We boxing fans despair: What's to become of boxing? It has no future in a world of extreme sports.

If the looks on the faces of the fathers, mothers and sons that showed up for an old-fashioned smoker at Freddie Roach's Wild Card Gym in Los Angeles is any indication, boxing's very much alive.

"Fight Night at Wild Card" was the same evening as the Roy Jones-Tarver fight; which is Roach's way of saying what he thinks of Jones.

In this tiny spot in the heart of Hollywood above a Chinese laundry, it was the 1940s again – in every settlement house and church in Brooklyn and the Bronx -- including fighters with names like "The Asian Tiger," "Repo Man," and "Bugsy."

There were 13 bouts scheduled -- three two-minute rounds, with 12-ounce gloves and headgears. Since they were unsanctioned by the AAU, every great fighter from the '20s through the '70s served his apprenticeship in smokers, without risking his amateur record. Many of boxing's hardcore fans got their addiction by lacing'em-up as kids in smokers.

Downstairs in the parking lot, with cars being jockeyed like a Rubik's Cube, Justin Fortune, Roach's conditioning coach, cooked-up franks.

The gym very quickly looked like it was going to collapse into the laundry under the weight of all the bodies pushing to get a better view of the ring. Some stood on tables and chairs. Some stood above the others without any visible means of support. The mood was like Mariachi music.

Though it was a bracing fall evening outside, it was quickly a sauna in the gym, without a centimeter to breathe -- people peeling down to T-shirts.

U.S. Olympian, Brian Viloria, an undefeated pro, was the picture of intensity at Wild Card during the day. Now, he was outgoing, signing autographs, acting as a ringside judge.

On the other side of the ring -- also signing autographs and laughing -- was an almost cherubic Manny Pacquiao, who hardly looked like he was about to go to war with Marco Antonio Barrera -- one of the best featherweights ever.

Roach was the referee; his brother, Pep, was a second, and his mother was one of the other judges. Hollywood Celebes lined ringside, and local fighters and trainers sprinkled the crowd -- that looked like ten pounds in a five-pound bag.

The ring announcer let everyone know that regular ref James Toney couldn't be there. "He's in

Vegas calling out Roy Jones."

It was an adrenaline rush for three hours — raucous, profane…old friends and opponents ragging on each other – eyes lit up, rolling back the years.

93-year-old trainer Eddie Cousins hadn't slowed a bit climbing into the ring, furiously demonstrating what his charges needed to do.

There was one moment when the crowd booed a decision for a fighter that Pep was handling. He gave them the finger. They booed even louder. Pep stood on the ring apron, dropped his pants and mooned them, roundly.

Laughter shook the building. People rocked in their seats, stamping their feet. The pure joy was like a sports bar when the home team wins the World Series. That alone was worth the $5. It was the fix that satisfied the jones of every old-school boxing junkie.

Mario Lopez, the actor and TV personality, sporting the handle "Bazooka," was a big surprise to those who didn't know how seriously he took boxing. With his black headgear with the bar across the front, and his powerful build, he looked like Spartacus.

"The Jersey Kid," his opponent, must have felt he'd been ganged up on by what seemed the entire Lopez family -- all with one face -- who jumped up and down at ringside, taking pictures, shouting encouragement and swinging along with every punch Mario threw.

Lopez wasn't just a fired-up swinger: He showed what he'd learned in the many rounds with James Toney and Shane Mosley, using some of their signature moves: pivoting left and right inside for the best angles and leverage. He was patient, didn't lunge, threw multiple left hooks and accurate, short lead rights.

Lopez not only landed with the kind of punches that made the crowd go "OOH!" he showed enough meanness that he had to be warned several times by Roach for unnecessary roughness.

"The Jersey Kid" hung in there tough but he was outgunned and overpowered.

When Lopez was announced the winner, and the little bronze medal on the red and white ribbon was placed around his neck, he flashed a mega-watt smile that couldn't have been broader if he’d won the Academy Award.

There must have been a sudden exodus from Dublin, when "Irish Man" battled "The Russian Sleeping Pill." Rows of lads who'd had more than a few to drink -- wrapped in the Irish flag -- chanted, "Irish!" "Irish!" Some scruffy leprechauns feeling no pain smushed their faces against the gym's second-story window screens -- all but inaccessible from the ground -- yelling "Irish Man! Irish Man!" at a level that would normally summon the police to a domestic disturbance.

The crowd warmed to anybody that showed heart, and were no less appreciative of the two

women's bouts, which were wars. "The Moroccan Princess" and "Killer" staged their own version of Gatti-Ward 1. And, "The Torpedo" must have studied the films of Jake LaMotta, trying to walk through the bombardment of "Knockout."

When "The Bruiser" was in a grueling struggle with Danny "The Man," "The Bruiser's" mother stood near me wringing a handkerchief and tensing with his every effort. "Yes, my son!" she repeated, tears welling in her eyes when he was given a majority decision.

After conferring with Freddie Roach, the ring announcer said: because his opponent didn't show up, seven-year-old Steven Ayala was declared the winner in his 57-pound match.

Ayala, the brother of 15-year-old amateur middleweight Anthony Ayala Jr., wants to be just like him. "Only better," says Anthony.

With the medal around his neck, Steven was encouraged by Roach to shadowbox for the crowd. He looked like a scale-model Ricardo Lopez, throwing perfectly executed, blurring combinations. The cheers grew as the crowd took him to their heart.

After the naming of the Best Boxer of The Night, and the Most Courageous, the crowd filed out, still buzzing with the evening's excitement. Mario Lopez -- medal still around his neck -- posed with his arm around a young Pacquiao relative. She looked like she'd treasure it.

Trainer Eric Brown turned to me: "We should do it in the parking lot next time. We could fill it." There was no question in my mind.

The demise of boxing -- with thoughts of skateboarding and street luge siphoning away the sport's life blood -- seems much less likely after feeling the electricity, desire to excel, and camaraderie in that room...

And, above all, seeing the growing dream in the eyes of young Steven Ayala as he left the ring holding his medal up for his dad to see, makes me sure that he and youngsters like him will carry the torch.