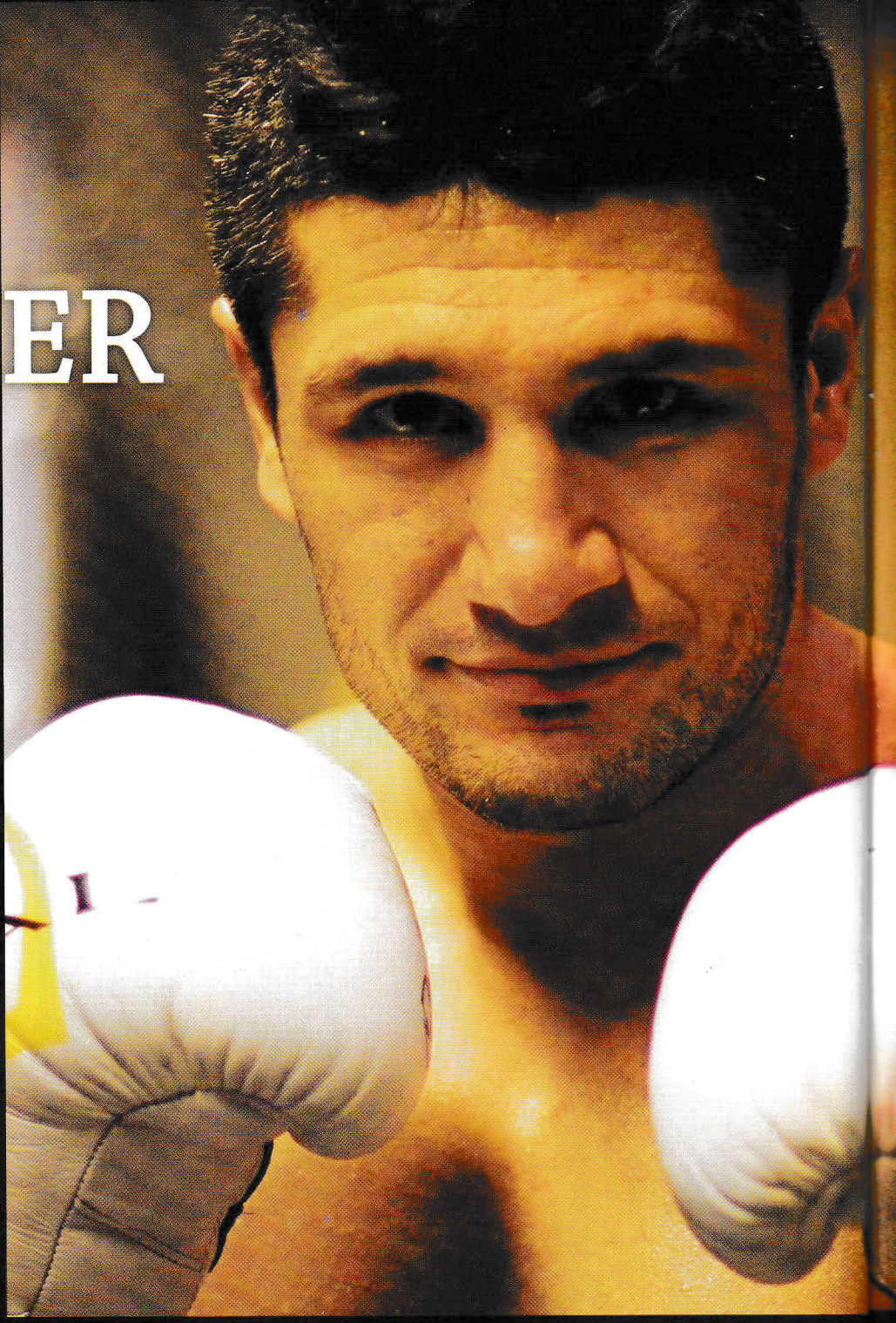
born FIGHTER

AFGHAN-CANADIAN BOXER RISES FROM ASHES OF WAR TO SPORT'S HIGHEST LEVEL

BY **DOUG ROWE**



ARASH USMANEE IS a fighter who has risen from wartime tragedy to triumph, battling into contention for a world boxing title.

Usmanee, a boxer from Red Deer, Alta., fought for the International Boxing Federation world featherweight title this summer in New York. Going into the bout, Usmanee was the underdog and came within a whisker of winning the championship. But after 12 hard-fought rounds, one judge had the Canadian winning 115-113 while the other two judges saw it as a draw, 114-114, allowing champion Argenis Mendez to retain his belt.

Usmanee was raised in wartorn Afghanistan. Facing an opponent with padded gauntlets cannot begin to compare with the other obstacles he has faced in life.

"We would hear random rockets over our head, and you would hear the loud noise afterwards. And lot of times, when it was close enough, we would run and see the hole big enough for semi-trucks to drive into," says Usmanee. "Now when I think of it, it was like fireworks. There was no fear for me personally, you were scared a little bit, you didn't want to die. I get more scared when I think of it now, how I lived as a kid."

