

Tolleson girl is national boxing champ

by Mike Russo
sports editor

At an age when most girls are still playing with dolls, Ariel Arismendez, 15, decided she wanted a pursuit that was a little less mundane.

She put down the dolls and picked up a pair of boxing gloves at age 11, and she has not regretted her decision.

"My mom was going to try boxing to try to lose weight," Arismendez said. "She bought gloves but didn't use them. They were in the garage and I found them. I really didn't know anything about boxing but I thought I would try it."

She began training with Sonny Gutierrez, owner of Sonny's Boxing Gym, 13765 W. Auto Drive, Goodyear. Gutierrez is a former six-time amateur champion and a member of the 1992 USA Boxing team.

Arismendez has progressed rapidly since starting her ring career four years ago. She has fashioned an impressive 15-1 record with her crowning achievement being winning the championship of the 132-pound novice division at the Women's National Golden Gloves July 10-13 in Dania Beach, Fla. She defeated Teresa Jones of Texas for the championship.

"She's really an open [class] fighter but she fought in the novice division at Golden Gloves because of her age," Gutierrez said.

Now that she has won the Golden Gloves championship, Arismendez has several goals, the first of which is to avenge the lone blemish on the record. Her only loss is to a Las Vegas fighter she had previously beaten.

"That was a good learning experience for her," Gutierrez said. "You can't take anyone for granted."

"We want to go to Las Vegas and beat the girl who beat me," Arismendez said.

(See Champ on Page 11)

Following that, Arismendez wants to represent the United States in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Olympic female boxing competitors must be at least 17 years of age. Arismendez will turn 17 in August 2015, just in time for Olympic qualifying.

"She would have to qualify for the Olympic trials through a regional tournament," Gutierrez said. "I know she'll make it to the Olympics. Girls who went to the last Olympics are not even as good as Ariel is now and she's only 15."

However, before she concentrates on making the Olympic team, Arismendez will compete in the National Police Athletic League tournament in Ohio in October.

"That's a big tournament," Gutierrez said.

Arismendez, an orthodox fighter, possesses several attributes that make her a successful boxer.

"She's a very strong fighter; a hard hitter, so she can fight on the inside or outside," Gutierrez said. "She is very tall [5-foot-7] and knows how to use her reach. She's a good all-around fighter."

"There is not one flaw. I can say she is a complete fighter. I put her in with my best fighters [boys]."

Arismendez and Gutierrez concur that the left hook is Arismendez's best punch.

Arismendez's prowess in the ring and a dearth of female boxers in Arizona has made it difficult for her to get local bouts.

"In Arizona, it's hard to get fights since there are so few female boxers," Arismendez said. "So, I have to go out of state."

The travel requirement limits her to about four bouts a year.

"I have to fight her out of town to get some competition," Gutierrez said. "No girls in Arizona want to fight her."

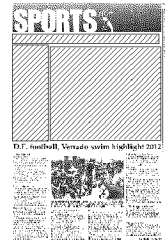
Her boxing hero is Oscar De La Hoya, who won 10 world titles in six weight classes during his 17-year professional career, but she also admires Ana Julaton, a professional boxer from San Francisco and former holder of the WBO super bantamweight world title.

Boxing helps in the classroom

The same dedication and hard work that has produced a boxing championship has also resulted in success in the classroom.

Arismendez, who lives in Tolleson, attends Arizona Agribusiness and Equine Center (AAEC) High School in Litchfield Park, while simultaneously taking classes at Estrella Mountain Community College as part of AAEC's curriculum. She is on track to graduate from AAEC in May and receive her associate's degree in arts from EMCC at the same time.

"She is not what people think of as stereotypical for a boxer," Gutierrez. "She is very smart."

