

Hannah Gaillard nurses the symptoms

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Tuesday, 27 December 2005 19:00

As a nurse, Hannah Gaillard knows how to treat a concussion. She knows the symptoms.

She also knows there are two ways not to get a concussion in boxing: Don't climb in the ring or learn to slip as many punches as possible.

Of the two options, she went the path of most resistance. She trained, put off work and lived the hackneyed lifestyle of a struggling boxer. And after two years of working part-time and boxing the rest of it, Gaillard was one decision away from being the No. 1 female amateur in the United States earlier this year.

"I loved the training aspect of it," the 27-year-old Atlanta resident said. "You always wanted to take it to the next level. You try to live a healthy lifestyle and everything is based on your performance. I didn't even care what I looked like anymore – most females care about that."

Gaillard knows her amateur days are limited as she progresses in age. And she's not had that many to count anyway, since she started at 24 years old. The Florida native hadn't even considered lacing a glove until she took an aerobics boxing class, and then resumed the class when she moved to Atlanta to work as a nurse.

Canadian Olympic bronze medallist Chris Johnson instructed the class. It was from him that Gaillard got her initial boost into the competitive realm.

"He's like, 'When are you going to start competing,'" Gaillard said. "I had no intentions of doing that. But within the first few months I started competing."

Her first fights weren't all that easy; she lost all of them.

"My first fight, I fought a girl that was a lot larger than me (10 or 12 pounds), and I fought at 119," she said. "It was the fight of the night and most of the people thought I had won."

Of course, experience made her a better fighter. She improved enough to have her mother Amelia watch a fight. Ironically, it was Gaillard who had reservations about Amelia's first trip to ringside.

"I can remember being really worried," Gaillard said. "The girl's nose was bleeding ... but every time I got hit I thought, 'Oh, my mom saw that.'"

"I don't think she likes to watch, but I would say that she's proud of me."

Including her run at the U.S. Nationals, Gaillard holds a 6-4 amateur career record. It's almost a mirror image of the professionals, who have very few contests to their name and are ranked among the top contenders or actually hold titles.

Hannah Gaillard nurses the symptoms

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Tuesday, 27 December 2005 19:00

With a few wins under her belt in Georgia bouts and her youth melting away, Gaillard wanted to take a chance on the national level.

“I felt like I really had a chance,” she said. “I trained twice a day for three days a week. I was working overtime in the boxing gym, and, as far as my regular profession, I backed off on a lot of hours. I was living very poorly.”

She lived poorly, working 25 hours a week, and, if she was lucky, 30 hours a week. She picked up 16 hours a week in a pediatric emergency room at Atlanta’s Grady Hospital and scooped up a few more shifts at Egleston Hospital’s pediatric intensive care unit.

Earning money wouldn’t have been too much of a problem for her. The hospitals called constantly, asking for her to fill in shifts here and there. If she had the energy, she might have considered it.

“They called almost every day, but I was completely dedicated (to boxing),” she said. “I was almost obsessive about it.”

Unfortunately for Gaillard, the hours she put in were not enough to pay for a trainer. Johnson, who trained Gaillard for free, had moved back to Canada to open his own gym.

With no money or full-time trainers, she had to train herself through the state, regional and into the national tournament.

To her credit, she fought well through the national in Colorado Springs, Colo. The championship match came down to her and the No. 1-rated amateur, Vanessa Juarez.

Juarez, an 18-year-old from San Antonio, had been boxing since 14. Her youth and experience were evident to Gaillard in their bout.

“She’s won every JO thing that you can win,” Gaillard said. “I felt like a grandma next to her, but at the same time I thought I had the ability to improve with a rematch with her.”

For all the dedication she put into boxing, and considering the poor lifestyle she lived outside of the gym, Gaillard never felt a compulsion to earn money for all the punches she took.

“My plans were not to go pro,” she said. “Being a nurse and knowing the risks of head injury, things like that, it kind of slows me down as far as being a pro.”

Instead, she shared the same dream as many female amateurs: the Olympics. Unfortunately for her and the many amateur women in the ring, the International Olympic Committee excluded women from boxing in the 2008 games.

Gaillard did not take the news so well.

“I think I shed a tear there,” she said. “I felt like I was on a time crunch to make it on the 2008

Hannah Gaillard nurses the symptoms

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Tuesday, 27 December 2005 19:00

Games.

“It takes away a little motivation, considering that was my main goal. I’ll have to make a new goal as far as winning the national, which is a great opportunity.”

Since losing to Juarez last spring, Gaillard hasn’t ducked under the ropes to face another opponent. Along with recuperating her financial losses, she’s trying to let a nagging ankle injury heal.

There are still a few more years of fight left in Gaillard, but she wants it out of the way before she starts a family. But it doesn’t stop her from thinking about other aspects of the fight game.

“I’d love to train people, even though I don’t have a lot of experience,” she said. “I just like to fix people. When I see them hitting a bag, I’m like, ‘Here do it like this.’”

“It’s funny,” she added after a long pause, “some people start and they can’t stop.”