Written by David A. Avila
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Mikey and Saul (right) show their stuff on Saturday.

Most people think Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. began boxing in the town of his father the great Mexican boxing legend Julio Cesar Chavez Sr. They would be wrong.

Most people think Mikey Garcia, the younger brother of boxing trainer Robert Garcia, still lives and trains in the city of Oxnard under his brother's tutelage. They would be wrong.

And most people think you need to win numerous amateur titles and awards to become a sought after amateur star. They would be wrong too, especially when you see a boxer like Saul "Neno" Rodriguez come along.

Riverside claims all three fighters above including Chavez Jr. who began lacing up the gloves and learning the rudimentary aspects of the fight game in the rural town of Mira Loma, a suburb of Riverside, California.

Lately, the area surrounding Riverside has become a hub for boxers of all weight classes from

mini flyweights to heavyweights. Chavez Jr. and his younger brother Omar Chavez began boxing in this new hotbed for boxing that erupted in the late 1990s.

A strong Riverside connection led by Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., Mikey Garcia and newcomer Rodriguez takes front stage on Saturday's Top Rank card at the Staples Center.

The Riverside area will be showing off some of its talent.

Chavez Jr. fights current WBC middleweight titleholder Sebastian Zbik (30-0, 10 KOs) in the main event, and in the semi-main event Garcia tangles with Miguel Beltran Jr. and Rodriguez makes his pro debut. Chavez and Garcia's fight will be televised on HBO.

Chavez, a former student at Ramona High, has been waiting for this moment since he became a pro in September 2003.

"I wasn't in a hurry," said Chavez, 25, who began training in Mira Loma when he was a young teen. "There were a lot of things I needed to learn. I'm excited to be fighting for the title."

Chavez (42-0-1, 30 KOs) remains undefeated and has moved up several weight divisions since he first laced up gloves as a pro at 130 pounds. Now he weighs 160 pounds and has grown several inches.

Though raised for several years in Riverside its Mexico that holds his heart.

"I want to win the championship for Mexico," Chavez says.

Germany's Zbik is also undefeated. The current titleholder also desires to make history but for another reason.

"I want to become the first German fighter since Max Schmeling to win a world championship fight in the United States," said Zbik pointing toward Schmeling's win over Joe Louis back in June 19, 1936. "I want to make history."

In actuality, Zbik would be the first. When Schmeling beat Louis it was in a non-title match. Their second fight was a world title fight.

Zbik acquired the title when Argentina's Sergio Martinez took the middleweight crown and was relieved of the junior middleweight title.

"People say I didn't really win the world title," Zbik, 29, says. "That will all change when I beat Chavez. He's strong but I'm stronger."

In a featherweight battle between top contenders, Moreno Valley's Garcia (25-0, 21 KOs) battles Mexico's Beltran (24-1, 17 KOs) to decide who gets first crack at a world title. (Note: Beltran broke his hand, so Rafael Guzman will face Garcia instead.)

Garcia moved to Moreno Valley and trains in Riverside in the same gym as heavyweight contender Chris “The Nightmare” Arreola and junior welterweight contender Josesito Lopez. No longer does he prepare in Oxnard and his father Eduardo is his trainer.

“I haven’t seen him fight but he’s got to be a tough opponent, he’s going to come to win,” said Garcia about Beltran. “Obviously he’s trying to make a step up and if he were to beat me he possibly gets a title shot in his next fight,” Garcia said. “So I expect a rugged fight.”

Garcia recently fought on a nationally televised broadcast and knocked out another undefeated fighter in Matt Remillard last March in New Jersey. Now he’s fighting in Los Angeles.

“I haven’t fought at Staples Center ever and it’s been a while since I fought here in California,” said Garcia whose family moved from Oxnard to Moreno Valley in early 2010. “We’ve been here for more than a year and it’s been good. I’m happy and my father is happy.”

Garcia is a stable-mate of Saul Rodriguez who recently turned 18 and is about to graduate from Riverside Poly High on Wednesday June 1. Three days later he’ll make his pro debut at Staples Center after a successful amateur career.

“It’s pretty exciting,” said Rodriguez, who lives in Riverside, about graduating and turning pro. “It’s a big opportunity to have that same memory in the same week.”
Rodriguez trains under little-known king-maker Garcia who helped his other son Robert Garcia become a junior lightweight world champion and also guided Fernando “El Feroz” Vargas to the junior middleweight world title.

Rodriguez has been a crowd pleasing amateur for many years with his fast hands and knockout power. After years of providing excitement to amateur boxing fans, he’s like a young gunslinger eager to move on to the pro crowds and show the stuff he’s learned under legendary trainer Eduardo Garcia. The man who guided his sons and “El Feroz” has a new potential champion and those at the Staples Center will see him do his work.

“It’s an honor to train with Mr. Garcia and you learn a lot. He has a lot of experience and he’s made it to the top with a lot of fighters,” said Rodriguez who was mulling different offers from various managers and ultimately signed with Cameron Dunkin. “Hopefully I’ll do good things.”

All three prizefighters will be showing boxing fans a taste of Riverside’s fighting style.

