

It's extremely hard to stand out in the talent rich pool that is Southern California. Michael "Lil' Warrior" Franco (10-0, 7 KO's) has been doing exactly that while building a loyal following.

This Friday, at the Morongo Casino, the 20-year-old Franco gets another chance to shine when he faces Jaime Gutierrez (3-1) of Los Mochis, Sinaloa as part of the Golden Boy Promotions card which will be headlined by Jhonny Gonzalez vs. Mauricio Pastrana.

Franco's last fight, an impressive first round knockout win over the very tough Ernie Marquez on the Vazquez/Marquez III undercard, showed Franco's tremendous growth over the last two and half years since turning pro.

A left hand started Marquez's downfall as he was caught and dropped dramatically. Marquez got up and fought on valiantly but was soon decked by a brutal right that put him down and out in emphatic fashion.

"That was my best win so far. He has a reputation for being a tough guy," said Franco, who campaigns in the 115 lbs. weight class. "I was trained properly and ready to go and that was the result."

Franco's growth has been spurred on by having the benefit of great sparring against some of the top fighters in the world, like WBC Super Bantamweight Champion Israel "Magnifico" Vazquez. "Sparring Israel was a great learning experience for me. He's extremely fast on his feet. I learned a lot about using angles," related Franco. "The only way to learn is to spar against great fighters. It was a real privilege to work with Israel. I'd like to spar with him again."

Also a gifted football and baseball player, Franco chose boxing due to the individualistic nature of the sport. "When I started going to the boxing tournaments I got hooked," said Franco. "I like winning through my own efforts. I like having to train hard and seeing it pay off in the ring."

His father and trainer, Al Franco, admits there are pros and cons to being in his son's corner. "On the positive side, I know him inside out. He trusts me more than anyone, he looks me in the eye and always listens to me," said Franco. "One of the cons for him is that I'm not as experienced in the corner as I should be. That's why I have some strong support like Ruben Chavez with me."

"I'd like to get Michael five more fights this year and maybe a WBC Youth Title shot," said Papa Franco regarding the short term plans for "Lil' Warrior."

"We're a couple years away from a world title shot at this point. We'll eventually start fighting more and more experienced fighters after every fight. By the end of this year we plan to put him in against people like Vic Darchinyan or Brian Viloria."

TSS Prospect Watch: Michael Franco

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
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The laid back and affable youngster who spends his time fishing when not in the gym considers his father the most inspirational and important part of his team. "He's always believed in me and he's been there for me through everything. And if he believes in me then that's all I need," said Franco of the relationship with his dad. "We're a great team together. When I played baseball and football he was my coach too. He's definitely the biggest inspiration of all."

Wherever Franco fights his numerous followers are always there to show him support. The loyalty of his fan base is both touching and empowering for the promising kid out of Victorville. "To all the fans who motivate me so much, the ones that make me get up in the morning and run. All I can say is thank you and keep watching me," said Franco. "I won't let you down. I love them for believing in me. I want to get that title belt for them."

"Lil' Warrior's" boxing career is a family affair that goes beyond father Al and his mother Teresa. "I love the way the whole family gets together to support me," said Franco. "They believe in me so much that it gives me the strength to work hard at being the top fighter in my division. They're all the motivation I need."

Tickets for the function are \$125, \$75 and \$35 dollars and are available at the Casino Morongo Resort and Spa or by calling (951) 755-5391 or logging on to www.ticketmaster.com.

Doors open at 4:00 p.m. and the first fight is at 4:30 p.m. TeleFutura will televise the main event at 8:00 p.m. ET / PT.

For more on Michael Franco: www.lilwarrior.com

For Michael's Franco last fight against Ernie Marquez: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yU2z73Lcb0>