A center to train in the name of courage: the CeSMi in Padua dedicated to Matteo Vanzan

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On May 28, 2025, at the **Military Sports Center (CeSMi) in Padua**, a solemn ceremony was held to dedicate the facility to **First Corporal Major Matteo Vanzan, Gold Medal for Military Valor, who fell in Nassiryah (Iraq) on May 17, 2004** during a military operation. A heartfelt and dutiful tribute, which united memory, gratitude, and collective participation.

Present were the highest civil and military authorities of the city, including the mayor of Padua, Sergio Giordani, a representation from the “Ricci Curbastro” Comprehensive Institute, and various combat and arms associations. The ceremony began with the solemn flag-raising, a monthly tradition of the CeSMi, followed by the unveiling of the commemorative plaque placed at the entrance of the military complex, which today proudly bears the name of the young lagoon soldier from Camponogara (Venice).

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Matteo Vanzan's family, present at the event, discreetly and emotionally testified to the deep bond between the institutions and those who paid the highest price in service to the Homeland. Alongside them was also the Commander of the “Serenissima” Lagunari Regiment, the unit where Matteo served.

Matteo Vanzan and the many “Matteos” of the present – Examples of silent service

During his speech, Army Corps General Maurizio Riccò, Commander of the Northern Operational Forces, emphasized with simple yet powerful words the meaning of the day:

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> *“Preserving memory, even through gestures like today's dedication of a sports facility, is essential to remember those who sacrificed the most precious good to keep faith with the oath taken.”*

The name of Matteo Vanzan has thus become a symbol of all those soldiers who, today as then, operate daily on the front line, in silence and away from the spotlight, embodying the spirit of service and attachment to democratic and republican values. General Riccò wanted to remember, through Matteo, the many “Matteos” who, with humility and dedication, represent the true face of the Italian Armed Forces.

The presence of students and the educational world added an important educational value to the moment. In an era where collective memory risks fading, involving new generations in ceremonies like this means transmitting to them the deep sense of duty, honor, and responsibility towards the State and the community.

Vanzan's sacrifice, awarded the Gold Medal for Valor for the ultimate act of courage performed in Iraq, represents a moral legacy to be preserved and passed on, to understand that freedom and peace are also founded on painful choices made by men and women in uniform.

A day of cohesion, sport, and operational training

After the commemorative phase, the event continued with a demonstration moment at the exhibition area set up by the CeSMi in collaboration with the Fondazione Opera Immacolata Concezione Onlus. Guests were able to witness gymnastic-sporting exercises and military capability tests that showcased the high level of preparation and professionalism of the Northern Operational Forces.

A central element of the day was also the awarding of the **second edition of the COMFOP Nord Trophy**, a sports training activity that took place last May 13 and involved seven representative teams from as many Army units. The event aimed to strengthen the spirit of corps, healthy competition, and sense of belonging, values fully shared by the CeSMi, which daily trains and supports the physical and moral preparation of military personnel.

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The dedication of the CeSMi to Matteo Vanzan is not just a formal tribute: it is the conscious choice to link a facility dedicated to physical and operational preparation to the memory of a man who made service his vocation. Every entrance to the Military Sports Center will now also be a passage in front of his name, an invitation to reflect on what it truly means to “serve the State.”

Matteo Vanzan, with his sacrifice, has become a symbol and guide for those who wear the uniform every day. His story will continue to live not only in memories but in the training, preparation, and sense of duty that the CeSMi embodies.