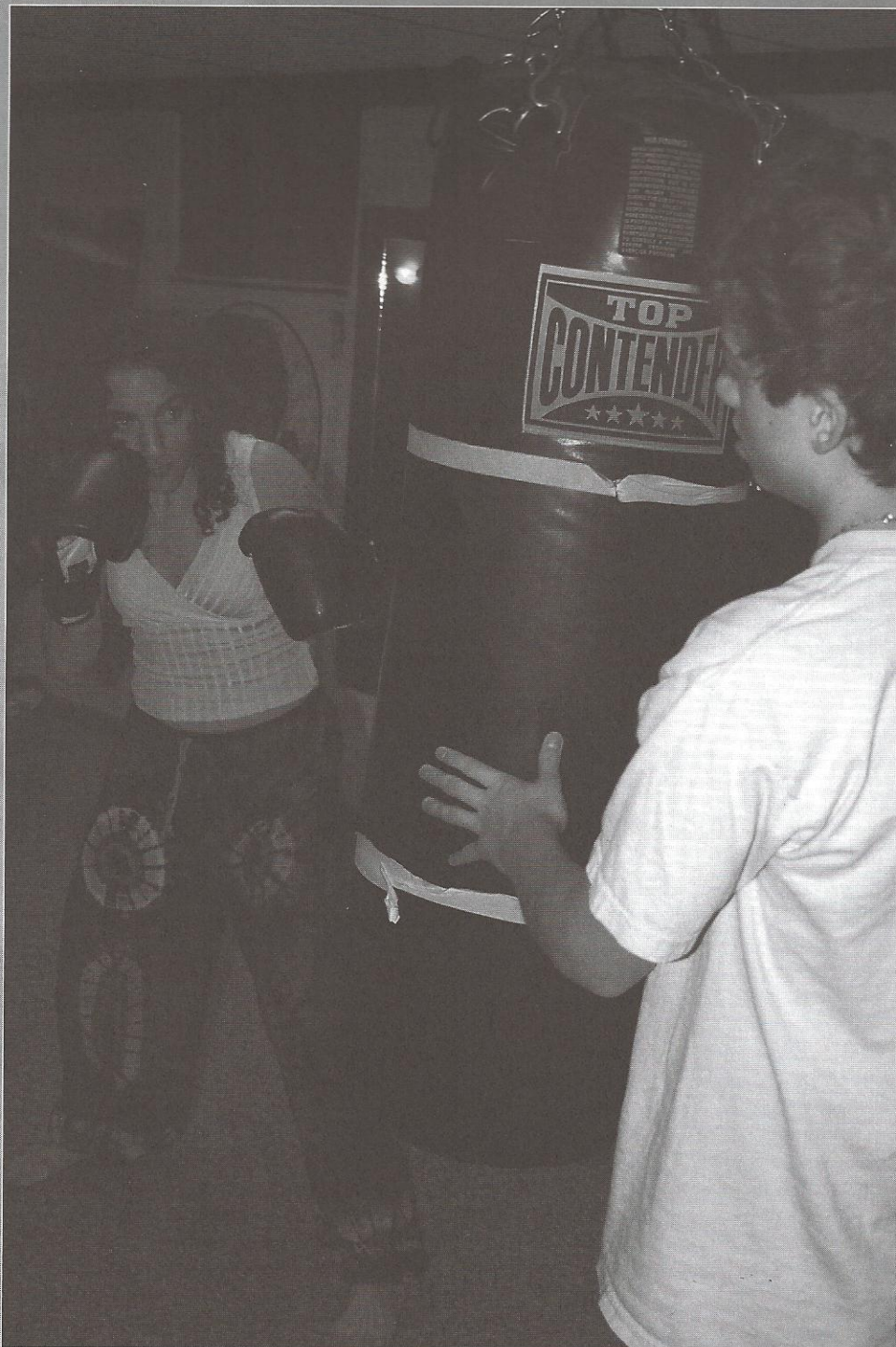


MILLION DOLLAR MOM

Freshman's mother top women's boxer in the world, most avoided as well



Sumya Anani trades punches with her punching bag while son, freshman Matt Anani holds. Sumya works out about six days per week and estimates that she does so about six hours a day altogether. photo | chris williams

stephen montemayor | assistant editor

Freshman Matt Anani has a boxing ring, weights, punching bag and a collection of world championship belts in his basement. But they aren't for him, they belong to his mother.

