



News Release

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**UST Alumnus Shows Pride As Only College Graduate Among
Famed Lopez Family Taekwondo Olympic Trio**

HOUSTON (June 2, 2008) – Any university business school expects to send its graduates out into the world poised for success in their best business attire. It's not every day a university gets to boast that one of its graduates achieves success wearing a white suit, a black belt, a helmet and pads while delivering the hardest kick to his opponent at the Olympics.

Mark Lopez, a 2005 University of St. Thomas Cameron School of Business graduate has garnered worldwide attention – not for achievements in the boardroom, but for his victories in the taekwondo competition ring.

Lopez is a member of what has quickly become known as the “First Family of Taekwondo” – the four Sugar Land siblings bound for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. The Lopez family consists of oldest brother, Jean, the 2004 and 2008 U.S. Olympic Team head coach, Steven, a two-time Olympic taekwondo gold medalist, Mark and his younger sister Diana. The Lopez family will be the first trio of siblings to represent the United States in the same Olympics since 1904, and the first to ever have four on the same U.S. Olympic team. In 2005, the Lopezes became the first three siblings in any sport to win world championship titles at the same event in the same year when they each won a gold medal at the World Taekwondo Championships in Madrid, Spain.

The son of Nicaraguan-born parents, Lopez is a first- generation college graduate and the only one of his family to earn a university degree to date. This summer, he is in the midst of the Olympic whirlwind – intensive training; national sponsorship advertisements including AT&T where Lopez does his trademark back flip and even network television interviews on the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.

Despite his hectic schedule, Lopez said he is never too busy to tout the value of education. In an online Q&A session for the ABC affiliate in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Lopez was asked, “What is one thing you want people to know about you?” Lopez answered, “I graduated magna cum laude from the University of St. Thomas with a degree in finance and a minor in philosophy. I really like to learn.”

Lopez said he chose to attend UST in part because it was a school which mirrored his own ideals and values. Lopez also said the environment at UST enabled him to go to school full time while he continued competing, even at the international level.

“With the small classes, I was able to have a more personal relationship with my professors. They understood my situation, and didn't treat me like a number. They were really willing to work with me when I had to travel for competition,” he said.

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Dr. Jean Kitchel, a recently retired professor of philosophy, taught Lopez when he was a UST student.

“He did a remarkable job balancing his school work and competition,” Kitchel said. “The values which were instilled in him at home were evident in his approach to his studies, his peer groups and his teachers. The same discipline which served him as an athletic competitor served him equally as well as a student.”

She recalled him as a very outgoing student, “but he had a dedication, humility, a kind of modesty. He was not a braggadocio. In fact, when he was at UST, I bet the majority of the people didn’t know he was a world-class athlete. He’s just the total package. I’m so proud of him and so excited for the whole family. I wish I could go to China to see him compete in the Olympics,” Kitchel said.

Lopez has kept in touch with a number of his UST professors including Ramon Fernandez, assistant professor of accounting. Fernandez helps the Lopez family with their tax returns. He commended Lopez for being such a positive role model.

“There are so many kids in martial arts these days, and Mark and his brother and sister are really like the modern idols of the taekwondo community. I can’t imagine a better role model than Mark. He’s smart, hard-working, ethical, dedicated, and goal-oriented. I know he is going to make us proud in Beijing.”

“As a teacher, one of your great joys is seeing your students succeed, and helping make their goals possible,” Fernandez said. “It’s not every day I get an e-mail that one of my former students says they qualified for the Olympics. When the University says we are building leaders of faith and character, Mark is an excellent example. Not everyone is going to be an Olympic athlete, but everyone can be a leader and work to be the best they can be.”

Lopez is currently focusing all of his attention on training for the Olympics, but he said his education in business has given him numerous career options when he chooses to retire from competition. Lopez is no stranger to business enterprise. He witnessed his family grow their home garage-based taekwondo school into Elite Tae Kwon Do Center, one of the nation’s leading *dojangs*. During his last semester of college, Lopez had an internship with Morgan Stanley, but he said he cannot imagine himself working “9 to 5” in a traditional suit all day. He also received his real estate license last year.

“I was always interested in business and I always saved any money I ever earned as a kid,” Lopez said. “I like the idea of knowing how to invest money, and that will come in handy with sponsorship money I have earned. I invested in a small house; I may want to do some day trading. I may want to open my own taekwondo school some day. For now, I want to take advantage of my youth and physical abilities and compete as long as I can.”

Mark and Diana will compete at the Beijing Olympic Games on Aug. 21, and Steven will compete on Aug. 22. The Olympic Games will be broadcast on NBC.

University of St. Thomas, dedicated to building leaders of faith and character, is a private institution committed to the liberal arts and to the religious, ethical and intellectual tradition of Catholic higher education.



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