TUCSONTV LAND – There's a lot to be said for a little basic durability.

In everyday situations far removed from the surrounding strands of a boxing ring, to those that only occur when some devil is throwing heavy punches and connecting to your head, sometimes the ability to simply hold on, endure what may come, and then keep moving forward can provide a foundation for eventual success.

Just ask Norberto "Nito" Bravo.

"It's like a new career," says 35-year-old Bravo of his recent revitalization. "Being on 'The Contender' has really opened a lot of people's eyes. Everywhere I go I'm being recognized, by a lot of people that aren't diehard boxing fans, who don't watch boxing otherwise. It's opening a lot of doors with the exposure. I'm really glad I made the choice to be on the show."

After a series of scorecard disappointments, Bravo, 23-10-3 (12) prior to the series, thought he was just about at the end of his ring rope. After a pair of controversial 2005 losses, to Demetrius Hopkins and Ernesto Zepeda, a frustrated Bravo talked about boxing politics grinding him down to the point of hanging up the gloves.

For Bravo, that symbolic gesture would turn out to be a pleasantly ironic celluloid image.

Bravo decided to keep punching. A questionable draw with still tough Ben Tackie kept Bravo on the fringe.

Then, out of broadcast nowhere, lucrative opportunity played a sweet song at his door.

Bravo was enlisted as one of this season's "Contender" participants, and while the full results are still generally unknown, he's seeing his fistic status grow in both marketability and personal recognition.

"You know, seeing myself on TV, I'm kind of amazed," reflects Bravo. "It took a show like this to really give my career that jump it needed. It's kind of funny seeing myself on a [reality] show like that, but I'm happy the way it turned out."

A couple weeks into the series, after Bravo's ESPN spotlight victory over Rudy Cisneros, Desert Diamond Casino hosted a homecoming pep rally celebration. In a crowded sports bar, a couple hundred folks gathered in tribute and curiosity toward the area's first renowned mainstream prospect, after quite a dry spell.

The night air was clear and beautiful. The local calendar said it was a "new moon."

Bravo took pats on the back and posed at the center of group pictures. After the bar room crowd

put a respectable number of bottles away and watched this week's "The Contender" episode, there was more applause for the hometown hero. Desert Diamond gave out nice publicity photos to the fans.

Generally reserved, Bravo looked appreciatively sheepish as he stood next to a glossy poster of himself; signing autographs next to wall-sized murals of Oscar de la Hoya and Sugar Ray Leonard. There was a line of smiling faces waiting for his signature. T-shirts sales were doing ok.

"I was supposed to go try out for the first season but an uncle of mine passed away so I didn't try out," said Bravo. "The second season came around and my career was kind of at a standstill. I mean, I was boxing my heart out but I wasn't going anywhere. I made the decision on going to try out and here I am. Everything's going great."

Bravo was unable to comment, probably with serious penalties, until "The Contender" season has concluded. Initial filming wrapped in February, leaving two contestants from the original sixteen.

Bravo could talk about Leonard, the promoter of a couple cards Bravo appeared on at Desert Diamond.

"Working with Leonard on the show was great," said Bravo. "He's such a great person. He makes you feel right at home. The big star that he is doesn't come out of him, he just a normal person, and he treats you the same. Being around him was a pleasure. I can say he's one of the nicest people I've met."

Anyone who witnessed Leonard's classy run of around half a dozen Desert Diamond shows probably seconds that emotion. Leonard helped lay the foundation for a boxing oasis. Tucson loved Leonard. Whether his previous association with Bravo had anything to do with Bravo's big break is unknown. It obviously didn't hurt.

Bravo is enjoying some well-earned cheers these days, but the verdict still isn't unanimous. Some prominent Tribal members voiced displeasure at the way Bravo spoke negatively at the time about promotion of his recent setbacks at the Native American casino.

Now Bravo said he felt happy and at home amidst the hometown slot machines.

Anyone who surfs Sportscenter knows "The Contender" finale is live, September 26th at Staples Center. The winner gets an advertised payday of half a million bucks. One way or another, Bravo figures to be there, with basic satisfaction at the very least.

Bravo, an Arizona Golden Gloves winner, started his pro career in 1991. He has nowhere near such a duration's worth of wear and tear. Bravo went 8-1-1, then abandoned the game for almost a decade, coming back in 2001. He has never appeared to deal well with defeat.

"Oh man, to get all this attention around town, it's great," said Bravo. "I'm thankful for my family

and for myself. I'm loving every minute of it."

It's about an eight-hour drive, 450 miles of occasional fear and loathing, between Tucson and downtown LA.

For Bravo, it's turned out to be a round trip reward for his honest, ongoing effort.

Call it KO karma.

Bravo, Mr. Bravo.