At a very young age, the war took a devastating turn for Usmanee and his family.

"I lost my dad in the war," says the boxer. "A rocket landed and shrapnel hit him in the back, almost through the heart, and it was pretty much instant death. I was six years old."

Young Arash inherited leadership responsibilities as the eldest male in a family of five children, a role that he quickly grew into. He credits his faith in God for carrying him through the war and the difficult times he faced afterwards.

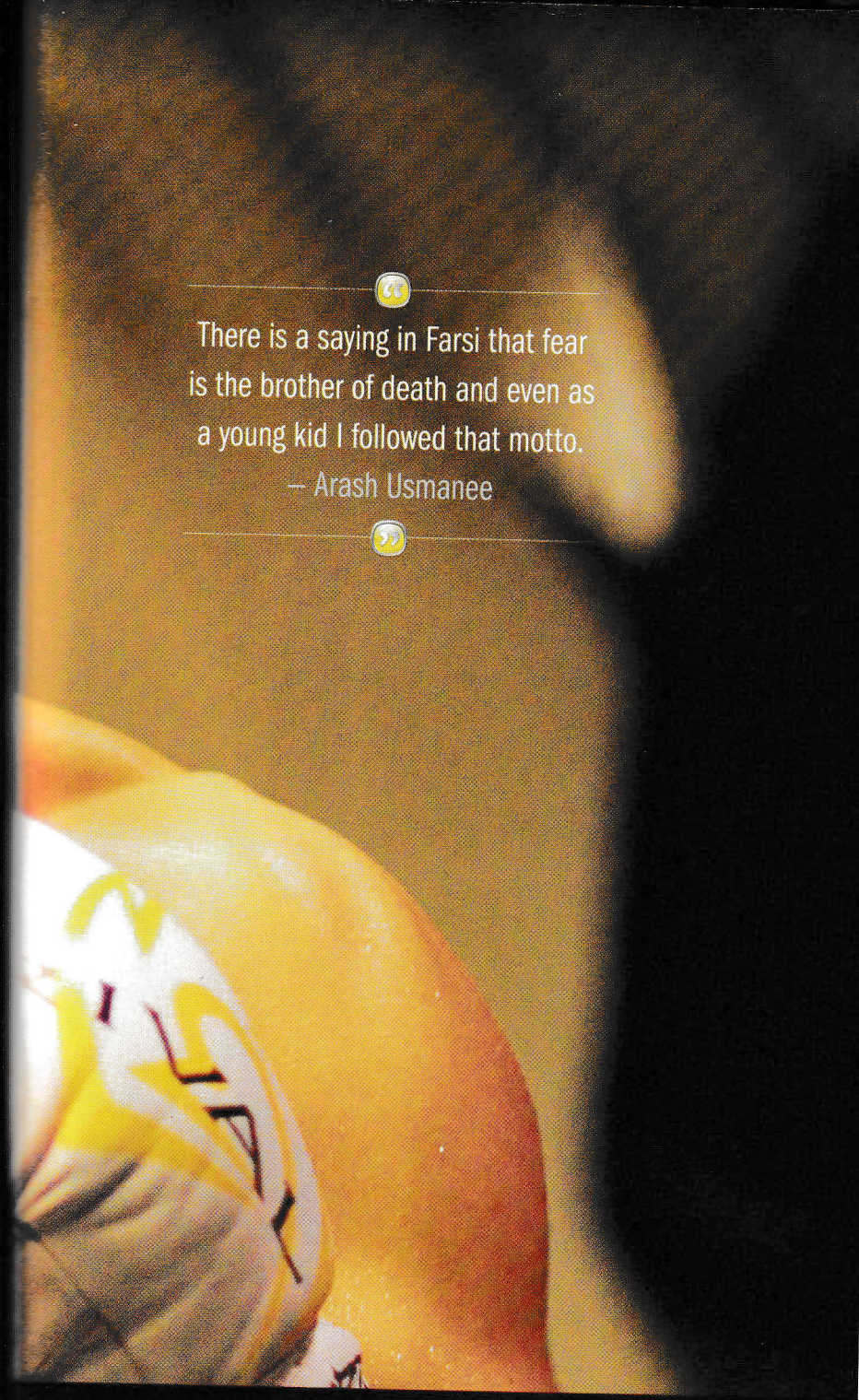
"There is a saying in Farsi that fear is the brother of death and even as a young kid I followed that motto," says Usmanee, 31. "Ultimately, I believed in God and that is where all of my protection came from: God."

Usmanee and his family left Afghanistan and moved to Pakistan, barely escaping yet another dark time in Afghani history.

"I remember when the Taliban rushed into the cities in their trucks with their beards and their guns, and girls running in their skirts. It was just when the Taliban came that we moved out."

At age 12, Usmanee and his family immigrated to Canada. But life did not get

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CARLENS RÉMY, GOTCONNEX**



> There is a saying in Farsi that fear is the brother of death and even as a young kid I followed that motto.
> — Arash Usmanee

much easier for the boy who would win five Canadian championships.