Other bouts

Glendale’s undefeated Vanes Martirosyan (29-0, 18 KOs) fights Saul Roman (34-8, 29 KOs) in a 12 round junior middleweight match. The winner could possibly fight the Chavez-Zbik winner later this year.

Female star Christy “The Coalminer’s Daughter” Martin (49-5-3, 31 KOs) fights Dakota Stone (9-8-5) in a six round junior middleweight bout. They previously fought in 2009 and Martin won by majority decision.

“She’s a tough girl I don’t expect an easy fight,” said Martin while training in West Hollywood.

Other boxing chatter:

Heavyweight contender Chris “The Nightmare” Arreola of Riverside is already scheduled to fight again on July 9 in Atlantic City. Arreola (32-2, 28 KOs) recently knocked out Kendrick Releford in round seven last Friday. It was his second fight in two weeks.

San Diego’s Antonio Orozco (9-0, 6 KOs) meets Hensley Strachan (5-8-1) in a junior welterweight fight scheduled for six rounds on Thursday, June 2 at the Orange County Fairgrounds. Orozco had to postpone a fight several weeks ago due to food poisoning but has recovered. Riverside’s Sindy Amador fights Jessica Penne in a flyweight bout. For more information call Roy Englebrecht Events (949) 760-3131.

Three Southern California prospects, Luis Ramos, Leo Santa Cruz and Randy Caballero fight on Friday, June 3 at Fantasy Springs Casino in Indio. Ramos (18-0) fights Francisco Lorenzo (36-9) in a lightweight bout set for eight rounds. Santa Cruz (15-0-1) faces Puerto Rico’s Jose Lopez (39-9-2) and Coachella’s Caballero is scheduled for a six round bout. For more information (800) 827-2946.

Cruiserweight Anatoliy Dudchenko (11-2, 8 KOs) fights Michael Simms (21-13-2, 13 KOs) in an eight round contest on Friday, June 3 at the Warner Center Marriott in Woodland Hills. For more information call Art of Boxing Promotions (626) 388-8888.

Undefeated bantamweight Abner Mares (21-0-1, 13 KOs) will fight IBF bantamweight titleholder Joseph “King Kong” Agbeko (28-2, 22 KOs) in the finals of the Showtime Bantamweight Tournament on August 13. No site has been determined. Agbeko was forced to back out last month when he suffered a back injury.

Omar Chavez (26-0-1, 19 KOs), the younger brother of Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., knocked out Genaro Trazancos (22-15-1, 13 KOs) at 56 seconds of the fourth round of a welterweight bout in Mexicali on Saturday. Chavez, who formerly lived in Riverside, is 21 years old.

Costa Rica’s junior lightweight prospect Bryan Vazquez (26-0, 14 KOs) knocked out Nicaragua’s Michael Carrero (10-15-2) in the first round of a scheduled 10 round contest. Vazquez, 23, fights out of San Jose, Costa Rica.

Germany’s Christina Hammer (10-0, 7 KOs) won the battle of undefeated middleweights by decision over Sweden’s Maria Lindberg (5-1-2) after 10 rounds. The world title unification bout took place in the Czech Republic on Saturday. Hammer now has the WBO and WBF middleweight titles.

Heavyweight Franklin Lawrence (15-2-2, 10 KOs) stopped Jason Gavern (20-8-4) at the end of the seventh round by knockout. The fight took place in Dover, Delaware on Friday night. In a female junior lightweight bout Ronica Jeffrey (7-0) handed Elizabeth Sherman (3-1) her first pro loss after four rounds.

WBO lightweight titleholder Erin McGowan (14-0, 7 KOs) defends against Amy Johnson (7-2-3) on Friday, June 3 in Mt. Claremont, Australia. McGowan, 30, is making her first title defense. Johnson fights out of Edmonton, Canada.

Former super middleweight world champion Mikkel Kessler (43-2, 32 KOs) fights Mehdi Bouadla (22-3, 10 KOs) in a 12 round super middleweight bout on Saturday, June 4, in Copenhagen, Denmark .

Marco Antonio Rubio (50-5-1, 43 KOs), who recently upset Canada's David Lemieux by knockout, is set to fight Ricardo Ramallo (11-3-1) in a super middleweight match on Saturday, June 4, in Mexico City.

Undefeated Andy Murray (24-0, 12 KOs) clashes with Gavin Rees (34-1, 26 KOs) in a 12 round bout for the vacant EBU lightweight title on Saturday, June 4. The lightweight title match takes place in Cardiff, Wales.

WBC super middleweight titleholder Carl Froch (27-1, 20 KOs) of Great Britain meets former light heavyweight world champion Glen Johnson (51-14-2, 35 KOs) in the semi-finals of the Super Six Super Middleweight tournament. The contest takes place Saturday, June 4 in Atlantic City. The winner meets WBA super middleweight titleholder Andre Ward who beat Arthur Abraham decisively two weeks ago.

Fights on television

Fri. 11:30 p.m., Leo Santa Cruz (15-0-1) vs. Jose Lopez (39-9-2).

Sat. 9 p.m., Carl Froch (27-1) vs. Glen Johnson (51-14-2).

Sat. HBO, 10 p.m., Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. (42-0-1) vs. Sebastian Zbik (30-0).

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