

- **James "Chico" Hernandez** (born April 14, 1954 in [Chicago, Illinois](#)) is a [Sambo](#) athlete and a seven-time member of the Team USA National Team.

History

Hernandez competed and wrestled for [Reavis High School](#), [Chicago State University](#), the [University of Maine at Presque Isle](#) and the [US Army](#) National Team.^[1]

Hernandez is the First [Illinois](#) wrestler to be featured on [Wheaties](#) (Wheaties Energy Crunch).^[2]

Hernandez won his first Gold medal at the United States Wrestling Federation Illinois District #4 Jr. [Freestyle Wrestling](#) Championships in the 154 lbs weight class in April 1972. He won a Bronze medal at 154 lbs in the 1972 [Amateur Athletic Union](#) Illinois State Jr. Freestyle Wrestling Championships held at [Loyola Academy](#).^[2] At the 1973 City of [Chicago Park District](#) City-Wide Open Wrestling Championships, Hernandez won the 155 lbs weight class finals.^[3]

In January 1975 he was awarded a wrestling scholarship to Chicago State [University](#). He won his first [NCAA](#) victory at 158 lbs at a tournament held at [Carthage College](#) in [Kenosha, Wisconsin](#). He took second place at the 1976 [National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics](#) District #20 at 158 lbs.^[4] He qualified for the NAIA National Wrestling Championships held at [Edinboro University](#) in [Edinboro, Pennsylvania](#).

Hernandez transferred to the [University of](#) Maine at Presque Isle in August 1976. Hernandez won first place at the 1979 [USA Wrestling Maine](#) State Freestyle Wrestling Championships, third place at the Northern [New England](#) Championships and fifth place at the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#) Northeast Regional.^{[5][6]} He was an 3 time All-District selection in NAIA #5, 1979 All-New England and NCAA Northeast Regional Teams.^[7] The State of Maine AAU Olympic Freestyle Wrestling All-Star Team selected him to compete against [The Netherlands](#) Olympic Freestyle Wrestling Team. Hernandez graduated with a Bachelor Arts Degree in [Social Science](#).^[8]

Hernandez was named head wrestling coach at University of Maine at Presque Isle for the 1980-81 season.^[9] He coached 3 Northern New England Champions, 3 All-New England NAIA Wrestlers, 2 All-New England D-3 NCAA Wrestlers and 3 NAIA National Qualifiers. He was selected as NAIA District 5 Wrestling Coach of the Year. He was the State of Maine Report Editor for WRESTLING USA Magazine in 1980–1981.^[10]

He enlisted in the [United States Army](#) in October 1981. In November 1982, he won the [Fort Riley, Kansas](#) Post Freestyle Wrestling Championship in the 158 lbs weight class.^{[11][12][13]} In January 1983, Hernandez was selected to the All-Army National Wrestling team at [Ft. Bliss, Texas](#). Hernandez won a Bronze at the [Texas Tech](#) Wrestling Invitational and helped the Army National Team win the team title.^[14] In November 1983, he won his second Ft. Riley Post Wrestling Championship in the 158 lbs weight class and was selected the "Outstanding Wrestler" of the 3 day tournament.^[15]

In April 1984, he participated in the 1984 US Olympic Greco-Roman Wrestling Trials. Hernandez attended a Sambo clinic during the Olympic Trials, where he was introduced to the sport of Sambo by Jim Schneweis, a US National Sambo [Champion](#). Coach Schneweis cornered Hernandez during the Olympic Trials.^{[16] [17]} In April 1985, he won the USA Wrestling [Vermont State Freestyle Championships](#) in the 163lbs weight class^{[18] [19]} and in April 1986, he won the USA Wrestling Massachusetts State Freestyle Wrestling Championships in the 180lbs weight class.^[20] In July 1986, he was a [Bay State Games](#) Freestyle Wrestling finalist.^{[21][22]}

Hernandez was named Outstanding Wrestler as he won his first United States National Sambo Championship in May 1987 at the Amateur Athletic Union National Sambo Championships by defeating Earl Norman of Washington, D.C. 12-0 in the 163lbs weight class.^{[23][24][25]} He won the AAU National Greco-Roman Masters Championships in the 163 lbs weight class pinning Yohnnie Shambourger of Washington, D.C. in 54 seconds in the finals. In the Greco-Roman Masters All-Around 163 lbs weight class championship final, he defeated Omar Malik of [Maryland](#).^[26] Hernandez placed 4th in the Greco-Roman Open losing 12-2 to Pan-American Greco-Roman Champion Mark Black of [Ohio](#).^{[27][28]}

In June 1989, Hernandez competed in the 180lbs and 163lbs weight [classes](#) and won 3 National AAU Medals at the Amateur Athletic Union National Masters and Open Free-Style Wrestling Championships held in [Battle Creek, Michigan](#). He lost in the National Open Division Finals 10-9 to Charles Cody at 180 lbs. In the 163 lbs All-Round Masters Division Finals he was defeated by Randy Lex. He finished 4th in the Masters 163 lbs 35-40 year old age group.^[29]

