Growing up in Syria and Jordan, the now 32-year-old middleweight prospect Mohammad Said idolized Mustafa Hamsho, the second best middleweight of the 1980s who fought a veritable who's who of top contenders and champions.

Marvin Hagler, who reigned supreme for much of that decade, and whom Hamsho twice fought for the title, has continually said if he wasn't around Hamsho would have most certainly been the champion.

Not only did Said choose the same vocation as his idol, he even named his young son after him. While training at the Top Rank Gym in Las Vegas in 2004, where he sparred regularly with Floyd Mayweather Jr., Zab Judah, and Ricardo Mayorga, Said had the pleasure of meeting his hero for the first time.

"I say, 'You're Mustafa Hamsho?'" said Said, who still gets excited when recounting that momentous day, in broken English. "He is a good man and a big fighter in my country. He is the most famous boxer in Syria and Jordan. When I was young, he was always in magazines and on television."

Not only did Said get to know Hamsho, who lives in New York, Hamsho quickly became a mentor to him. He brought him East, where Said now trains in New Jersey with Al Certo, who took over Hamsho's training when Hamsho's beloved first trainer, the colorful Paddy Flood, passed away suddenly in the early eighties.

"You need people in your corner, people that respect you," said Hamsho. "A lot of cornermen and trainers don't even own a bottle or a towel. Anyone on the street can call themselves a trainer. People start using you as an opponent, even when you're better than that. I know, because it happened to me."

Hamsho, who retired in 1989 with a 43-6-2 (27 KOs) record, recalls losing his pro debut and fighting to a draw in his second bout. He also remembered traveling to Las Vegas for the first time, only to be left alone in his hotel room while his handlers went out gambling.

"Early in my career, people don't care if I lose," said Hamsho in his heavily accented but articulate English. "It is hard to get a break because if you are Arab everyone is against you. They were then, and they are even more now.

"But I was always in such good shape, I would win fights I was supposed to lose," he added. "One time I saw a white guy (my opponent) at the weigh-in. In the ring for the fight was a black guy. When I say something to my people, they ignore me. I went and knocked the guy out."

Boxing is a game, says Hamsho, and young and impressionable boxers need someone to look after them.

"Boxing is beautiful, but it is easy to be used like a horse," he said. "You have to make people like you. The way you do that is by the way you fight."

Said, he says, is much more talented than his 17-4 (10 KOs) indicates. While his first loss, a first round knockout to the previously undefeated Anderson Clayton occurred in Said's adopted home country of Brazil, where his wife and child still reside, the others were close decisions to the more experienced Raul Frank, Jerson Ravelo, and Ian Gardner.

In Said's most recent bout—his first under Hamsho's tutelage—he won a four round decision over former middleweight title challenger Jonathan Reid, who was also a participant on "The Contender" television series, in Providence, Rhode Island, on February 13.

"It will take us a few more fights to make a name for ourselves," said Hamsho. "We are not here to show how tough we are. We are here to make money. Mohammad is too good of a fighter to not get noticed."

Hamsho said that they would like to fight Peter Manfredo, another alumnus of "The Contender" who headlined the Providence show against Scott Pemberton. "We would even fight Sugar Ray Leonard if he came back," joked Hamsho.

Said, who once worked as a travel agent in Brazil, said that it is very comforting for him to have Hamsho and Certo on his team. He marvels at the fact that he can even understand Certo's unique version of the English language, which contains at least four expletives per sentence.

"Nobody use curse words more than him," laughed Said. "But he is very good trainer. I learn a lot with him every day."

Asked if it is important for them to use boxing to become Middle Eastern ambassadors to the sporting community, Hamsho was adamant in his response.

"You don't come to America to fight for your home country," said Hamsho. "My country doesn't make myself as a man, just like it doesn't make him (Said) as a man. I make myself and he will make himself.

"I ran away from my country to make a better living for myself," he continued. "That is why he is away from his family now, working hard to make life better for all of them. We will keep fighting and keep winning. Right now no one will fight him because there is no money (and too much risk).

"We will get him to the point where people will need to fight him," added Hamsho. "Once you have good name, anyone will fight you because there is money involved. Boxing is like everything else. If you have money, people respect you. If you can make money (generate revenue) people will line up to fight you. That is the plan for Mohammad."