Being one of the hottest prospects to come out of Northern California has its advantages. For Karim “The Hard Hitta” Mayfield, that advantage led him straight to Manchester, England. Karim Mayfield held the privilege of helping Ricky Hatton prepare for his upcoming showdown with Floyd Mayweather Jr. on December 8th.

Karim grew up in the Fillmore section of the San Francisco Bay Area. He currently trains at the Straight Forward Boxing Club, the hottest gym in the Bay Area, located in the heart of downtown San Francisco. Like most fighters before him, Karim’s upbringing was rough: “I have seen a lot of death and poverty. But my family and closest friends keep me inspired to keep going.”

And keep going he has. Like the Road Runner. After only five years of boxing training, a Golden Gloves championship, and an impressive 40-5 amateur record on his resume, “The Hard Hitta” has built a 5-0 record with all five wins coming by way of knockout. One of his victims was a man named Alejo Sepulveda who was actually considered Roger Mayweather’s hottest prospect until he met the quick hands of “The Hard Hitta” and lost via first round knockout.

“Growing up, I could have easily gone down the wrong road," he said. "But I have been lucky my family has always been there for me. I have a wife and three beautiful children. My grandmother, parents and my older brother have all been my greatest inspirations.

"My older brother beat me up a lot as a kid. He actually taught me how to box. We fought many times growing up I remember trying to attack him with my head down throwing roundhouse punches. He used to hit me with the jab every time. He would always tell me to keep my head up when I punch. Fighting with my older brother helped me become a better boxer.”

Ricky Hatton has taken notice. “You can make some good things happen man. You have an awkward style. It is hard to mess with,” he told Mayfield.

In his defense, Mayfield pointed out the positive reinforcement received from the Hatton statement. “Hatton says I have an awkward style. But to me, awkward means unique. I have a unique style. I come in throwing punches from all angles. If I had to compare it to any fighters it would be Mike Tyson, Prince Naseem Hamed, and Roy Jones Jr.”

When Karim’s trainer Ben Batista received a call from Robert Diaz, the Golden Boy Promotions matchmaker in request of Mayfield’s services in the Hatton camp, they were both excited and willing to take the opportunity. “I wanted to see if I could compete at the highest level,” Karim said. “I also wanted to train with one of the best fighters out there, Ricky Hatton. It was a tremendous honor.”

The one week adventure started with a near bang but ended in a boxing culture shock. “My first

day in Manchester, I almost got hit by a car crossing the street," Mayfield said. "I completely forgot that traffic in Europe goes in the opposite direction."

Unlike Floyd Mayweather Jr. who is notorious for treating his sparring partners like trash, Ricky Hatton did everything he could to make Karim Mayfield's visit as comfortable as possible.

"I felt like the Prince of England," Karim said. "Hatton's people treated us like royalty. They flew us out from San Francisco business class and took care of everything. They took care of the hotel, taxi, food, and also got us box seats to a Manchester soccer game. The Manchester soccer team signed their team flag and gave it to us. It was a great experience. Everyone there was really great."

Batista agreed but was also impressed with the boxing culture in England. "It was huge, you know," the trainer said. "Training with a world champion and being a part of the HBO 24/7 thing. Being around the Golden Boy people was a mega experience. They treated us royally in England. But one thing I realized about Manchester is that boxing is mega hot out there. In Manchester, they stay true to boxing. They have boxing in the school curriculum. I mean it is crazy. The top sport there is soccer then its boxing."

Batista continued with his assessment of the Manchester fight scene. "There are fighting gyms everywhere. It is a good feeling to know that I could pick up a newspaper and read about boxing. In England you can go into a super market and you will see Everlast clothes for sale and Lonsdale clothes for sale. In the United States, it is a shock to find any sports store carrying boxing gear. In America, you see wresting shoes before you see boxing shoes. Boxing is a culture in Manchester."

Aside from the royal treatment Ricky Hatton conveyed to them and the obvious difference in boxing popularity between England and the United States, both Ben Batista and Karim Mayfield were impressed with Ricky Hatton as a person and a fighter. "Ricky is a nice dude," Batista said. "Real humble, but he is a beast in a ring. If he gets a hold of Floyd in that fight it is going to be a long day."

"Seeing how boxing is in England inspires me even more as a trainer. I want to go global with this thing (SFC)," said Batista, who is the owner and head trainer at the Straight Forward Boxing Club in San Francisco, Ca. His goal is to instill the sweet science of boxing into the minds of the inner city youth. Karim Mayfield and Ashante Jordan, who recently signed with Golden Boy, are his greatest prospects. "Karim Mayfield and Ashante Jordan are knocking down doors for San Francisco fighters. They are helping boxers in the Bay Area become recognized," he said.

Karim is not only the SFC's hottest talent but he is also a contributing trainer. "I want all the kids from Fillmore and the rest of the Bay Area to know that I am willing to help," he said. "If anyone wants to come by the gym and train I am here for you."

Questions or Comments email Raymond.Markarian@yahoo.com