Vigorous workouts and sparring sessions take place down there as his mother, Sumya Anani, trains in hope that someone will step up and challenge her. Sumya has been recognized as the top female boxer in the world and owns four championship belts.

The problem, however, is that nobody wants to fight her. For the second consecutive year one website awarded her the "Most Avoided Fighter."

"Her career can get frustrating because it is so hard for her to get a fight," Matt said. "Everyone is scared of her."

Still with all of the attention and success Sumya has had in her career, it is nothing out of the ordinary for Matt, who was four when his mother began boxing competitively.

The two lived in Jamaica and moved back to the United States before Matt started kindergarten. Sumya, a 1990 SM North grad, wanted to experience a little excitement living somewhere else and said that she felt the best time to do that was before Matt started school.

When they returned home, the two had to move in with Sumya's mother as she didn't have any money to support the two of them. It was that, along with the constant suggestions by her personal trainer to start boxing, that started a career that has so far seen a 25-1-1 record in which she has avenged both her loss and draw.

"I had never thought about pursuing anything in boxing outside of Bally's Total Fitness," Sumya said. "I was always insecure in high school and never did any sports but when we came home from Jamaica and I had no means to pay for anything was when I decided to try boxing."

Whenever Matt would tell his friends about his mom's sport, none would believe him. That is until they stepped into his basement.

"(My friends) thought the basement was very cool when I first showed them," Matt said. "Now they always want to come down and see the ring and always ask to see the belts."

Matt sometimes trains with his mom, doing various workouts and even spars with her occasionally.

"She takes it easy on me," Matt said.

Despite having grown up around boxing and in a gym, Matt has never really been pushed into boxing as Sumya doesn't want to be "one of those pushy parents."

"Matt has some good skills, but the most important thing is his confidence in self defense," Sumya said. "I want him to be himself and be confident in any situation as sometimes these days people will pick fights for no reason."

Sumya's career didn't take long to elevate as less than two years into it she was matched up against one of the sports biggest names, Christy Martin.

Sumya went on to defeat Martin, handing the woman known as the sport's pioneer her first loss since 1989.

Both Matt and Sumya agree that match is a personal highlight for both of them. Now, their biggest fight is finding an opponent. Sumya nearly had a fight against Muhammad Ali's undefeated daughter, Laila, before she backed out.

"She didn't want to fight me, so she fought Christy Martin instead," Sumya said. "(Martin) was way past her prime and this also was years after I had beaten (Martin)."

Going on her 10th season as a boxer, Sumya knows she will not continue boxing if she thinks she is no longer up to par. She said she doesn't want to stay too long and get hurt if her timing and other skills diminish due to age like many boxers in the past have done and later suffered the consequences of injury.

Sumya said that although she is 33, she feels like she can box another three years and feels much younger due to the great shape she keeps herself in.

"I like to take great care of my body," Sumya said. "I don't drink, smoke or go out."

Her resume also includes several appearances on ESPN both as a fighter and analyst and in April 2004 she appeared on the undercard of the Vitali Klitschko vs. Corrie Sanders pay-per-view fight in California.

In addition to boxing, Sumya also teaches weight training at Johnson County Community College, is a personal trainer at her home, teaches yoga and art classes and also is a massage therapist. She would like to encourage people to contact her regarding her classes as she would love to have new students.

Sumya can be reached through email at sumya_anani@msn.com and also has a website: Sumya.com.

She said that because she only fights a few times per year, boxing alone can't support her so she relies on the extra activities as well.

Last year, Sumya led a yoga retreat to her former

home in Jamaica and said that the mental focus of yoga protects her from injury.

"Yoga definitely helps me stay in shape," Sumya said. "Especially being in my thirties, I would recommend yoga to all athletes and I am very fortunate to not have experienced any serious injuries in my career."

