

S. Utah boxers head for July 22-24 National Golden Gloves in Mesquite

As a juvenile justice services worker in St. George, Utah, Paki Tiatia works the graveyard shift before heading home to get his nephews Askete Alofipo and Shaq Tiatia and son, Pano, ready for their next performance as amateur boxers.

The teenage boys are working extra hard preparing for the National Junior Golden Gloves Boxing Championship July 22-24 at the CasaBlanca Event Center in Mesquite, Nev. where more than 400 fighters from all over the nation will compete.

Once he arrives home, Paki gets the boys ready for a workout that includes about two hours of road work and time in the gym during the morning hours before repeating the exercise in the evening hours.

“This is a big event,” said the elder Tiatia, who at 37 trains the boys at New Beginnings Academy at his home in St. George. “If you’re going to win in Mesquite, you had better be ready.”

Both boys are 3.0 students, so their dedication is evident by their grades and their performance in the ring. In addition, they are both involved in football one at Pine View Middle School and the other at Pine View High School in St. George.

Shaq has been fighting for five years. At 5-foot-9 and 200 pounds, he is a solid boxer in the ring and middle linebacker on the football field.

“He’s a good boxer,” his uncle says. “He is very solid. The only problem is finding fights for him.”

Meanwhile, the 13-year-old eighth-grader Pano combines his ability as a running back on the football field fighting in the 150-pound division of the Golden Gloves competition.

“Pano is now trying to get his left hook figured out,” Paki said. “He is very quick with his hands and his feet, but he has always fought kids two-to-three years older than him.”

Alofipo, 9, is entering his first ever Junior Golden Gloves competition in 65-pound weight class.

“He actually lives in Salt Lake with my sister, but he’s been in St. George training for Mesquite,” said Paki. “This is his first year and he has had just five fights. So far, he has won three of his fights and lost the other two.”

Paki said he sleeps only three or four hours each morning concentrating instead on his job before helping his family members.

“I boxed when I was about 14 or 15 years old in Hawaii,” Paki explains. “My dad stopped me from the game so that I could work and help the family out. I want to see these kids follow through and not have any excuses for getting out of boxing. I want them to have the chances that I didn’t have growing up.”

Paki was away from the fight game until about five years ago when Pano saw one of his boxing pictures.

“Pano told me he wanted to box,” Paki said. “I told him that it would take a warrior with heart and dedication. He said he had that and so far he has shown it with 55

fights and 12 defeats. Shaq has been his sparring partner since they started boxing. Askete now wants to follow what they are doing.”

Tickets are priced at \$15 for a one day pass, \$25 for a two-day pass and \$30 for a three-day pass and may be purchased at the door each night. Weigh-ins begin at 7 a.m. each day, while doors open at 5 p.m. and boxing set to begin at 6 p.m.

Mesquite locals get a 50 percent discount on tickets.

Further information regarding the Junior Golden Gloves event can be found at www.juniorgoldengloves.com, www.casablanaresort.com or by calling Dawn Barry at 702-368-2696.

CAPTION: Shaq and Pano Tiatia of St. George will be competing in the National Junior Golden Gloves July 22-24 at the CasaBlanca Event Center in Mesquite.

CONTACTS: Dawn Barry, 702-368-2696; Michelle Yegge Evans, 702-994-7619; Mike Henle, The Idea Company Public Relations, 702-279-3483.