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Golden opportunity

Winning Olympian visits Hoboken wrestling club

by Timothy J. Carroll

More than 80 kids and parents gathered in the Edge Wrestling club in Hoboken on Friday, Feb. 12 to see Olympic champion Henry Cejudo show off his moves.

At 21, Cejudo was America's youngest Olympic wrestling champion ever at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. At 23, Cejudo is travelling the country with his new autobiography in hand, meeting and training with wrestlers and wrestling enthusiasts.

Edge Wrestling, a youth club above the car wash on Observer Highway, is relatively new to Hoboken, but has quickly attracted plenty of interest.

Since the club began last year, the number of kids coming to Edge interested in wrestling has been more than the crew can handle. In response, the city has created its own free recreational wrestling club that has also taken off. Roughly 40 boys and a few girls are enrolled in the rec team, and another 20 kids train as part of the Edge program.

Most of these kids were able to meet

and train with Cejudo two weeks ago, and they were excited for the chance.

The story of Cejudo's life has recently been encapsulated in his new autobiography, "American Victory," which Cejudo admits in the tome could just as easily be called "American Madness."

The moving book – ghost-written by Los Angeles sportswriter Bill Plaschke – details Cejudo's life growing up in Arizona with immigrant parents, his journey from being used in "human cockfights," his successes on the mat, and his unexpected glory in 2008 Summer Games.

Running through the moves

Edge Hoboken's wrestler-in-chief Dave Esposito said the group had to cut off registration for the clinic and book signing.

"It's a nice turnout," he said. "As a kid, it's pretty rare you get to see an Olympic champion."

Cejudo and several of the acclaimed wrestlers who work at Edge drilled some

basic moves with the kids while excited and proud parents looked on.

Residents Luis and Maria Arzuaga watched their son Luis, 11, from the third floor lounge. Luis joined the rec club this year with no prior wrestling experience.

"He loves it," his father said, and his mother agreed.

"I find him at home doing push-ups with his father now," she said. "It's great. It keeps him busy. They practice three times per week."

His parents also like that wrestling has helped Luis overcome some shyness.

"He was a shy kid," Maria said. "This had opened him up."

Book it

Cejudo said he is enjoying travelling and training around the country.

"I went from being an ordinary guy to an Olympic hero," he said. "I'm getting the chance to eat different foods and meet different people."

"Hoboken's one of my favorite

places,” he added, but admits that he gets the royal treatment from local wrestling enthusiast Dave Barry, the president of Applied Development Company. The company owns the W Hotel and the Edge building.

Barry is a longtime supporter of U.S. Wrestling, and is slated to be a team leader for the national team in 2012.

As team leader, he will be in charge of organizing the team, including its roster and travel plans, and Barry will walk in the opening ceremonies.

Cejudo said Barry has been a great friend for years and is the reason he decided to visit Hoboken.

Barry even footed the bill for some of Cejudo’s books that were distributed to the Hoboken kids.

Cejudo was 12 years old when he started wrestling – even though he was fighting at a young age – and he said the young wrestlers in Hoboken, even though they are just now getting into the sport, still have a chance to go far if they work hard.

“Everything is possible,” Cejudo said. “I was amazed at these kids. It means a lot to me [to visit], and it means a lot to them [to meet an Olympian]. We’re both inspired by this.”



FREESTYLE – Henry Cejudo, the youngest gold medal wrestler ever in the United States, visited Edge Hoboken for a wrestling clinic.



HIT THE MAT – Wrestling in Hoboken has taken off in the last two years – first with the creation of the Edge Hoboken program, then with a free city-sponsored recreational program.



CLUBBING – Seasoned wrestlers worked with the kids at the Edge Hoboken wrestling club, above the car wash on Observer Highway.





PASSING THE TORCH – Henry Cejudo (standing) said he loves Hoboken and enjoys teaching the next generation of wrestlers the tricks of the trade.