If you are in Miami Beach and are looking for a gym where to train seriously, South Florida Boxing is the place to go. It is located at 715 Washington Avenue, in the heart of the tourist area and a coin toss from Ocean Drive, and it is one of the most respected venues in the United States. World champions Roy Jones, Bernard Hopkins, Ricardo Mayorga and Lennox Lewis trained at the Miami Beach location. Even Muhammad Ali showed up once, thanks to his old friend Angelo Dundee.

The start of the original South Florida Boxing is connected to the legendary Fifth Street Gym owned by Chris Dundee; when it closed, Trevor Cedar understood that something was missing in Miami Beach and opened South Florida Boxing. He asked Angelo for some advice and they have been together ever since. As a matter of fact, it was Angelo who told me to go to the gym when I was in Florida back in August 2002. So, I went to Washington Avenue and spoke to Trevor, who welcomed me with open arms. Trevor had me visit the gym and told me his story: he was living in London and decided to spend two weeks in Miami, but he was so impressed by the city that he decided to stay. When he opened the gym he had to go through some hard times, as always happens in these cases, but he kept on working and made it a success; the prizefighters trained there regularly, the gym got in the newspapers and the showbiz people started coming.

At South Florida Boxing, I met famed trained Luis Lagerman and heavyweight Attila Levine, who was described by some American magazine as a big prospect. As it turned out, Levine lost two consecutive fights against Jeremy Williams (TKO 8) and Nicolay Valuev (TKO 3) and retired with a record of 29 wins (23 by KO) and 3 losses. As for Luis Lagerman, he impressed me for his ability to answer to every question in a very detailed way. When I asked him about the shows organized in the Sunshine State, he told me everything about the promoters, the venues, the purses and the fans. In Italy, most of the trainers would have answered: “There are many shows.”

The ability to relate to people is the main reason why there is a strong connection between the boxing and showbiz communities in the United States. Producers, actors, singers and their agents don’t have time to waste and want to work only with consummate professionals. That’s why they gravitate to South Florida Boxing and to Gleason’s Gym (if they are in New York City). It’s the same for martial arts and the other ring sports. I interviewed many American champions and I noticed that they knew how to talk to the media.

In Italy, it’s just the opposite. Most gym owners have no idea about how to relate to showbiz people, yet they don’t want to hire a press agent to get the job done and mess things up every time. Most trainers and fighters are the same – that’s why you never see boxing, the other ring sports and martial arts on Italian television. Of course, there are exceptions. Last week, the producer of the Italian version of “Beauty and the Geek” called me to provide martial arts fighters for the show which had to be taped the next day. I called a kung fu master, explained him what he had to do and he told me that it was ok and that he would bring four of his

students. When we went to the studio, the author, the anchorman and the director gave us some suggestions on how to make the performance more spectacular. The athletes welcomed the advice, adapted their kung fu techniques to the wishes of the showbiz people and had a huge success. After the show, everybody thanked me for bringing such great and versatile fighters. “Beauty and the Geek” was aired on national network “Italia 1” on September 14 and got 3,174,000 viewers. The numbers were so high that “Studio Aperto” (something like CBS News) talked about it on September 15 and showed images of the kung fu performance. Most Italian martial arts, ring sports and boxing people wouldn’t have adapted to the situation and would have been kicked out of the studio. I mean literally, with a big kick in the behind.

Going back to South Florida Boxing, its connection with the entertainment industry didn’t change the spirit of the gym. It remains a classic boxing club, with huge signs like “No pain, no gain,” “Champions never take the easy way out” and “Just go for it.” If you look at the gym’s official website, you will notice that the signs are still there; that’s to make everybody understand that they have to work seriously if they want to reach a goal. This concept has been so successful that Trevor Cedar opened a second gym in Pembroke Pines. Back in 2002, he drove me there to meet Angelo and I also had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Hank Kaplan. The legendary journalist was with a university professor, with whom I had a long discussion about the political situation of Venezuela. I took the opportunity to ask the historian the classic question: “Who was the greatest heavyweight champion?” According to Mr. Kaplan it was Joe Louis, who he considered the poet of the ring. I’m sure that Mr. Kaplan met too many people over the years to remember me, but I want to tell him that it was a pleasure talking with him.

The star of the Pembroke Pines facility, located at 12425 Taft Street, is welterweight David Estrada whose record consists of 18 wins (9 KOs) and 3 losses. His biggest triumph was over Chris Smith (TKO 11) on January 21, 2005 at Mohegun Sun Casino (Uncasville, CT). After that, Estrada lost to Shane Mosley (on points, after ten rounds) and to Kermit Cintron (TKO 10). David is just 28 years old; he will have other big opportunities.

A few months ago, Trevor Cedar opened a third South Florida Boxing gym inside the Aventura Mall, at 2148 N.E. 164 Street, North Miami Beach. I’m sure it will be a success too.