"It was almost worse in Canada. I was always the older one. If a fight broke out, I had the protective personality and would get in the middle. I took care of all of my siblings."

Usmanee is an inspiration for young athletes at home in Red Deer, not only for his success but his attitude towards life.

"I have a list of people who helped get me through the tough times," says pro boxer Cam O'Connell, 23. "But Arash Usmanee — his positivity, even when the worst things happened . . . he is a role model to me, not just a mentor."

Usmanee has his eye on another title shot, and the warrior in him says he will fight anyone, anywhere, including Japan's Takashi Uchiyama, the World Boxing Association champion.

"I am a grinder, I am a road warrior. I will fight him in his grandmother's backyard if that is what it takes!"

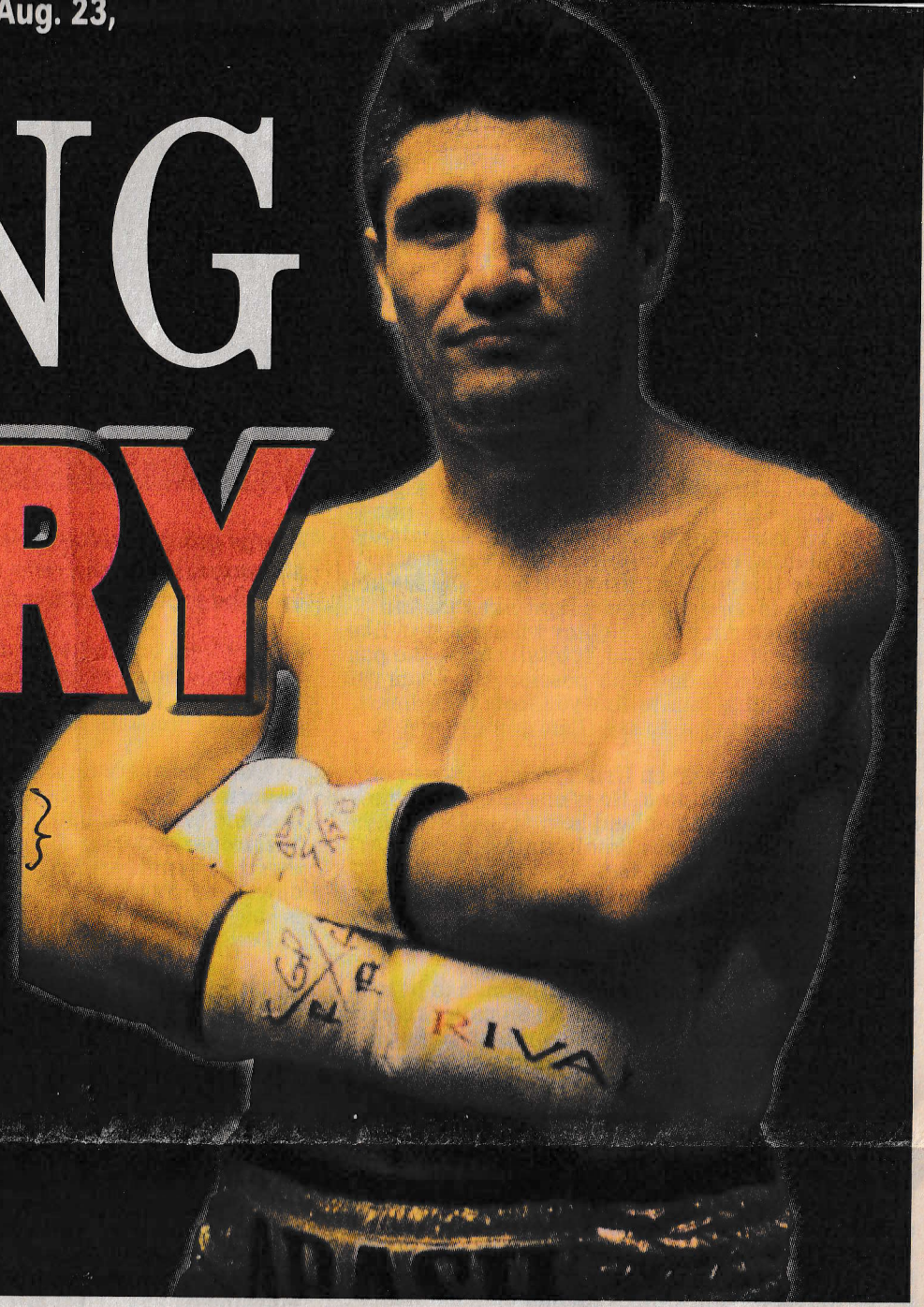
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When Arash Usmanee steps into the ring on Aug. 23, he'll be fighting for his place in

BOXING HISTORY



BY DOUG ROWE
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

On Aug. 23, in Verona, N.Y., Red Deer boxer Arash Usmanee will be fighting for the super-featherweight championship of the world. If he wins, he will be the first man from Alberta to ever achieve that honour.

"History when it is made, only happens once, you can't make it happen again," said Usmanee, 31. "It (the historical significance of the fight) is more important than anything. I am not fighting for money. I want this history and it is the most important thing for me to do!"

Six months ago, fighting for a world championship seemed like a distant hope for the professional boxer. After losing a controversial decision to Rances Barthelemy on ESPN2 Friday Night Fights, for the No. 2 ranking in the International Boxing Federation, the Canadian fighter saw his ranking drop and his dreams fade.

However, in a scene taken from the movie *Rocky*, IBF Champion Argenis Mendez and his team went on public record, that Usmanee was the real winner of the fight against Barthelemy, and therefore deserved to be their next title defence.

"I thank him for recognizing that and giving me the opportunity and acknowledging that I won the last fight," said Usmanee.

Please see **USMANEE** on Page A2

Caterham blat lures sports car

RIVER SAFETY

'There are a

cut of about seven per cent in March.

In response, the university originally proposed a three-year plan, which would have seen its budget reduced by $28 million a year.

But the university officials say they have been in-

will have to pay more, and the quality of i
will suffer," he said. "You can't just take
money out — 10 per cent of the whole bud
not expect to see devastating consequenc

STORIES FROM A1

USMANEE: *Approaching the summit*

Even though Usmanee has won five Canadian amateur championships, is a two-time Ringside World champion, a former North American Boxing Association superfeatherweight champion and World Boxing Council Continental Americas lightweight champion, he has fought in relative obscurity for most of his boxing career.

The loss on Jan. 4 — the first of his professional career — has actually turned into a big win for the former Red Deer Boxing Club fighter. Since the controversial decision, he has received more fan mail, support, interviews, and recognition than he has ever received in his previous 13 years of boxing. The support has included ESPN colour commentator Teddy Atlas, who was vehement that Usmanee was the real winner of the Barthelemy fight.

"The bad thing is I got a 'L' on my record and the good thing is that I have three times the amount of people following me than I did before," explained the boxer. "I want to thank my people . . . My Afghan, my Canadians, my friends, my family, Islamic, non-Islamic, my fans from all over the world. Everybody who is watching me, I appreciate them very much!"

"At times like that last fight, you have no idea how difficult it is to come up from a fight like that and how discouraging it is as a fighter when you win like that and then you get robbed. It totally takes the passion, the desire to follow your passion. But when you hear fans, genuine fans telling you from their heart, that kind of boosts you to say, 'I am going to give it another go.'"

The loss has also given Usmanee a chance to be more than just an athlete. He is now attracting media attention in his homeland having recently been interviewed by an Afghani radio station and the Afghani sport website: SportAf.

The Canadian is extremely proud of his Afghani heritage. Having lost his father to a Russian rocket, he is very aware of how violence plagues his homeland, and he wants to make a difference.

In Usmanee's mind, Mendez is the man to beat in his division. The fighters match up on paper remarkably well. The boxer from the Dominican Republic, like Usmanee, has extensive amateur pedigree, with well over 200 fights, and is a former Pan American Boxing Championships gold medalist. As a professional, the Canadian has a 20-1 record with 10 KO's, while Mendez comes in at 21-2, having stopped 11 of his opponents.

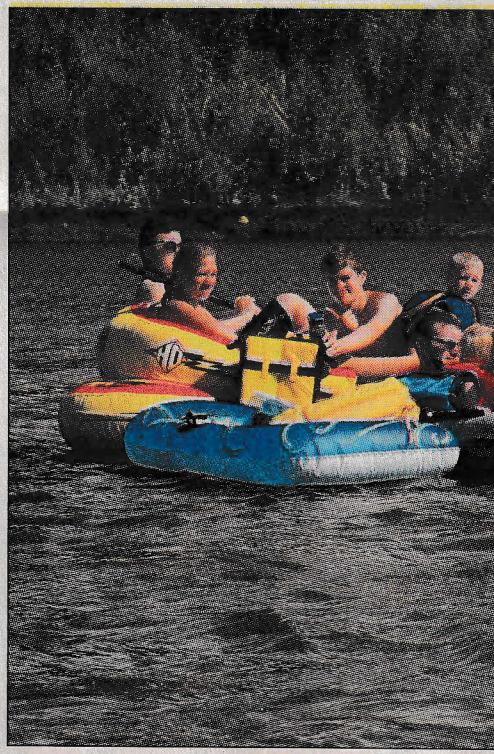
"We are matched up pretty well. Our records are pretty close. He was a high level amateur. I fought a few undefeated guys (as a professional). He has not fought too many, but the last few fights he has fought pretty tough, world calibre opponents. We were brought up the right way and the last few fights we have both been fighting world calibre opposition. Our experience is about the same level."

One advantage the Canadian does have going into this bout is that the world has not yet seen the best of Arash Usmanee. Two weeks into training for the Barthelemy bout, Usmanee injured his shoulder, an injury that would have forced most athletes to withdraw from the contest.

"Prior to that fight, a month and a half before, I sprained my shoulder. After that, I didn't do any upper body work and . . . in my opinion I didn't have enough sparring for the fight. Those are major things.

"Everything is 100 per cent heading into this fight!"

Usmanee has also moved his camp from Montreal



**A large group of rafters relax as they pass
afternoon. While the river usually has m
could be spotted heading downstream.**

to Las Vegas where he is now training wit
world light heavyweight champion Eddie
Muhammed. He believes the former cham
providing him with a different ideology o
of boxing.

"As a pro every fight counts and every
important, but all of those fights point in
tion and to this summit. Everything that I
has prepared me for this moment right no
ing on top of Mount Everest and just abou
down your flag. It is the highest point in m
is very important, it is the summit."

Doug Rowe is a Red Deer freelance writer

SAFETY: *Life-jackets m be carried at all time*

But peace officers have come across bo
ties who have already consumed copious
beer while still in the parking lot.

Since this makes them less than lucid b
getting to the river, these people are usua
with fines, added Dixon.

"You're not making good decisions if yo
consumed alcohol or have heat stroke" —
brings him to the subject of preparedness
there of.

Too many people get into a boat or raft
the clothing on their back, which might co
a bathing suit or skimpy shorts and a T-sh
shoes and life-jackets seemingly consider
tional.

Actually, Dixon said life-jackets must b
at all times. "A lot of people don't realize
you get on a raft on the river, this is consid
vessel and you are supposed to have life-j
you, along with safety gear," including sig
devices.

Being a strong swimmer won't matter if
pulled underwater by an undertow and ge
on log, he added, noting that the river bott

Usmanee brothers make history inside the ring

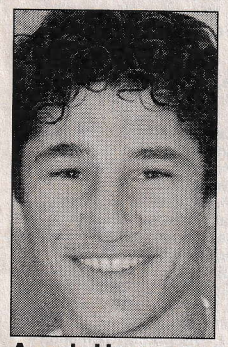
By **DOUG ROWE**
Special to the Advocate

KANSAS CITY, MO. — Red Deer brothers Arash and Sleman Usmanee cleaned up at the Ringside World Championships this weekend, both bringing home gold medals in the senior featherweight division.

There were so many boxers entered in the 125 pound category, it was split it in two and award gold medals in each division.

"We demolished the featherweight category," said Arash.

For Sleman, 18, it was his first major tournament fighting at the senior level and his first international tournament. For Arash, 23, it was a chance at redemption as last year he came home from the Ringside Tournament with a silver medal.


Arash Usmanee


Sleman Usmanee

"Arash and I made history we were the first brothers to win the same tournament and in the same division," said Sleman, a former three time Canadian junior champion.

The brothers each had three bouts on their way to the tournament title.

Arash beat Omaha's Diego Mujica on points in his first fight.

The Red Deer boxer stopped his second opponent, J. Parrum, in the third round.

In his final fight, against Denver's Jairo Delgado, Arash was in a quandary as his little brother was fighting one ring away.

"It was hard for me, I kind of gave the first round away, Sleman was fighting in the next ring at the same time," said Arash. "I'd watch him go into the ring and fight, my head wasn't really there. I was doing things but I really wanted to look over and see Sleman."

After, a couple rounds, the national team member was able to regain his focus.

"The first round I thought it could have gone either way. Second round was pretty close too. Then I started loosening up to, I felt if I kept going with the same strategy, this guy was going to take the fight away. In third round I started jabbing lots and made him come to me. I was making him miss lots of shots, I was slipping and counterpunching.

"I would hit him four or five times flush. I would catch him lots. In the last two rounds I took the fight away."

Sleman won his first two bouts and then faced an American fighter, L. Ramos, in the final.

"The third fight was the best fight of my life," said Sleman. "He was 24, a Mexican-American and kept coming. I was having so much fun, I was so relaxed it was just like sparring.

"My fight finished first and Arash's was in the fourth round, I was waiting for his decision and when I heard he won, I was just so happy,

"I have never felt like that before in my life."

Arash was extremely proud of Sleman's accomplishment.

"Sleman fought really awesome. I told him these guys are older, stronger, so they are not going to give him too much respect. He had to stay out and box these guys. He was a head taller than all these guys.

"He just boxed these guys."

The Usmanee brothers almost ended up fighting each other. When they arrived at the tournament, they were both on the same side of the featherweight division. After two requests from the Alberta contingent they were moved to opposite divisions.

Having both brothers win was a moral victory.

"When we asked the second time we were told 'you guys are probably never going to see each other in the finals anyways,'" said Arash. "We asked anyways and then whipped them all."

This was Arash's fourth gold medal in a major tournament in just over a year. Last weekend, the featherweight won the Multi Nation's Boxing Tournament in Liverpool, England.

This spring, Usmanee won the Canadian national championships, and last summer brought home a gold medal from the Festival Olympica Mexicana Tournament.

