

Hammer, Shields offer encouragement to local youth

DAVID WEINBERG Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — Claressa Shields had been there.

The two-time Olympic gold medalist had to overcome her share of obstacles while growing up in Flint, Michigan, much like some of the youngsters who showed up at the Atlantic City Police Athletic League on Thursday.

“My mother was an alcoholic, and my father was in prison,” Shields said. “There were days when I went hungry. But I didn’t let that stop me from reaching my goals, and you shouldn’t either. You can decide what to do with your life.”

Shields decided to focus on boxing and wound up winning gold medals in the 2012 and 2016 Summer Olympics. As a pro, she also owns the International Boxing Federation, World Boxing Association and World Boxing Council belts.

Shields (8-0, 2 KOs) will put those belts on the line Saturday night, when she will meet World Boxing Organization champion Christina Hammer (24-0, 11 KOs) in a unification bout at Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall’s Adrian Phillips Ballroom.

She brought her gold medals and her championship belts to the PAL’s third-floor boxing gym and plans to come back Sunday with even more awards.

“I have to fly home on Monday, but I’m going to come back here with four belts before I leave,” Shields said. “I have three belts, and after Saturday, I’m going to have all four.”

About two dozen youngsters ranging from 7 to 17 years old showed up to meet Shields and Hammer.

Hammer happily posed for photos with them and some of the boxers who were working out.

That group included prospects such as Atlantic City middleweights Isaiah Hart (3-0, 2 KOs) and Isiah Seldon (12-2-1, 4 KOs). Seldon will fight on Saturday’s undercard against Bryan Goldsby (5-9, 0 KOs), of Macon, Georgia.

“I trained for this fight just as hard as all my fights,” Seldon said. “I don’t take anybody lightly. This is boxing, and anything can happen. Everyone has two hands and a jaw.”

Off in a far corner of the PAL, Atlantic City High School senior Hannah McCarthy was doing situps with a friend. McCarthy, who used to row for the Vikings, took up boxing a few months ago as a way to stay in shape and has impressed trainers Donnell Parker and Bill Johnson with her hand speed and power.

But she has no plans to compete.

“You should try it!” Hammer said to her with a smile. “I bet you would do very well!”

A few minutes later, Stafford Township boxing fan John Martin reached into a gym bag and took out a few items for Hammer to autograph.

Hammer broke into laughter when Martin brandished a hammer.

“I was a big Dave Schultz fan back in the day,” Martin said of the former Philadelphia Flyers enforcer, who was nicknamed “The Hammer.” “I couldn’t pass up the chance to meet another ‘Hammer.’”

Notes: Hammer-Shields is the main event of a card being shown on Showtime Championship Boxing.

The show will also include a pair of heavyweight fights. Sweden’s Otto Wallin (20-0, 13 KOs), ranked No. 5 by the WBO, will meet Baltimore’s Nick Kisner (21-4-1, 6 KOs), and Jermaine Franklin (20-0, 13 KOs), of Saginaw, Michigan, will face Detroit’s Rydell Booker (25-1, 12 KOs).

Friday’s weigh-in will be held at Ocean Casino Resort at 1 p.m. and is open to the public. Tickets for Saturday’s card, which is being promoted by Dimitry Salita Promotions, range from \$35 to \$150 and are available through Ticketmaster and at boardwalkhall.com.