In July 1991, Hernandez won two Gold Medals at the 1991 Amateur Athletic Union National Masters Free-Style Wrestling Championships in the 180 lbs weight class. He won the 35-39 age-group by defeating Bruce Gabrielson by fall in 2 minutes, 30 seconds. In the Masters All-Round Championships he won Gold by defeating Gene Butler in the Masters All-Round Finals 4-1. He was selected and won the “Most Outstanding Wrestler Award”.^[30] Hernandez was named to WRESTLING USA “National Honor Roll of Champions” in 1983 and in 1992.^{[31][32]}

In 1995 he took fifth place as a member of the USA Wrestling National Veterans Team at the [Fédération Internationale des Luttes Associées](#) World Veterans Freestyle Wrestling Championships held in [Sofia, Bulgaria](#).^{[33] [34]}

Hernandez at age 43 won three Gold medals, two Silvers and two Bronzes at the Grand National AAU Wrestling Championships.^[35] He participated in Sambo, Greco-Roman and Freestyle wrestling contested at the 3 day event in 1997,^[36] held at [Rabobank Arena](#) in [Bakersfield, California](#).

In 1999 he won the 1999 Fédération Internationale Amateur de Sambo Pan-American Gold and Bronze medals in the 180lbs weight class. Hernandez competed as a member of the [USMC](#) National Sambo Team which won the US National Sambo Team Championships held at Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia in 1999.^{[37][38]}

In April 2000, Hernandez won the XXV National AAU Sambo Championships held at [Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex](#) in [Orlando, Florida](#). Hernandez defeated 22 year old Eric

Wagner of Virginia in the Open Finals by armbar submission. He won the Fédération Internationale Amateur de Sambo Pan-American Silver medal by defeating Canadian Amateur Wrestling Association Greco Roman Silver Medalist Josh Albright of Nova Scotia, Canada by a score of 7-2.^[39] In July 2000, the 46-year-old Hernandez won the middleweight (163 pounds), Gold medal in the 45-49 age group at the Federation International Association Sambo World Championships held at the [Hara Arena](#) in [Dayton, Ohio](#). He also earned the Silver medal in the Masters of the Sport category, which combines champions from all masters' age groups. He won the Bronze medal in Combat Sambo and a Bronze medal in the open division finishing behind [Venezuela](#) and [Switzerland](#).^[40] He was selected to represent the USA at the World Cup of Sombo in [Nice, France](#). In November 2000, Hernandez led the United States to a second place finish at the FIAS West World Cup of Sambo Wrestling held in Nice, France, himself winning a Silver medal by defeating Martial Bouchaud of [France](#) and losing in the finals to defending World Champion Vanyo Todorov of [Bulgaria](#).^{[41][42][43]}

In May 2003, he won 2 Gold medals at the 6th World [AAU](#) Iron Man Wrestling Championships in Open and Masters division held in [Knoxville, Tennessee](#).^{[44][45]} He pinned Glen Tolleson of Florida in 1:23 in the Greco Roman Championship finals. Hernandez from 1987 to 2003 has achieved AAU All American status as a wrestler 31 times.^[46]

In 2004 he represented the [USA](#) at the FIAS British Sambo Championships held at the Swallows Leisure Centre, [Sittingbourne, Kent, England](#). He defeated British Middleweight MMA Fighter Grant Waterman of [Portsmouth, England](#) 14-4 to win the Silver medal.^[47]

In 2005, at age 51, Hernandez represented the USA at the FIAS British Sambo Championships held in Sittingbourne, England, winning the Silver medal in his weight class.^{[48][49]}

In June 2006 representing Team Irish, he won Gold and Silver medals at the [North American Grappling Association](#) New England Championships held at [Bryant University](#). In November later that year; he won Silver and Gold medals at the North American Grappling Association Championships held at [Sacred Heart University William H. Pitt Center](#) in [Fairfield, Connecticut](#).^{[50][51]}

In 2007 Hernandez represented the USA and the American Sambo Association at the FIAS/BSF British Sambo Championships held in Sittingbourne, Kent, England. He took the Silver medal by defeating Oktam of [Uzbekistan](#), 1-0 in the semi-finals. He was defeated by FIAS World Sambo medalist and World [Cornish Wrestling](#) champion Darrin Richardson of [Gosport, England](#), 2-0, in the Championship finals.^{[52][53]}

Hernandez has won 2 Gold, 3 Silver and a Bronze medal in Open and Masters Expert divisions at the Maine Skirmish competitions in 2003, 2005 and 2007 held at [Winslow High School](#).^[54]

In April 2008 at the North American Grappling Association's World Championships at [Essex County College](#) in [Newark, New Jersey](#), Hernandez won a pair of world titles in the Executive Expert Heavy Weight NO-GI division. He won a Bronze No-Gi Championship by defeating Phil Kavowski of New York, New York by choke submission and the Silver Medal in the Gi

competition losing to World NAGA Champion Neal Keegstra of New Jersey (Royce Gracie) by a score of 2-2 overtime split decision.^[55]

