

Local youth boxers can take a punch

■ Community Youth Center in Concord has produced some of the top fighters in Northern California

By Robert Jordan
STAFF WRITER

CONCORD — Charles Lawson wears the purple and black shiner below his right eye with pride.

It's the result of taking the thumb of a boxing glove during a bout on July 28. The mark is one of a few wounds Lawson has suffered in the two years he has been boxing — and he's proud of it.

It represents the dedication and hard work the 14-year old Walnut Creek resident has put in during his time with the sport.

For Lawson, the black eye shows how far he has come. A year and a half ago, Lawson returned from an eight-month hiatus, one he took because he wasn't dedicated or patient enough to earn his boxing license. He put

IF YOU GO

WHAT: 14th annual Concord Cup Boxing Invitational

WHEN: Aug. 18-19; doors open at 1 p.m., boxing from 2 p.m.-6:30 p.m.

WHERE: Community Youth Center, 2241 Galaxy Ct., Concord

COST: \$5-15.

in part of the work but to succeed in Gary Sullenger's program, part of the work won't cut it.

The youth boxing program at the Community Youth Center in Concord has developed a reputation for developing some of the top boxers in Northern California. Well over 100 kids ages 8 to 18 from throughout Contra Costa County and parts of Alameda and Solano county show up five days a week to participate and receive training from Sullenger, who heads the program.

"I would fall off as I got close to my license and (Sullenger) wants you to be ready," Lawson said. "It was hard coming back

because you have to regain (Sullenger's) trust. ... If you don't work hard and you get in that ring and you are not ready, somebody is going to drop you."

Lawson has been doing the dropping in the ring since his return.

In the last month, the incoming freshman at Las Lomas High School has brought home two titles for the CYC program.

At the Desert Spring Showdown, in which over 400 boxers participated throughout the country, Lawson won the 101-pound crown. A few weeks later, Lawson added to his achievements, winning the 101-pound belt at the Annual Right of Passage.

"The discipline and dedication has really helped me," Lawson said. "Boxing has helped me turn school around. The last two quarters, I got all A's."

In the last two tournaments, CYC boxers have earned high marks, claiming 10 belts. The program will try and add to its trophy case this weekend at the 14th annual Concord Cup Boxing Invitational Tournament hosted by CYC. Doors open at 1



KEVIN MONTANO, left, spars with Alexis Garibay, in front of Community Youth Center boxing coach Gary Sullenger.

p.m., and boxing begins at 2 p.m.

Lawson will be on hand to represent CYC as well as Concord's Christal Barajas, one of the top girl boxers in the state, and Concord's Eric Altamirano, who earned best boxer honors at the Desert Showdown.

"This sport more than any is under extra scrutiny," said Sullenger, who has also trained some of the top professional fighters in the world. "We're not teaching them to be tough or how to street fight but to grow to be good adults."

Before Altamirano started boxing, he was skipping school and headed down a path of trouble.

But six years ago, he followed his brother, Carlos, to the CYC. In that time, Altamirano has risen up the ranks to become one of CYC's and Sullenger's best boxers.

Altamirano has won three Golden Gloves titles, three Junior Olympic crowns, a U.S. Regional title and a bronze medal at the 2005 Junior Olympics.

Boxing exposed Altamirano to traveling throughout the country, given him structure and helped him improve his grades.

"This has helped me outside of the gym," Altamirano said. "They said that if I wanted to comeback they said I had to start going to school."

The structure and discipline are a big part of Sullenger and his staff's program. Incoming boxers have to prove themselves through a variety of strength and conditioning drills.

Before, Sullenger allows a boxer to spar he or she must prove that they can go three full rounds without getting tired. It's a process that Sullenger said takes anywhere from five to six weeks.

"This is one of the most demanding sports short of a triathlon," Sullenger said. "I don't know of a better workout."

Back in the ring on a Tuesday afternoon in late July, Lawson was back in the ring sparring in protective gear with Barajas. And this time when Lawson left the ring he didn't have any marks. Instead, Lawson left Barajas with a trickle of blood coming from her nose.

But like Lawson, Barajas also wore it with pride, because she knows it doesn't happen very often.

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DIGEST

Youth boxing tournament

■ Boxers from California, Nevada and Oregon will compete at the 14th annual Concord Cup Boxing Invitational Tournament hosted by the Community Youth Center — Concord Campus. CYC boxers include Concord resident Eric Altamirano, who has three Golden Gloves, three Junior Olympic titles and a U.S. regional title, and Daniel Thomas of Bethel Island, who has two Junior Olympic titles and a Golden Glove award. The event will take place from 2 to 6:30 p.m. (doors open at 1 p.m.) Aug. 18-19, at 2241 Galaxy Court, Concord. Call 925-671-7070.

■ Community Youth Center — 14th annual CYC Concord Cup Boxing Tournament 1 p.m. Aug. 18-19. Open to boxers ages 8-24, 60 pounds to heavyweights. 2241 Galaxy Court, Concord. Admission: \$5-\$15. 925-671-7070 ext. 215, www.communityyouthcenter.org.