Sumya also keeps herself occupied with her local charity: A.C.T., meaning Awakening Change Together. The charity meets once a month to partake in various charitable activities that Sumya said are mostly family friendly.

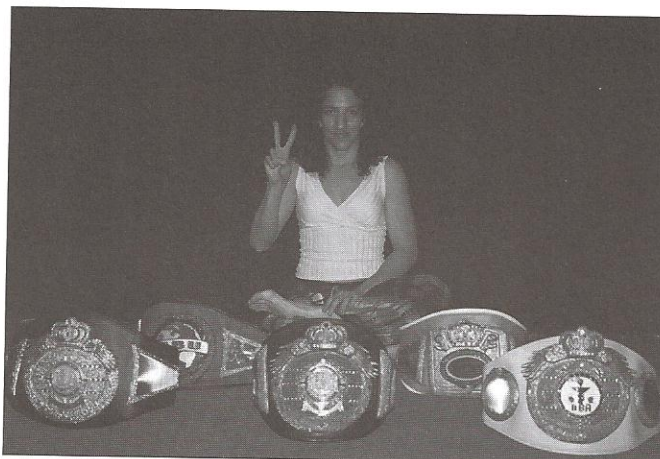
She said she welcomes as many volunteers as possible and that people can volunteer by contacting her through email and get more information through her website.

Matt usually only goes to Sumya's local fights, but has traveled to California before. Sumya said that as Matt has gotten older he has become a bigger help for her when she fights.

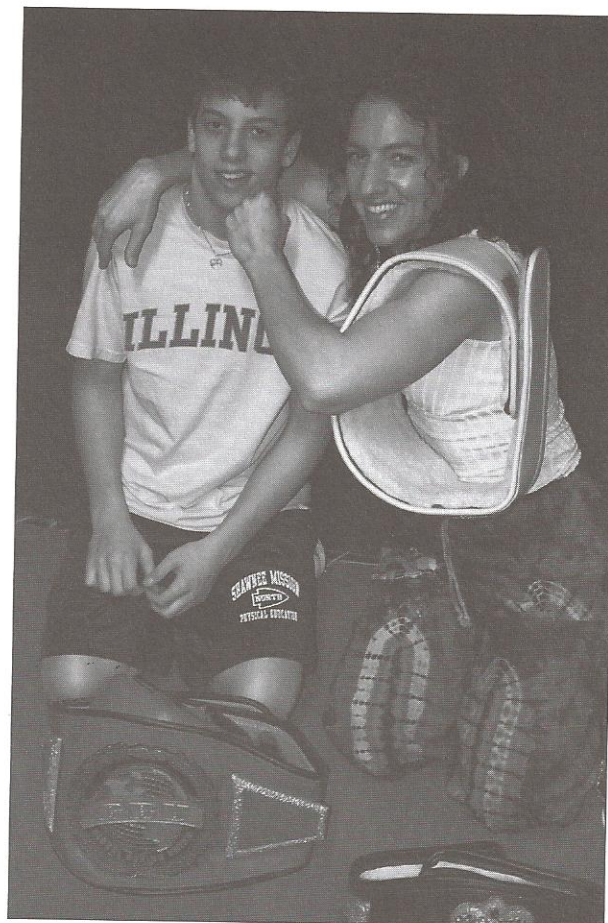
"He knows that when I'm preparing for a fight that it is serious," Sumya said. "For my last fight he and his friends were a big help in getting my music and helping get the belts to the referee."

Matt is unsure about whether or not he will consider trying boxing but when he said it was whether he thought he could do it, his mother quickly caught him.

"One thing boxing has helped me see is that I can do anything I set my mind to," Sumya said. "That is something that I not only want to show Matt but everyone else as well. No matter what it is, if you set your mind to something it is possible."



Sumya currently holds four WIBA world title belts. One in the 135 lb. weight class, two in the 140 lb. weight class and one in the 147 lb. weight class.
photo | chris williams



Left: Matt spars with his mother. Sumya said he helps her train before every fight.
Right: The two pose with Sumya's championship belts.
photo | chris williams