Ran Nakash says it's really very simple. He heads the Krav Maga instructional division of the Israeli Defense Force, and the form of hand-to-hand combat he teaches his nation's military is all-or-nothing. Kill or be killed.

"There is only one way for an Israeli soldier," Nakash said. "You need to live, the terrorist needs to die. That is it. There is no in-between."

Welcome to a different sort of fighting man, the kind for whom a matchup with a gloved opponent with bad, but not necessarily lethal, intentions is a relative walk in the park. In boxing, it's perfectly normal for two guys to try to beat hell out of one another, then at the final bell to embrace and wish each other well. That's sportsmanship.

But for Nakash and another Israeli soldier-boxer, Elad Shmouel, the very real possibility of someday finding themselves in a desperate clinch with an enemy dedicated to the eradication of the Jewish state hardly qualifies as sport. In war, there is no referee, no time limit, no decisions rendered by judges with scorecards and pencils. Survival is the only acceptable outcome.

"Hamas is a terrorist organization. Hezbollah is a terrorist organization," said Shmouel, who recently concluded his mandatory three-year military service with the IDF as a first sergeant, but is leaving open the possibility of re-upping for another hitch. "There's really nobody to talk to like regular people. They are terrorists, and we do not negotiate with terrorists."

Friday night at Philadelphia's Blue Horizon, Nakash and Shmouel attempt to take another step toward what they hope will someday be fame, fortune and bejeweled championship belts. They're not exactly fighting for fun, but there understandably is a lesser sense of urgency than when rockets are falling and the possibility of instant death is tugging at your elbow.

Nakash (16-0, 12 KOs), a cruiserweight from Haifa, takes on Ryan Carroll (7-1, 4 KOs), from Delaware, Ohio, in the eight-round main event while Shmouel (18-2, 9 KOs), a junior welterweight from Tel Aviv, swaps punches with Khristian Garaci (4-5-1, 3 KOs) in a six-round undercard bout.

Promoter Vernoca Michael is billing the eight-fight event as the "Valentine Special Show," but love, brotherly or otherwise, often is in short supply in the Middle East, where tensions always are high and fear is a part of everyday life.

For many American teenagers, going to the mall is all about hanging out with friends or maybe just alleviating boredom. Not so in Israel, where even the most mundane of activities is fraught with peril.

"I was 15 and I was walking to the mall with some people I know," said Shmouel, now 22. "All of a sudden we hear this big boom and we started running. We saw bodies and blood all over the

place. A suicide bomber.

"It's terrifying for a 15-year-old to see maybe 50 dead people, and I don't know how many more wounded screaming. It's hard to describe in words. But that is what our lives are. Danger is constant."

Even courtship and romance in Israel can be more hazardous than Americans might imagine.

"I was at my girlfriend's house in Ashod and a rocket landed right near her house," Shmouel said. "You don't pause, but that is the reality."

Nakash, 30, said it might be better to look into the face of your enemy, to meet his stare with one of your own, and to just go at it in a struggle in which the loser goes down and forever stays down. What is frustrating is when someone is pushing a button and raining death and destruction on you from some distant place. Rockets and missiles fired from long range are indiscriminate killers.

"In the southern part of Israel there have been rocket attacks every day for the past eight years," Nakash said. "Children who go to school are afraid because at any minute there can be an alarm and you have only 15 or 20 seconds to take shelter. That's it. Now, imagine that alarm sounding eight to 10 times a day. That is what our people live with. It is a nightmare."

Nakash often feels like lashing out, retaliating, but the enemy is seldom right in front of him, as is an opponent in boxing. Fights, real fights, at least are honest when you know exactly who you are fighting.

"I don't think there can be peace in this generation," he allowed. "The real enemy is not the guy in Gaza firing the missiles. The real enemy is in Iran, paying money to the guy in Gaza who fires the missiles. So we don't fight the real enemy. This is the big problem. People in America don't understand that."

Well, some Americans do. Friday marks Nakash's eighth appearance at the Blue Horizon, his U.S. home-away-from-home. Shmouel is fighting there for the seventh time. They have become popular figures in the local Jewish community, representatives of a shared faith and ethnicity. And they are fighters, in and out of the ring, which strikes a chord in all national permutations of a people who have endured thousands of years of armed conflict.

"They take me to synagogues, to schools," Nakash said of the warm welcome he always receives from fellow Jews whenever he comes to Philly. "It is great to have that sort of support."

That Nakash and Shmouel have become almost cultural icons in Philadelphia is in and of itself a curious story. Their manager, Raanan Gal, was in New York searching for an American venue to regularly showcase his fighters when someone suggested he contact matchmaker Don Elbaum, who works with Michael and lives in the Philly suburb of Phoenixville.

Elbaum has turned the venerable Blue Horizon into an international destination, previously

importing several Swedish fighters who for a time gave the old arena a distinct Scandanavian tinge. He was aware that once upon a time Jewish fighters were numerous and popular in the country, the best of whom were Benny Leonard, Barney Ross, Jackie “Kid” Berg, Lew Tendler, Abe Atell, Battling Levinsky, Maxie Rosenbloom, Jackie Fields and Benny Bass. And if it once was that way, why not again? You know the old saying: What goes around, comes around.

“Israel is becoming what Russia was 10 years ago when the Klitschkos began to gain widespread recognition,” Elbaum said. “In the next couple of years, I think you’ll see an exodus of incredible boxing talent coming out of Israel.”

So, just maybe, Nakash and Shmouel are the forerunners of the next Jewish boxing revolution. As it is, Elbaum thinks both can make a larger mark of their own, with Nakash closer to the sort of breakthrough that would graduate him from the Blue Horizon to possible gigs at Madison Square Garden or the big casino-resorts in Las Vegas.

Nakash and Shmouel came to Philadelphia earlier than usual on this trip, one of the reasons being that Nakash had an opportunity to do some serious sparring with former IBF cruiser champ Steve “USS” Cunningham, a fellow serviceman (he served in the United States Navy) who could provide the Israeli with a benchmark for how high he needed to rise to become a legitimate contender.

If Elbaum is to be believed, Cunningham and Nakash engaged in a sparring session every bit as spirited as was the recent title bout in which Cunningham yielded his title to Poland’s Tomasz Adamek on a split decision.

“I think Ran is two to three fights away from beating Adamek,” Elbaum opined. “Adamek is tough, but nobody is tougher than Ran Nakash."

“Ran is going to stun the boxing world before this year is out, mark my word. There is nobody – nobody – tougher than Ran Nakash.”

Eight years younger and perhaps not as far along in his boxing development, Shmouel likely will have to wait a bit longer before he breaks through to the proverbial next level. But if and when he does, he said he, like Nakash, will carry with him a motivation and purpose that supersedes that of such Jewish-American boxers as Dmitriy Salita and Yuri Foreman.

“What we are doing, no one has done,” he said of the untrod path he and Nakash are following to what they hope will be a glorious destiny. “You can’t compare it to Salita and Foreman. They are Jewish, but not real Israelis like we are. It is a whole different thing. We are the pure Jewish warriors.”