“The first time I saw him he was a baby,” remembers Jorge Paez Jr.’s childhood friend, “La Cachorra”. “Maromero was wearing overalls and carrying him in his arms while riding a bicycle.” “Cachorra”, “Little Cub” in English, was eight years old when he first laid eyes on the kid who would eventually become one of his closest friends. They called him “El Raton” at first. The mouse. “He really liked cheese when he was little so ‘Maromero’ named him that,” elaborates “Cachorra”.

“Maromero” is Paez Jr.’s father, a man whose skills won him three title belts during the late eighties and into the mid nineties. The former circus performer also attracted a large and loyal fan base that still exists today. Paez Jr. who’s known as “Maromerito”, “Little Tumbler” in some circles, doesn’t really care what nickname he’s called by. “Whatever,” said Paez Jr. “It’s up to the fans. They can call me whatever they want. I’m happy with either name.”

He admits that carrying the Paez surname hasn’t been easy. “There’s a lot of pressure because of what my father’s accomplished,” said Paez Jr. who has a record of 20-1, (12 KO’s). “You feel like you have to look good every time out. But little by little, I’ve been realizing that my father is his own person and I have to make a mark of my own.”

Paez Jr. looked impressive in dispatching Tomas Barragan in three rounds on the undercard of Israel Vazquez/Rafael Marquez III. It's the best Paez has looked so far. Obviously, changes have taken place. His priorities are different, he discloses. “What drives me the most is my one year old daughter. I want to give her everything she needs and everything I didn’t have.” At age 20, Paez is a father for the first time and the urge to provide is great enough to make him treat his job with the high level of professionalism it deserves.

After a stellar run of 13 wins to start off his career, Paez Jr.’s 2007 loss to Ramon Guevara by TKO in the fourth round was a shocking wake up call to the previously undefeated fighter. “It felt bad. But I thank God for losing at that point in my life. I learned my lesson,” said Paez Jr. “From then on I’ve trained harder than ever and it really made me focus. Since then I’ve been in against tougher guys than Guevara and they can’t touch me.”

“We decided to get serious after the loss in Florida,” said Sycuan Ringside Promotions’ Sean Gibbons. “When he was living at home in Mexicali, he had people coming around and that’s not what he needs in order to get a serious career going. That’s why we made the move to Culiacan and now what we have is a whole different fighter than the one who lost in March of 2007.”

Paez Jr. wholeheartedly agrees. “I’m being trained by Romulo Quirarte and the Chavez team,” said Paez Jr. “It’s very intensive training without all the distractions. It’s exactly what I needed.”

Gibbons and Paez’s Manager, Andy Ruiz, brought the young fighter to Sycuan Ringside Promotions at a critical point in his personal life. “Andy came to me at the worst and best time,” remembers Paez. “It was an incredibly hard time for me economically and he was the one that

pulled me out of that and together we started on this road."

It's a road that Paez Jr. believes is his god-given fate. "This is what I was born to do. I didn't like school. Boxing is my passion. I think of it as my job," said Paez Jr.

His mother Sylvia separated from Paez Jr's father, had her hands full with the rowdy kid who'd sometimes roam the gritty streets of Mexicali until three or four in the morning. "My mom had to be a mom and a dad. She definitely had a tough time with me," recalls Paez Jr. "But she would always come find me wherever I was to take me home."

Although Paez Sr. wasn't in the picture for much of his life, Jr. holds him in high regard and recognizes where his talent originated. "My father has influenced me greatly. Some of the things I do in the ring just come out of me. I don't even think about it," said Paez Jr. "It's all instincts. I get my talent from him."

Paez Sr. is rumored to be making a comeback in San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico at forty two years of age. "I think he's too old for that and I don't think he should fight but he's very hard headed," said Paez Jr. "He's training and everything. I say he shouldn't fight but it's his decision."

When training in Culiacan, Paez Jr. often spends time with the original "Lion of Culiacan," Julio Cesar Chavez Sr., who's always shown great affection for him. "He loves me and treats me like one of his own sons," said Paez Jr. "When I'm in the gym he tells me what to do. Do this. Do that. He really cares about me and I have the same feelings towards him." He also gets a chance to spend time with his good friend Julio Jr. who's in the midst of his own career.

An amazing video of an exhibition match between Chavez Jr. and Paez Jr. has made it onto Youtube.com. It shows both kids at the age of about ten years old in a match that displayed their first glimpses of talent. "Julio Jr. and I were watching it together for the first time. We laughed," he recalled. "We were little kids. It's exciting to watch because I consider it the first step in my life as a boxer."

The Culiacan camp has paid off well for Paez Jr., who's reeled off seven wins in a row and finally feels like he's got it together. "I have the right team. We were trying out different trainers but I think we got all the right pieces of the puzzle," he said. "Over the last two years, things have changed a lot for me as a fighter and as a human being."

Gibbons plans to take Paez Jr. at a slow and steady pace towards an eventual world title shot. "We're going to keep him busy with better quality opponents," said Gibbons, who helped develop talent for Top Rank Promotions before becoming matchmaker for Sycuan Ringside. "Maybe he'll fight for a world youth title by the end of the year. We're thinking of possibly matching him against Pipino Cuevas Jr. next. We're going to take our time with him."

"It's a talented division," said Paez Jr. of the current lightweight crop. "Ultimately it's going to be about who's the hungriest. Hunger motivates everything and that makes any fighter dangerous. And I'm extremely hungry."

Paez's final words? "I want to be a world champion and I'm going to be a world champion. That's just the way it has to be."

For a link to the exhibition bout between Jorge Paez Jr. and Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. click here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHiifqfxmsA