

Boxing: Remington Park Casino Fight Night

O'Grady helps Zuhdi make switch to boxing

By Robert Przybylo
Staff Writer

In one way, Oklahoma City native Noah Zuhdi epitomizes the modern boxer.

At age 24, he's getting a late start. He tried another sport before deciding to throw his name into the ring.

Zuhdi was a point guard at St. Gregory's University in Shawnee after being nominated for the McDonald's High School All-American team in 2001. The 5-foot-10 guard did not have the size for professional basketball.

The trend in recent years has been for boxers to ply their trade elsewhere first.

But in another way, Zuhdi is nothing like the modern pugilist.

So, he went back to the future.

Even when Zuhdi was younger, he's always had a special connection with boxing. His father, Bill, has been friends with Sean O'Grady for more than 30 years.

And after he missed his call to the NBA, as Noah joked, it was the former lightweight champion O'Grady who helped him find his way.

"I've really learned a lot from Sean, and who wouldn't?"

Remington Park Casino Fight Night

■ **When:** 7 p.m. Sunday, doors open at 6 p.m.

■ **Where:** Remington Park Casino, 1 Remington Place.

■ **Tickets:** Call 1-800-595-4849 for more info.

■ **Story line:** He was once a point guard for the St. Gregory's basketball team. Now Noah Zuhdi makes his professional boxing debut under the tutelage of former world champion Sean O'Grady and former No. 1 contender Buck Smith.

Noah said. "He's got so much wisdom, so much insight into the sport. You would be a fool to not listen to him."

With O'Grady taking him under his wing, Zuhdi's journey to reach the pinnacle begins Sunday night in the Remington Park Casino. Weighing 135 pounds, Zuhdi is the same weight O'Grady was when he won the title.

O'Grady said Noah's ability to understand and listen is the biggest reason for Noah's success.

"You tell him something

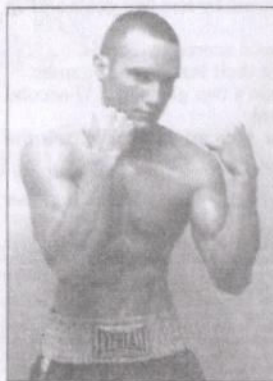


PHOTO PROVIDED

Oklahoma City native Noah Zuhdi faces veteran Rafael Torres on Sunday.

once, and he just knows how to execute it," O'Grady said. "What you find in boxing is someone's soul. From working with Noah, I can tell he has a strong soul."

Zuhdi was originally going to make the plunge two months ago, but Bill's health problems prevented the fight from going on as scheduled.

Noah's father started to bleed from the brain a week and a half before the fight.

"It's made me realize how special everything is," Noah said. "If anything, it's made me

more determined to get the job done."

Noah is diving right into his debut, facing veteran Rafael Torres as part of a six-bout card promoted by CatBOX Entertainment.

Torres has fought 16 times, and his experience is something Noah said has kept him cautious.

"I've been nervous about this, but I'm also really excited about everything," Noah said. "In basketball, there's a team, but there's no teammates here."

While there's no team in the ring, Noah has assembled a top-notch coaching staff.

To go along with O'Grady, former No. 1 contender Buck Smith is Noah's head trainer.

It's that dynamic group that has led Noah to fully appreciate the sport.

"I remember conditioning in basketball, but this is like 10 times as worse," Noah said. "You have to prepare fully each day because if you don't, it might be your last time in the ring."

"The key is doing things the right way. There are no such things as shortcuts. You have to earn everything."