BIG BEAR, CA.-An often-used cliché “life often imitates art” never rang truer.

Imagine two young undefeated California heavyweights moving up the rung of prizefight contention looking each other cross-eyed and bent on out-doing each other. Finally they meet in a Las Vegas casino in front of a large crowd and suddenly only one remains with a spotless record.

Now, two years later, Chris “The Nightmare” Arreola remains undefeated top contender and Damian “Bolo” Wills remains a contender looking for someone to slip in front of him. In 2006 they hated each other, now, they’re friendly rivals.

Oh yeah, one more thing, Wills is helping Arreola (25-0, 22 KOs) everyday with mind boggling sparring in the Big Bear Mountains as the Riverside heavyweight prepares to face Florida’s Travis “Freight Train” Walker (28-1-1, 22 KOs) on Saturday Nov. 29, at the new Citizens Business Bank Arena in Ontario, California.

HBO will televise the event that also features feared WBO welterweight Paul “The Punisher” Williams (35-1, 26 KOs) move up in weight again to test IBF junior middleweight titleholder Verno Phillips (42-10-1, 21 KOs).

Let’s get back to Arreola and Wills.

Both of these guys were fighting for several years in small club shows in Nevada and Southern California with one eye on the other. Sometimes they even fought the same guy and would attempt to knock the guy out a round or two earlier than the other.

Arreola and Wills were bitter, bitter rivals. And their teams were just as acidic toward each other as the fighters.

When Wills lost by TKO to Arreola you could feel the disappointment from the Hollywood-based fighter and his team, including motion picture super star Denzel Washington who sat ringside for the fight.

Before the fight words had been exchanged and promises of destruction were made, but after the fight, somebody had to win and somebody had to lose.

“I learned from that fight,” said Wills, who was stopped that night in the seventh round but never hit the deck. “That fight and the loss to Kevin Johnson made me work even harder. I should never lose to a guy like Johnson who slaps and doesn’t punch.”

**Bolo**

In the Big Bear mountains Arreola has been training for weeks in the high altitude with a number of high level heavyweights, including Wills.

Normally, fighters of this quality do not spar with each other, especially after clashing in one of the best heavyweight fights of 2006. But they have their reasons.

Like the motion picture Rocky III, when Apollo Creed offered to train and spar Rocky Balboa before his match with Clubber Lang, in the real life scenario Wills has offered his services to Arreola in the desolate section of Big Bear where only a few spectators are able to see the two rivals clash as if their life depended on it.

“The first time we sparred it was like round eight,” said Arreola who won by seventh round technical knockout against Wills in a competitive bout on November 2006 in Las Vegas. “It seems like that fight is still continuing. It seems like we hate each other in the ring, but outside the ring we’re real cool. We’re like friends.”

Wills was undefeated when he fought Arreola and like the Riverside fighter, he has an ultra competitive spirit in and out of the ring. He also has his reasons for helping Arreola prepare for his next fight with Walker.

“I think it’s good for Chris because I bring a lot more to the table than he’ll see with Travis Walker,” said Wills, who fights out of Los Angeles. “I want him to win because I have a dream of fighting Chris (Arreola) again.”

So they bang each other with a vengeance every day.

“We don’t take it easy. Why should I”? Wills said. “We go at it. That’s what I like about Chris, he’s very competitive also.”

Wills foresees in the near future that Arreola will win a world title and when that happens it will be the Riverside fighter’s obligation to return the favor.

“He’ll get there before me cause he’s in a better position. But I’m hoping he is successful on that journey,” says Wills who plans to make a big strides in 2009. “Then, I want that fight with Chris.”

Arreola likes the idea of fighting Wills again.

“It was my night when we fought the first time. It would be a great fight with two California fighters going at it again,” said Arreola of a second match with Wills. “It’s funny the way it is now. We talk, we play video games against each other, we’re friends, but there is still that competitiveness between each other.”

So every day around noon Wills and Arreola bang the heck out of each other with no more than six people watching. But in two weeks Arreola expects to fight Walker in front of more than 10,000 fight fans at the Citizen Business Bank Arena.

Wills will be watching closely.

I wonder if Sylvester Stallone is watching?

(Part 2 of 3)