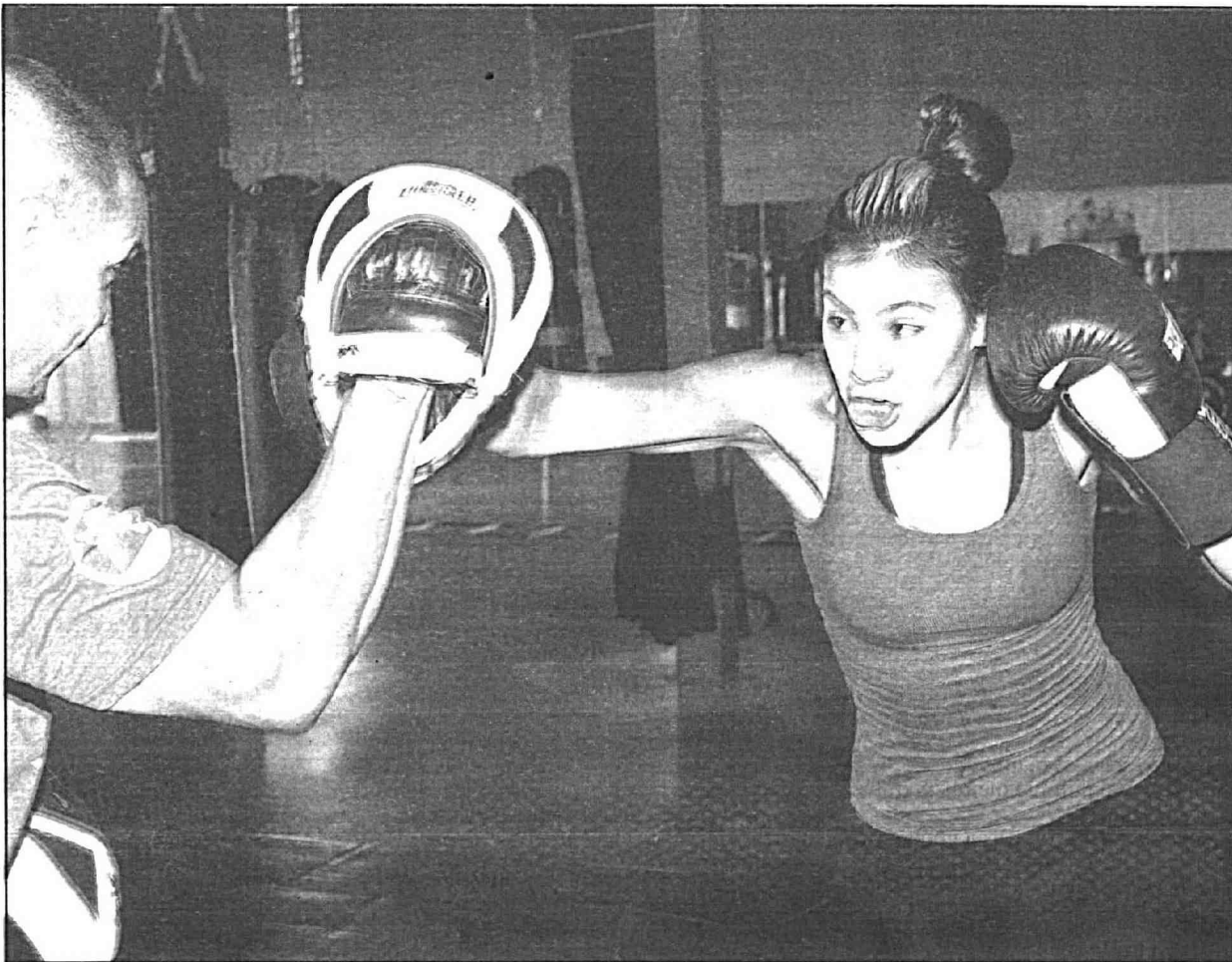


The discipline required to be a successful boxer also has translated into educational attainment beyond her age.

“Boxing builds my confidence,” Arismendez said. “I like the discipline involved. Boxing makes education easier for me. It’s a chance to get away.”

