

Boxer learns ring's lessons

Fighter, yoga instructor, volunteer leader — all describe Shawnee Mission North grad

By MAGGIE HESSEL-MIAL
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Watching Sumya Anani in a boxing match can teach even the faint of heart a bit about how beautiful the sport can be.

Anani hits explosively, putting all of her energy and her power into each punch. She concentrates; making smooth movements and most times swiftly defeats her opponent.

But outside the ring, it's a different story. Anani, 32, is soft spoken, with a gentle demeanor and centered soul.

As she sits in her Overland Park basement, which has become a boxer's dream, with a practice ring, punching bags and workout space, she is quick to get tears in her eyes when she thinks about how far she's come. She is choked up as she talks about how much she wants

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others to know they can achieve their dreams too — especially her 13 year-old son, Matthew.

"She is incredible," said her trainer, Barry Becker. "She never brags. She's so shy. She's finally starting to promote herself."

It's no wonder Becker is as proud of his protégé as he is.

It was he who noticed that boxing might be a good fit for her. Anani had never even watched a boxing match before she met Becker. She didn't know the rules. She hadn't even been involved in sports in high school.

But someone believing she could do it made it a possibility.

"To have someone like that in my

life when I'd never had that before ... he really encouraged me a lot," Anani said. "I wouldn't be where I am today if he hadn't."

Her first fight came in 1996. She won.

"It was inspiring to think you could put your mind to something and do it," Anani said. "It felt natural."

And Anani has kept winning, growing stronger and stronger as she works harder and harder at it.

In 1998, she beat Christy Martin, one of the most well-known and accomplished female boxers. That was a huge moment in Anani's life and when Becker knew he'd found a high-quality fighter. Since then, she has won four world championships in three weight divisions and was named the Female Fighter of the Year in 2002 by the *Ring Magazine*.

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Sumya Anani of Overland Park is a yoga instructor and a very talented boxer.

MIKE RANSEDELL/The Kansas City Star

ANANI: Boxer arranges charity events

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zine, which is dubbed the "Bible of Boxing."

Now Anani is a yoga instructor by career and boxer by trade. She works out for hours each day, perfecting her form and shape to be the next big thing in boxing.

While boxing has become a major love in the Shawnee Mission

North graduate's life and boxing fame seems to be right around the corner, she wants to do more.

Two years ago, she founded a non-profit organization, Awakening Change Together, or ACT. Through that organization, which is swiftly increasing in the size of volunteers, she organizes a charitable event every month. Her aim is to introduce as many people as she

can to different kinds of volunteer work. She hopes that every person who volunteers with ACT will find a niche, some area he or she wants to continue to work in.

"I want to instigate social change," Anani said. "We all have skills and we all have contributions to make the world a better place. I am providing a community service opportunity to help people find a way to start."

Thinking about her life and what she has accomplished, Anani is pleased and she is proud. Her boxing career is going better than ever and she is just waiting for her big break. She is waiting for a promoter to take her on.

But the main thing she knows is that boxing has dramatically impacted her life. It has made her strong and has made her determined to accomplish any goal that comes her way.

"Fifteen years ago if someone had told me I couldn't do something, I would have believed them," Anani said. "Now it would provide me with more incentive to prove that person wrong. Boxing has shown me that with hard work, determination and discipline, you can do anything."

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