



TUE NAM TON/TIMES

**JODY RAY SMITH** will compete in the Golden Gloves next week for the first time in 15 years.

## One last hurrah: Concord boxer returns to ring

**T**HAT WAS ONE HECK of a sabbatical. Jody Ray Smith, a 34-year-old machinist in Concord who doubles as a Community Youth Center boxing coach in the evenings, decided he wanted to be a kid again.

So when the San Francisco Golden Gloves begins Tuesday and runs through March 25 at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, Smith will be competing in the 165-pound Open Division class.

Considering that Smith won the 156-pound title in 1991, when he last competed, that's quite the layoff.

"There really was no thought about me fighting again," said Smith, who works under head coach Gary Sullenger at the CYC. "I had moved back to the area two years ago from Las Vegas, and I was thinking about coaching. It was something I always had wanted to do, and Gary was my trainer when I was fighting. The guy pretty much raised me, and I knew we would be on the same page."

Back when Smith, who grew up in Napa, was one of Northern California's top amateurs, he was living in the Sullenger household.



**JAY HEATER**  
Boxing

"But I decided girls were more important to me," Smith said. "I got too big for my britches. I started getting exposure and the girls started liking me. I moved out of Gary's house a week before the nationals (in 1991), and Gary would have none of that."

Smith blew his chance to compete in the Golden Gloves Nationals and decided to pursue other interests.

It wasn't long afterward that he got married.

"It carried me away from boxing," he said. "She didn't want me to be around boxing and she made it clear that it was her or boxing. I was trying to be a family man. I did what I thought was the right thing. Then eight years of marriage went past and it didn't work out."

Inactive for so many years, Smith pretty much figured his time had passed.

"Gary used to tell me that either one day I would come back and thank him for helping me out, or I would tell him that I should have listened," Smith said. "I think I should have listened. Gary is pretty quiet, but he knows the sport. He used to tell me when I would mess up, miss a few days at the gym. Sometimes you don't see that bright future ahead of you."

When Smith started coaching at CYC, he was a chubby 230 pounds. "Next thing you know, I was getting exercise and losing weight. I started sparring. My weight went down to 190, then 180."

Smith started to think about fighting again, but he didn't tell Sullenger. "I wanted to keep things going, so I went over to the Vallejo PAL to find some sparring. I was sparring with all the pros, guys like Danny Chavez. Danny and I spar on a regular basis now, six or seven rounds a night. I eventually told Gary that if I made 165, that he would have to let me try the Golden Gloves one more time. I've fought twice this year, and my last fight I weighed 165."

Sullenger gave Smith the go-ahead to try another shot at the Gloves.

"This is my last shot," Smith said. "I'll turn 35 next January and I'll be too old. I just want one more opportunity to get my hand raised. There is not another feeling like that."

Tickets for the Golden Gloves range in price from \$20 to \$100. For ticket information, call 209-825-1504.