Arash has attracted some high profile attention. In September he will again be heading south for an evaluation camp with Hall of Fame trainer and promoter Lou Duva.

Surprisingly it was not one of Usmanee's wins that caught the attention of Duva, but a close-decision loss to WBO Junior Welterweight Champion, Miguel Cotto's little brother Abner, earlier this summer in Cotto's hometown of Cagues, Puerto Rico.

"Arash was robbed against this guy (Abner Cotto)," said Usmanee's coach Doug Bolianatz.

"It was the bout between Arash and Cotto that prompted Bobby Lee (coach of the U.S. National Team) to call Lou Duva. Lou is interested, he wanted to see Arash in New Jersey before Ringside, but he (Arash) had the trip to England."

In November Arash will be representing Canada at the World Amateur Championships in China.

Greg Meachem, **Sports Editor**, 403-314-4363 **Sports line** 403-343-2244 **Fax** 403-341-6560 sports@reddeeradvocate.com

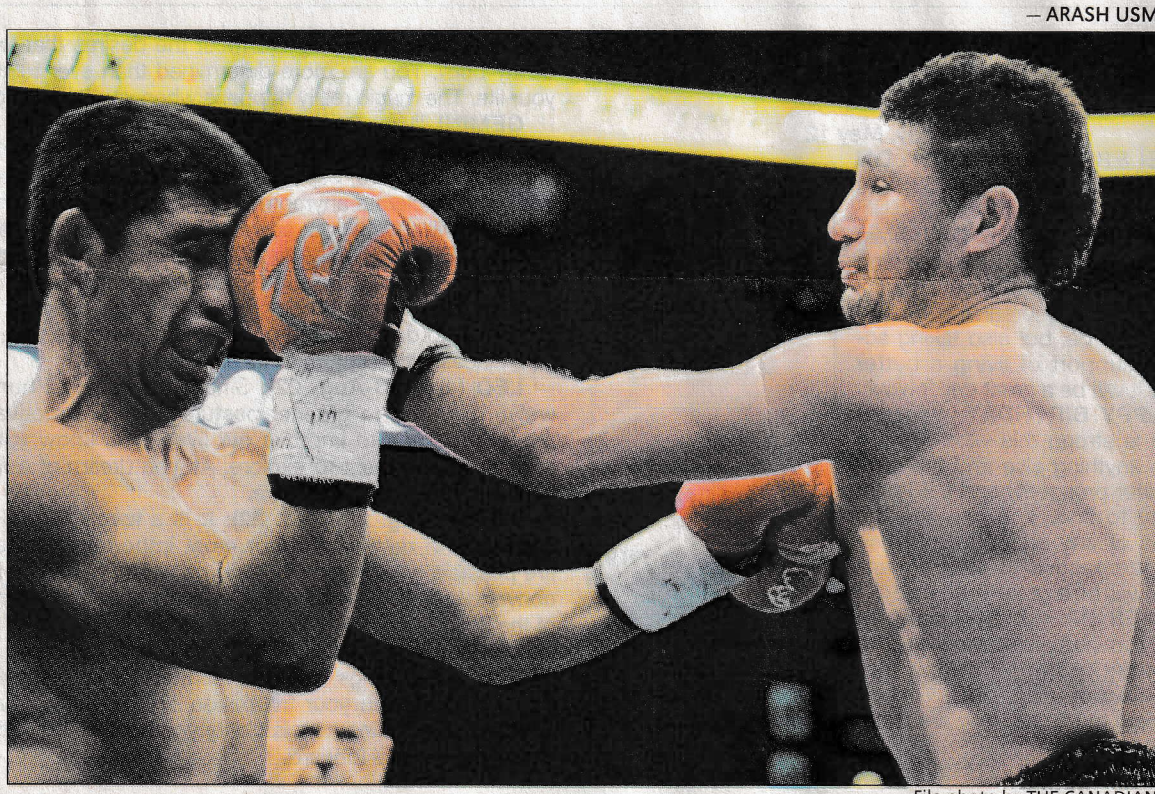
Fighting without fear

USMANEE NOW FIGHTING FOR A LIVING INSTEAD OF HIS LIFE

'FEAR IS THE BROTHER OF DEATH.'

— ARASH USM

BY DOUG ROWE
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE



File photo by THE CANADIAN

Red Deer's Arash Usmanee, right, trades blows with Aldo Valtierra from Mexico during t lightweight fight in Montreal on April 8. Usmanee is now 12-0 since turning professional.

For the average person, stepping into the ring against an opponent who wants to punch you in the face is a terrifying thought.

For Red Deer boxer Arash Usmanee, that fear simply does not exist.

Usmanee was raised in war-torn Afghanistan; his father was killed by a Russian rocket. Facing an opponent with padded gauntlets can not even begin to compare.

"We would hear random rockets over our head, and you would hear the loud noise afterwards, and lot of times when it was close enough we would run and see the hole big enough for semi-trucks to drive into." said Usmanee. "Now when I think of it, it was like fireworks. There was no fear for me personally, you were scared a little bit, you didn't want to die. I get more scared when I think of it now . . how I lived as a kid."

