let her focus on her MMA career."

“She’s not just a born athlete, she’s extremely intelligent, almost obnoxiously so,” added Carl Gebhardt, Wolf’s MMA coach at San Diego’s Steel Gym. “She has this mix of tenacity and instinct. She’s unapologetically Danielle and she’s not afraid to go out and take what she wants.”

Going pro had always been the goal for Wolf, ever since she made the decision in 2009 to live off her savings and “see what I was made of” as an athlete. But, leaving her job as a life coach in Rancho Santa Fe to train for Iron Man races and Triathlons in Pacific Beach, Wolf did not plan on boxing being the source of her success. But then, fate stepped in.

“I had just moved to San Diego and everywhere I went people would ask me, ‘So, are you a fighter?’” said Wolf, who was 25 at the time. “I wasn’t sure what they meant at first. I was like, ‘A fighter for what? For Jesus? For cancer?’ Martial arts wasn’t even on my radar.”

Though she has played almost every other sport under the sun from basketball to field hockey, Wolf said boxing was “probably the only sport I hadn’t tried yet.” After continuing to be asked “Where do you fight?” by perfect strangers over the following weeks, Wolf said her interest was peaked.

“I also was starting to worry about if my nose looked messed up,” said Wolf. “I couldn’t figure out why so many people kept mistaking me for a fighter? But now, years later, I believe those people must have been guardian angels directing me to where I was always supposed to go.”

Two years after picking up her first boxing glove, Wolf began fighting with team USA and traveling around the world, competing in South Korea, Guadalajara and Venezuela. Wolf has won ring-side world championships, Jiu Jitsu World League championships, national Golden Gloves and had opportunities to be in ESPN’s 2014 Body Issue and go to the ESPY Awards, walking the red carpet with The Rock.

But this multi-dimensional fighter’s biggest opportunity yet comes in December, when Wolf will have to beat out seven other women in the final stage of the U.S. Olympic trials to earn a spot on the national team.

“We have a lot of females as young as 6 in this gym who want to be fighters and they really look up to Danyelle,” said Gebhardt. “The competition is going to be steeper in December and then it will obviously be even more challenging in the Olympics. But I know Danyelle, I know her mindset and how hard she’s been working. She has a goal in front of her and I know she’s going to be fine.”

“I’m all about perseverance and digging deep to find the highest potential within yourself,” added Wolf. “I want to show women that doors open for you when you give 100 percent. The trick is being ready when it’s time to jump at the chance to walk through them.”

Danyelle currently trains at the [Arena Gym](#) in San Diego

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