

Mids bring home boxing title

Navy edges Air Force for national fight crown

By **BILL WAGNER**
Staff Writer

Nobody associated with the Naval Academy club boxing program was happy about finishing second nationally to Air Force the past two years.

Veteran coach Jim McNally and several returning fighters vowed things would be different in 2005, they worked harder than ever to get over the hump.

That effort paid off this past weekend when Navy ended Air Force's six-year run as national champs.

Junior Jeremy Biggs along with seniors Amir Shareef and Chris Lonero all captured individual crowns as Navy garnered the team title at the National Collegiate Boxing Association Championships.

It was Navy's third national championship and first since 1998. Nick Tawil and Alejandro Loya were runners-up for the Midshipmen, who totaled 42 points — just two better than Air Force.

Army finished third with 30 points at the 18-team event.

"I am just so proud of the way our guys competed," said McNally, in his 19th year as Navy boxing coach. "They really wanted this team title. Air Force had it long enough and we wanted to bring it back to Annapolis."

Navy won five of seven head-to-head bouts with Air Force in the quarter and semi finals to take a two-point lead into the championship round. The Midshipmen and Falcons had three winners apiece in the finals.

"Every match in which we went up

against Air Force was crucial because the team race was so close," McNally said.

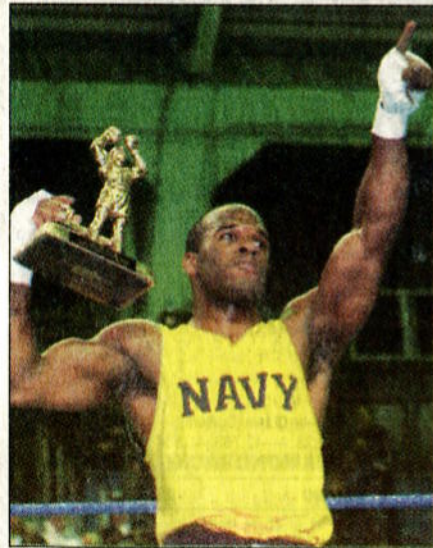
Air Force hosted the event for the seventh time, and McNally thought the rarified air of Colorado Springs has benefited the Falcons in the past.

"Air Force has a real advantage with the altitude at 7,200 feet. They win a lot of matches because they are in better shape," McNally said.

"We were determined not to let them beat us with conditioning. We spent spring break training in Colorado Springs and that helped. We won many of our matches in the third round by gutting it out."

Biggs earned a 3-2 split decision over Jose Casas of Nevada in the 125-pound

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By Joshua McKerrow — Capital file photo
Navy's Amir Shareef won his third national championship last weekend.

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final and was named the tournament's outstanding boxer. A native of Vienna, Va., Biggs had been national runner-up as a freshman and sophomore.

"Jeremy has quick hands and good movement. He has been hungry for this title and worked hard to achieve it," McNally said.

Shareef scored a 5-0 unanimous decision over Army's Ovidiu Lacob at 175 pounds to become a rare three-time national champion. The 5-foot-9 native of Brooklyn, N.Y., a four-time brigade champ, dominated the exchange student from Romania and ran his career record to 31-3.

"Amir had experience against the eastern European style from having boxed a Russian at the World University Championships in November," McNally explained.

In this year's brigade finals, Shareef defeated a plebe from the Ukraine who had been trained by a former Soviet Union national coach.

Lonero, a product of San Jose, Calif., won a slugfest with Army's Reggie Smith to capture the 185-pound crown. Lonero had lost twice to Shareef in the brigade finals before moving up a weight class and winning that title this year.

"We had a fairly experienced group of guys this season and they wanted it more than ever," McNally said. "They were really tired of losing to Air Force."

All midshipmen must take boxing as a physical education course during their plebe year. McNally encourages the most promising fighters to join the club team.

Biggs and Lonero are both the younger brothers of former Navy boxers. Ty Biggs was a brigade and national champ in 1999 while Dustin Lonero won one of the most exciting brigade finals ever in 2001.

"This is an institution at which we train men to become warriors and boxing fits perfectly with that mission since it is a warrior-type sport," McNally said.