

# Daren Hidalgo - In Loving Memory

by [Pete Rola](#) on Monday, February 21, 2011 at 9:15pm

I felt compelled to share this note with a loving and supporting community after receiving news today.

I spent the weekend with close friends celebrating our Intercollegiate Racquetball Regional tournament in Pennsylvania. Regionals has always fallen on my birthday, but I could never complain about the time spent with close friends.

Sunday was my big day. After a long but exciting tournament, I spent a long car ride home with my teammate and a close friend in the league, two individuals who I would consider to be my brothers; laughing and sharing stories about the ECRC and life. I could not have felt more elated. However, that feeling quickly turned to sorrow Monday afternoon when I learned the most heartbreaking news.

I learned that a friend and close racquetball competitor, Daren Hidalgo, had been killed on Sunday in Afghanistan while serving his country. The news brought more than tears to my eyes, but the sorrow and loss of a life that had meant so much to so many people.

Daren and I had played racquetball together for 3 years. It may not seem like a long time to have known someone, but if you knew the ECRC, you could understand the close bond of camaraderie rivaled and surpassed only by those in combat. Daren had both; he was a soldier in combat and a member of the ECRC family.

My experience could not compare to others such as his team mates who had spent more time with him or the soldiers who had spent time in combat with him, but Daren still had an impact on my life and I wanted to share it with everyone. After hearing the news, I reflected back on the time that I had spent with him, the conversations that we had, and the laughs that we shared.

We had become fierce doubles rivals while we played in college, his partner, Clint was a tall kid who had a rocket drive serve and got to every shot on the court, while my own partner, Marc, who was also a great player, was the horizontal achiever of his time, diving for every shot. I always liked playing ARMY because they were always good kids to play, respectful on the court, willing to help out around the club, and fun to hang out with out.

The four of us played in some of the toughest matches in our league, going to the tie breaker round every time we played. Time spent off the court with these fellow players are some of my fondest memories in the league. But Daren was easy to talk to both on and off the court. I remember sharing racquetball advice with him, talking about our shot selection and court positioning after we played our matches.

In a doubles match once, I managed to hit him in the chest with the ball at point blank range. After the match I gave him a hug and said, "Sorry about that one pal, you ok?" He just looked at me with blank stare and then his smile began to stretch across his face and he put his hand on his chest and said, "It's still so tender." The four of us in the entire crowd started laughing.

One time, Daren's coach, Ken Braeger at the time, brought Daren and a fellow team member, Chris Griggs to a Professional tournament out in New York City. I was surprised and shocked to see them, but glad nonetheless. When a match came up between two of the pros, Rocky Carson and Ben Croft, both top notch players.

Daren and I watched the match together, enthralled and impressed by the level of play by these two pros. I can still distinctly remember Daren looking over at me and saying, "We could beat them, Pete, I'll take Ben, you take Rocky." We both laughed because in reality, we would get crushed on the court by these two players, but managed to laugh at the fact we could never beat them.

During his down time at the courts at tournaments, Daren would watch and support his teammates. If no one was playing he would help out around the club and if there was nothing else to do, he would either be doing a gauntlet run or wrestling with Clint on the aerobics mat.

Everyone who knew him understood that he was a fun loving person. I managed to see the more serious side of him, both in competition on the court and talking about game strategy off the court. He was always looking for ways to improve and took advice where ever he could find it.

After Daren graduated from the USMA, I talked to him a few times on Facebook to catch up about what we had been doing. I knew he was going to be deployed overseas and was praying for the best, for a safe journey home, and to be able to play him again in the future.

When the news came about his death I was in complete disbelief. This type of thing isn't supposed to happen, not to someone like Daren, not to a friend, and not to an ECRC family member. The harsh reality of it was that it did happen and nothing that we can do can bring him back.

Unfortunately, there are no words to ease the pain of his passing. No remedy to take away the sting and bitterness of a loss such as this. We can only look at Daren's life and say that he made the most out of it and in the words of his coach Tim Blake, "Thank you for enriching my life and the lives of those around you."

Daren was a leader, a friend, and the true embodiment of strength. He was one of the only people that I could say did not have any characteristic flaws and I wouldn't have changed anything about him. If they ever tell his story let the records show that he was a larger than life person.

As for my part in this tale, I will forever live with his passing on my birthday, but I won't loath the day or curse existence for it. I will take it as a chance to live a better life and be a better person. I will always look to you for inspiration. I'd share my special day in honor of your remembrance any day, Daren, just as I had shared a drink, a court, and my time with you in life.

Rest in peace, my friend, my brother, our ECRC family member, we'll be together again some day.