

Teenager no lightweight despite weighing just 125

CONCORD

AT THE AGE OF 13, Daniel Thomas showed up at the Concord Youth Center for his first session with boxing trainer Gary Sullenger. Although that workout was two years ago, Thomas remembers it clearly being a big bawling fan who loved to watch the sport with his dad, John Thomas, of Bethel Island. Thomas wanted to see first-hand what the sport was all about.

"I didn't know what to expect," Thomas said. "I just remember being all sweaty and feeling sick."

He learned in two hours that he wasn't in the greatest shape and that boxing would take dedication.

Two years later, he is now one of the remaining amateurs at the Community Youth Center (which changed its name from the Concord Youth Center).

On Thursday, Thomas (7-1) will be one of the main event fighters for an amateur card to be held at the Big C Athletic Club, 1381 Galaxy Way, Concord.

The show will include a pasta dinner which begins at 6 p.m. before boxing begins at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$80, \$60 and \$40 and can be purchased by calling the athletic club at 925-671-2110 or the community center at 925-671-6070. A \$20 ticket is available for children 13 and under. Proceeds benefit the CYC.

Sullenger said Thomas is



JAY HEISTER
 Boxer

the perfect example of why members of the community should support CYC.

"He is not our most talented boxer," Sullenger said. "But he is one of our hardest workers, and he is a great kid."

Thomas is 5-foot, 11-in, fights at 125 pounds.

"I am not an inside guy," Thomas said. "I box and use my jab. I have to stay on the outside."

Eventually, Thomas hopes to grow into his name.

"I want to do it slowly and I want to move up by gaining in muscle," he said.

He said one of his favorite pro boxers is Arthur Gatti.

"I love dedication and the way a fighter will go down but then will get back up," Thomas said.

So far during his career, Thomas has yet to hit the car.

"I haven't even had a standing high count," he said.

Sullenger is putting together eight to 10 amateur bouts on Thursday's card, and he will

begin to match Thomas against tougher opponents as he gains more experience.

Thomas said he loves working with Sullenger and fear being at the center.

"It's a very nice facility," Thomas said. "I don't get any better. They give you anything you could want."

"And working with Gary has been great. He has been in boxing a long time and I don't think there is anybody around who could teach you more. Each week I feel I am getting a little better."

Sullenger expects to have at least three of his boxer's shows each Thursday. Besides

Thomas, Sullenger is working to put together bouts for Joey Smith and Elean Gonzalez.

Gonzalez is a 17-year-old Pittsburg resident who fights at 132 pounds. He has won both his amateur bouts.

Smith, a 32-year-old Chardonia resident, doubles as an assistant coach at the CYC. He will box in the light-heavyweight division.

As a bonus, fans will be treated to three USA Boxing "box-off" bouts to determine which athletes advance to the USA Boxing Regionals.

Most of the USA Boxing "box-off" tournament is being held Saturday and Sunday in Sacramento, but Sullenger said three weight classes have so many entries that those brackets can't be completed in two days. Fighters in those divisions will fight once Saturday, once Sunday and then determine the champion Thursday in Concord.

"These will be quality fights," Sullenger said.

Contact Jay Heister at jheister@ccimes.com.