

Nashville Coach takes a Road to Antalya for boxers on the Path to Olympic Dreams

On April 8, 30 young amateur boxers will make their way to Antalya, Turkey, from the continents of Africa, America, Asia and Europe, from countries including Afghanistan, Benin, Guatemala, Madagascar, Mali, Moldova, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Slovakia, Syria, Tajikistan and Vietnam.

The “Road to Antalya” is part of a "Road to Dreams" developmental program funded by AIBA (International Amateur Boxing Association, as the International Federation for Olympic-style boxing), which covers the travel and accommodation expenses for boxers from emerging countries for a training camp and the World Championships event. The goal of this innovative program is to assist boxers in developing boxing skills because in their respective countries they may lack sufficient resources to train at competitive levels with other countries.

Nashvillian Christy Halbert is the first US coach assigned to such an international training program. After successful work as assistant instructor in September for the Elite Women’s Worlds program “Road to Barbados,” Halbert now takes the reins as Head Instructor/Coach for Junior and Youth women. “I’m honored, and so pleased that AIBA is continuing to develop women’s boxing. I’m glad to be a part of such an historic event.”

Halbert will be assisted by In-Ho Cheon from Korea. Additionally, seven coaches from the various participating countries will attend the training camp and World Championships event as part of the Road to Antalya program. “I very much enjoy the diversity present in these international events. I love the challenge of finding common ways to communicate, and learning more about cultural differences between participants. I look forward to working with Coach In-Ho again, and getting to know the boxers and coaches from other countries.” When asked about the difficulty of communicating with boxers and coaches from around the world, Halbert says she enjoys communicating through sign language and demonstration. In regard to the host country, Halbert says “I don’t understand Turkish, but I love to hear it spoken.”

Halbert was previously in Turkey in 2005, when she coached seven US boxers in the largest boxing tournament for men and women held in the region. “I very much enjoyed the people, and the passion that they have for boxing. Support for their home boxers, is obvious. I’m looking forward to facing a competitive field of boxers, as well as an energetic crowd.”

The training camp begins April 8, and continues until the start of the World Championships event, which concludes on April 30. The first-ever World Championships for Women in Junior (15-16 years old) and Youth (17-18 years old) divisions has been identified as an important development tool for boxers in the elite division. For this event, Junior and Youth divisions will compete under the same roof. “I’m excited about the event, especially because it’s an historic event for women. I’m looking forward to seeing the level of competition at this first World Championship, and getting a preview of what might be in store for the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games.”

Competition will be tough for the inexperienced Road to Antalya boxers. Favorites such as Zhang Yibo, of China, in 48kg, and Anastasiya Beyakova, of Russia, at 60kg, and Sweden's European Youth Champion Love Holgersson at 64kg, bring a lot of international experience to the competition.

In the Road to Antalya program, history has already been made, with several Islamic nations now supporting women in the sport, including Afghanistan, Jordan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Syria. Syria just completed their first national championships for Junior and Elite divisions. Two of those participating boxers join Road to Antalya for their first taste of international competition. More than 250 boxers from 40 countries are expected at the World Championships.

The development of young women in the sport of boxing is a result of historical gains for women athletes in international sport. For the first time, women boxers will be included in the 2012 Olympic Games featuring three of their 10 weight categories. Boxers ages 17, and over, will be eligible to participate in the 2012 event.

Recently named the Director of Women's Programs for the United States Boxing Association, Halbert will not face her own country at the World Championships this month. The US will not field a team for the event. Several other countries, including Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan will field complete Youth teams. India, Poland, Germany and Romania are also sending large delegations, and are expected to perform well in the event.

Dr. Halbert is the director and head coach of East Nashville's Boxing Resource Center, a non-profit, 501.c(3), organization dedicated to training youth and young adults in the science and art of Olympic-style (amateur) boxing. Boys, girls, men and women train at Nashville's BRC in an effort to compete, have fun or get fit. "We have a diverse population in our gym. We want to help people succeed, no matter their goals in the sport. We have contact and non-contact options for everyone's age and skill level." Dr. Halbert has also written a best-selling instructional book on the sport, *The Ultimate Boxer: Understanding the Sport and Skills of Boxing*.