At a very young age the war took a devastating turn for Usmanee and his family, something that would shape him to this day.

"I lost my dad in the war," explained the boxer. "A rocket landed and shrapnel hit him in the back, almost through the heart and it was pretty much instant death. I was six years old."

Usmanee's father was an Afghani army recruit, a respected sheriff in Kabul, and the much respected head of his family. At age six, Usmanee inherited the role as the eldest male in a family of five children, a role that he quickly grew into.

The boxer credits his faith in God for carrying him through the war and the difficult times he faced afterwards.

"There is a saying in Farsi that fear is the brother of death, and even as a young kid I followed that motto," explained Usmanee.

"Ultimately, I believed in God and that is where all of my protection came from, God. As a Muslim you cannot fear anyone except God."

At age 10, Usmanee and his family left Afghanistan and moved to Pakistan.

"I remember when the Taliban rushed into the cities, in their trucks with their beards and their guns, and girls running in their skirts. It was just when the Taliban came that we moved out."

Usmanee's struggles did not end in Afghanistan.

"I had my own personal wars in Pakistan," explained the 29 year-old.

"I was an immigrant and I had to fight. It was never my age, but older men. I took a cricket bat over the head and it split into three pieces."

Already a street fighter at age 12, Usmanee and his family immigrated to Canada. As Canadians, we like to think we are more civilized when it comes to new Canadians, but this was not the case for Usmanee as once again he was forced to defend himself and his family.

"It was almost wors Canada. I was always the one. If a fight broke out I the protective personality would get in the middle. I care of all of my siblings."

When Usmanee turned one of his friends — Arden luszka — wore his boxing to phys-ed class. Usmanee many of his other classm were intrigued and talked a going to the Red Deer Bo Club, but Usmanee was the one who showed up. From on Usmanee did most of fighting in the ring.

Please see **USMANEE** on Page

UMANEE: *Perfect record*

Right away it was obvious that Usmanee had extraordinary talent. With only four bouts under his belt, he fought American Adam Carrera — a boxer with 142 amateur bouts and the Junior Olympic world champion — and lost a very close decision, giving Carrera everything he could handle. One year later, Usmanee was the Canadian national youth champion.

When a boxer gains notoriety, often the negative elements rise up and try to take the fighter down. This happened to Usmanee and he quickly realized he needed a change of scenery and moved his camp to Lodgepole, the home of coach Doug Bolianatz and the Alberta boxing team.

"I was at a crossroads in my life, I wasn't going anywhere," said Usmanee.

The move was a good one. Four national championships and five professional wins later, the boxer was ready to move to Montreal, the Mecca of boxing in Canada.

Since the move to Montreal last summer, Usmanee has reeled off seven straight victories, including winning the North America Boxing Association super featherweight title in December.

Currently the World Boxing Association 12th-rated super featherweight in the world, Usmanee credits his success to the good people who have guided him over the years.

"When you think of boxing, there are more people out there to get you than help you out. For me, I have been blessed with (boxing) families. In Red Deer I had Rob Carswell (head coach of the Red Deer Boxing Club), when I made the move to Lodgepole Doug embraced me as a family member, and now with coach Daniel Trepanier and manager Douggy Berneche in Montreal it is going so great."

On Saturday, in the Rumble in Red Deer card at the Capri Centre, the 12-0 boxer — with six knockouts — enters the ring for his first professional fight in Red Deer. His opponent is Mexican Alejandro Barrera (21-6 with 14 KO's), a renowned 'tough guy'.

Usmanee does not fear Barrera. He fears no man; what motivates him is the fear of losing.

"Fear of losing is such a hard feeling to explain," said the champion.

"It is the question if I am going to perform the way I want to, to get the win. The fear of losing is much more than the fear of man. That is the only fear I have in there."

The NABA champ is extremely excited about fighting in Red Deer and actually gave up two other lucrative bouts — including one in Dubai — in order to fight in his hometown.

"It has been a long time waiting for this fight to happen. I can not wait to get in there and showcase

Usmanee taking on top-ranked fighter

MOVING UP A WEIGHT CLASS ON SHORT NOTICE TO FIGHT ON LAS VEGAS CARD SATURDAY

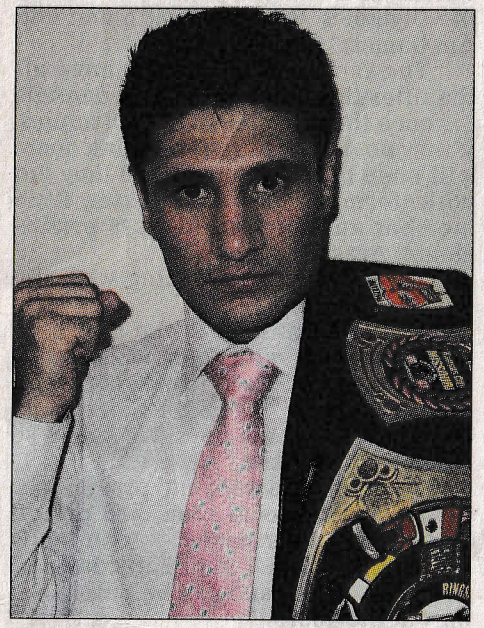


Photo contributed

Red Deer's Arash Usmanee will be part of the co-main event in Las Vegas this Saturday on the Manny Pacquiao-Tim Bradley boxing card.