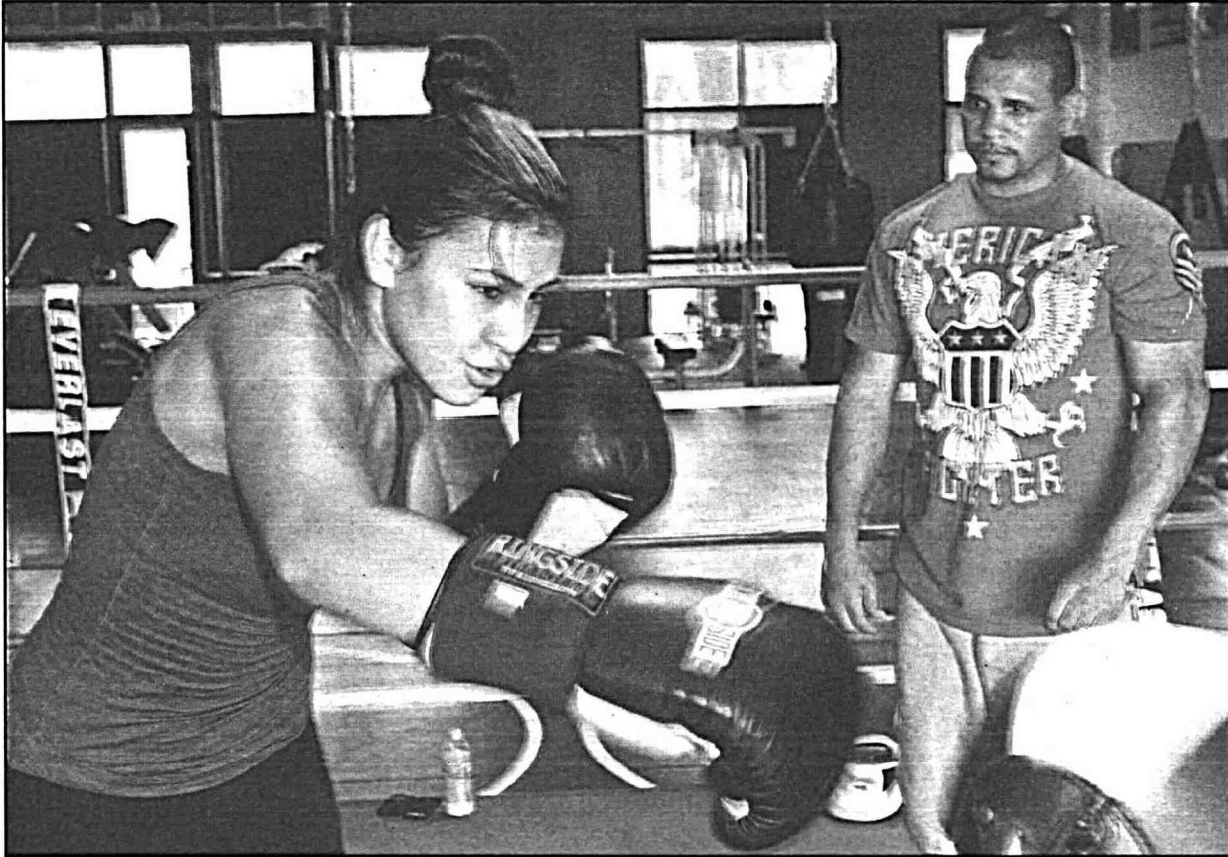
Ariel has not given thought to how long she would like her pro boxing career to last before pursuing another endeavor. She would like to eventually be a pediatrician.

Mike Russo can be reached by email at mrusso@westvalleyview.com.



View photo by Michael Clawson

ARIEL ARISMELENDEZ, 15, works out with trainer Sonny Gutierrez, owner of Sonny's Boxing Gym in Goodyear. Arismendez, who has a 15-1 record, recently won the 132-pound novice division championship of the 2013 Women's National Golden Gloves.



View photo by Michael Clawson

ARIEL ARISMELENDEZ works out last week under the watchful eye of trainer Sonny Gutierrez, owner of Sonny's Boxing Gym in Goodyear.