In April 2009 he won a Silver medal in the Executive Expert Heavy Weight No-Gi North American Grappling Association's World Championships held at Essex County College in Newark, New Jersey. He lost to World NAGA Champion Neal Keegstra of New Jersey by a score of 4-2, and further won the Bronze medal in the Gi competition by forfeit.^{[56][56]}

In November 2009 Hernandez won a Bronze medal in the Executive Expert Heavy Weight division at the NAGA North American Grappling Championships held at Essex County College in Newark, New Jersey. He defeated NO-GI Executive Cruiserweight Grappling NAGA World Champion George Sommers of New Jersey by a score of 8 - 0. He won the Bronze medal in the Gi Executive Expert Heavy Weight division competition.^[57]

In July 2010 Hernandez won two Bronze medals at the FIAS Scottish Sambo Open and Judo Championships held at the DG1 Leisure Centre, [Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland](#). He was defeated by Jack Tinning of [Closeburn, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland](#) and former British [Judo](#) Olympian Team member John Imrie [Edinburgh, Scotland](#) in the Heavy Weight division.^{[58][59]}

On May 5, 2012, Hernandez won the Executive Expert Heavy Weight GI division at the NAGA [Arizona](#) State Grappling Championships held at [Phoenix College, Phoenix, Arizona](#).^[60] He defeated Al Guinee of Arizona by a score of 2-1. He lost to Ken Smith of [Idaho](#) in the Executive Expert Heavy Weight No-Gi Championship finals. He further won another Silver medal in the Gi competition as he was defeated by Mike Myers of Arizona in the Championship finals.^[61]

Honors and awards

Hernandez was featured on a box of [Wheaties](#) Energy Crunch in December 2001. Hernandez was welcomed into the Wheaties Family by [Olympic Champion Mary Lou Retton](#) and [Tiger Woods](#) in [Madison Square Garden, New York City, New York](#).^[62]

He was also featured in [Sports Illustrated's](#) "[Faces in the Crowd](#)" and [CNN/SI](#) "[Faces in the Crowd](#)".^[63]

Hernandez has been inducted into the Maine Sports Hall of Fame,^{[64][65]} the [University of Maine at Presque Isle](#) Athletic Hall of Fame,^[66] and the Illinois Wrestlers Hall of Fame.^[2]

Hernandez holds the distinction of being one of only two master's division wrestlers in the country to have won gold medals in the three wrestling disciplines: Greco-Roman, Freestyle and Sombo.^[67]

Hernandez was selected by the Rotary Club of [Washburn, Maine](#) to serve as the [Grand Marshall](#) of the 22nd Annual Washburn August Festival Parade in 2002.^[68]

In October 2008, Hernandez was featured in the Scholastic textbook publication on the state of Maine called "*Maine-America the Beautiful*". In the biographical dictionary 'Famous Mainers' section, he is one of 49 other Maine figures featured and one of only five athletes appearing on the pages.^{[69][70]}

Hernandez was featured in Discover Maine Magazine, "Maine's History Magazine" in 2010.^{[71][72]}

On November 4, 2010, the President of the American Sambo Association Steve Koepfer announced James "Chico" Hernandez to be the "Pioneer of American Sambo" Award winner for 2009.^[73]

Military

Hernandez is a US Army [Veteran](#) of the [Cold War](#) and has also served honorably during the war eras of [1982 Lebanon War](#) and [Operation Urgent Fury \(Grenada\)](#), [Gulf War \(Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom\)](#) and the [War on Terrorism](#). He attained the rank of [First Sergeant](#) (1SG) during his military career. He completed his [Combat Basic Training](#) at [Fort Dix, New Jersey](#) in March 1982. He has served as a [Combat Basic Training Instructor](#) at the [United States Military Academy](#) in 2002-2005.^{[16] [74]} He has instructed at US Army Post [Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri](#) from 1998-2002,^[75] [Fort Bragg, North Carolina](#) from 1995-1996, [Fort Lewis, Washington](#) in 1991 and [Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania](#) from 1992-1994. He graduated from the premier class of the Soldier Physical Fitness Academy at [Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana](#) in 1983 as a Master Fitness Trainer. He graduated from the [Warrior Leader Course](#) in Fort Riley, Kansas in 1984, the Maine Military Academy in 1996, and the Vermont Military Academy in 1997. Hernandez during his US Army career was awarded the [Physical Fitness Badge](#) of Excellence a total 26 times. In 2003 he received a [Challenge coin](#) for his "Superior Performance as an Instructor" at West Point. Hernandez has served in the US Army and [US Army Reserves](#) from 1981 to 2006.

Hernandez, 43, won three gold medals, two silvers and two bronzes at the Grand National AAU Wrestling Championships. Competing in the 180 pound division, he participated in all three types of wrestling contested at the event: freestyle, Greco-Roman and Sombo (Russian judo).

I have also been serving our Nation in the US Army since 1981 as a Combat Basic Training Instructor and in 2014 I officially retire from the US Army.

This would be an incredible honor as I am and have been a long time AAU athlete since 1972 when I was 3rd in the AAU Illinois State Freestyle Championships and a AAU National Qualifier