BY DOUG ROWE
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

For most fighters, stepping into the ring on short notice against a No. 1 contender would be a daunting task.

But for Arash Usmanee, whose will was forged as a child in war-torn Afghanistan, fighting Ray Beltran as part of the co-main event on the Manny Pacquiao-Tim Bradley undercard this Saturday in Las Vegas is an opportunity that he could not turn down.

"I am a warrior, and this is a fight," explained Usmanee, 20-1-1 with 10 knockouts. "It was perfect! . . . I had to decide if I was in shape enough to go 12 hard rounds against a tough guy at a higher weight. I thought about it and talked to my trainer and I accepted the fight."

Beltran, 28-6-1 with 17 KO's, was originally scheduled to fight former WBO super featherweight champion Roman Martinez. Martinez got sick and pulled out at the last minute, leaving Top Rank scrambling for an opponent nine days before the big card.

Part of the Red Deer boxer's motivation to take the fight was the fact that he has been working intensely with a new trainer, Gil Martinez, who replaced Eddie Mustafa Mohammed.

"He is awesome, he is amazing," explained Usmanee. "He is honestly one of the best trainers, I have ever, I have ever seen in boxing . . . He makes you a better athlete, a better boxer, he teaches you to hit without getting hit, and to hit hard without getting hit at all. That is his method of teaching and it is very good and I really enjoy the training. We are ready for this fight."

Usmanee is not worried about the 12-round distance, because even though he hasn't had a camp to prepare for the bout, he has been working with Martinez four hours a day, six days a week, for eight weeks.

He is also not worried about moving up a weight division to take on the No. 1 ranked WBO lightweight in the world, because his last two opponents — Argenis Mendez and Rances Barthelemy — were exceptionally large super-featherweights. Usmanee is also the former WBC Continental Americas lightweight champion, almost shutting out Chris Howard — in Howard's hometown of Atlanta — to win the title.

The former five-time Canadian amateur champion sees his bout for the WBO NABO lightweight championship — on HBO pay-per-view from the MGM Grand in Las Vegas — as a tremendous battle of wills.

"He is a Mexican, he is a tough guy. He moves forward, he hits hard and takes a good shot," explained Usmanee. "When you look at my style, I am pretty much like a Mexican. It is going to be a clash, like a tsunami and a hurricane colliding."

The similarity between the two fighters goes beyond just style, both are 32 years old, both five-foot-eight, and both experienced controversial draws against world champions in their last fights — Beltran with a draw against WBO lightweight champion Ricky Burns last September, and Usmanee against WBA superfeatherweight champion Mendez, in August.

"They know very well what they are getting into," said Usmanee. "They took their time deciding on whether or not to take the bout. They know, and they will come prepared. I think they know that I am a more difficult fight for them than Martinez."

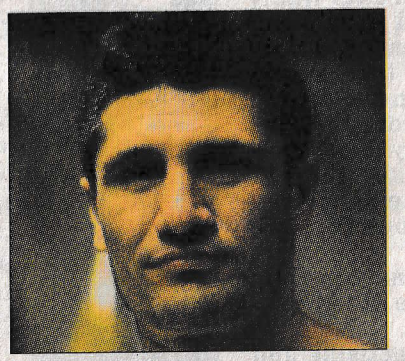
Doug Rowe is a Red Deer freelance writer

Usmanee battled IBF champion to a draw

Red Deer Boxing Club product Arash Usmanee nearly became a world champion Friday. Nearly.

Usmanee took on International Boxing Federation (IBF) junior lightweight champion Argenis 'La Tormenta' Mendez in the main event of an ESPN Friday Night Fights card and battled the champ to a 12-round majority draw.

The fight, promoted by Mike Tyson's Iron Mike Productions, featured the dogged determination of Usmanee versus the hand speed and powerful counter punching of Mendez.



Arash Usmanee

Usmanee was the aggressor through the first five rounds and forced Mendez to defend constantly.

But the champion tagged Usmanee with clean combinations down the stretch and gained momentum.

But Usmanee made Mendez pay when the champ dropped his hands and in the 12th round both fighters were exchanging combinations when the final bell rang.

At the conclusion of the thrilling, action-packed bout, the judges decided that neither fighter was the clear winner.

Mendez felt he had done enough to warrant a victory.

"I'm really disappointed in the decision," he said. "I'm the champion and I thought I won."

Usmanee disagreed.

"It was a very close fight," he said. "It depends on how you judge a fight. I was the aggressor. It could have gone either way."