

Armand Horn Boxes on Showtime

By Ryan Schlehuber

What may be his last boxing match may also be his biggest, as 27-year-old Armand Horn of St. Ignace will go against unbeaten Junior Welterweight Jorge Paez Jr. in a nationally televised fight at Manistee's Little River Casino Resort Saturday, July 1.

Though compiling a 13-1 record, with 11 knockouts, despite once being ranked in the top 100 world-wide and in the top 15 nationally, and despite the opportunity to boost his career on a national broadcast, Mr. Horn is prepared to retire from

his professional boxing career, deciding that the severe health risks to boxers is not worth it.

The chance to finally fight on Showtime, however, played a big part in his decision to accept this challenge.

"I spoke with my managers and told them I'd fight one more time, maybe three more, if they are fights that mean something," said Mr. Horn. "The health risks are too much to continue fighting, but I want to be able to look back when I'm older and be able to say, 'Hey, I fought on Showtime.'"

For the first time in Mr.

Horn's 12-year boxing career, he will be considered the underdog. Having not fought for more than a year, and having only been given three weeks to train rather than the normal eight weeks, Mr. Horn knows this fight will not be easy.

For the fight, Mr. Horn will jump two weight classes higher than he normally fights, from featherweight (126 pounds) to lightweight (135 pounds). Both boxers must weigh in at 135 pounds the night before but can gain weight afterwards, and, said Mr. Horn, boxers have been known to put on as much as 10 pounds in a 24-hour span after weigh-in.

Mr. Paez also has the advantage of being tutored by his father, Jorge Paez Sr., the former featherweight world champion who was famous for his boxing charisma and known to many as "The Clown Prince of Boxing."

"He has the advantage in speed and strength, but I think I'll hit harder," said Mr. Horn of his opponent, "and I have experience."

Mr. Paez turned pro in February 2005. He compiled an 80-1 record as an amateur and is



Professional boxer Armand Horn of St. Ignace will take on Jorge Paez Jr. in a televised lightweight fight in Manistee Saturday, July 1.

8-0 as a pro boxer, ending seven of those bouts with knockouts.

Showtime liked the potential of the bout, pitting an up-and-coming star against an experienced boxer with a good record who could give the audience a good showing.

Mr. Horn said Mr. Paez's manager wanted to test him with someone with a bit of "ring rust." Mr. Horn believes if Mr. Paez thinks the bout is nothing more than a tune-up, it will play to his advantage.

"I'll have the element of surprise, then," he said, with a smile.

Win or lose, though, Mr. Horn will be happy that he took the opportunity to box again.

"I just want to go with the flow and see what happens," he said. "But I can guarantee you I'm not fighting any more than three more fights. I want to focus on my accounting career, get my degree, and enjoy life to its fullest without the threat of health risks from boxing."

Mr. Horn has been in boxing for 12 years, entering the professional ranks in 2001. His concern for his health began when he noticed "floaters" in his eye, microscopic particles floating on the retina caused by pressure on the eye. In Mr. Horn's case, his doctors believe it was caused by continuous sparring in the ring.

"I've read that 80 to 90 percent of brain damage to boxers is caused from sparring," he said. "Preparing for an eight-round fight takes about 80 to 110 rounds of sparring, so it makes sense."

Mr. Horn's concern heightened after Kevin Payne died

from swelling of the brain after a fight with Ryan Moraldo in March. He knew both boxers and fought Mr. Moraldo, knowing he was not a powerful puncher.

"If it can happen to Payne against Moraldo, than it can happen to me in any situation," Mr. Horn said.

Statistics show that 75 percent of boxers who have fought more than 20 times have developed what is known as "punch-drunk" symptoms, said Mr. Horn, which can be slurring of the speech, slow motion skills, stiffness, and memory loss.

"I want to go out there and give it my all one last time," Mr. Horn said. "I'll be content with whatever happens, win or lose."

Mr. Horn, the son of Jim and Colleen Horn of St. Ignace and grandson of Mickey and Armand "Smi" Horn of Mackinac Island, is being trained by John Nolan of Sault Ste. Marie, who trained Mr. Horn earlier in his career.

Also on the Showtime fight card are three other bouts: Undefeated heavyweight Chazz Witherspoon against unbeaten heavyweight Mike Alexander, undefeated middleweight James McGirt Jr. against once-beaten middleweight Stephan Pryor, undefeated middleweight Ronald Hearn against middleweight Hector Hernandez.

Ronald Hearn, 27, of Detroit, is the son of the famous boxer Thomas "The Hitman" Hearn, who held seven world titles in five weight classes.

Showtime will begin airing the event at 9 p.m.



Armand Horn looks for his next strike in a 2004 bout. He has compiled a 13-1 record, with 11 knockouts, in his professional career. (Photograph courtesy of Dave Allen)

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