

Boxer continues climbing ladder of success

Promising middleweight claims silver at nationals

By Steve LeBlanc

CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Dewith Frazer is hardly one to discourage his boxers' competitive drive. But reining that in is occasionally the prudent call.

A prime example of that came recently in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, where his gifted Miltonian — Aljermaine Burnett — had just punched his ticket to the middleweight finals of the Elite Nationals. However, he'd done so amidst a nasty bout with the flu and hurt both hands and his elbow in the process.

To say he was in rough shape would be putting it mildly.

Realizing that his 23-year-old protégé may not have bowed out on his own, Frazer knew he had to step in.

"Aljermaine probably would have fought on... hurt hands and sick or not. He loves to compete," said the Dewith Boxing Studio (in Mississauga) owner and trainer, who would have had two of his boxers in the middleweight championship had it not been cancelled. "It was my choice to have him not fight. If he had, he would have hurt his hands even more and that would

have set him back."

Competing in Saint-Hyacinthe at all was quite a stretch for Burnett, who'd gotten sick three weeks before the nationals and missed much of his training over that stretch. But backing out of the tournament simply wasn't an option.

"I just kept thinking about how much time and energy my coach has put into my development. I didn't want to let him down," recalled the up-and-coming fighter, who's looking for sponsorship to aid his ongoing travel expenses. "That's what drove me."

A premature end to the tournament was no doubt a bitter pill to swallow for Burnett. However, it didn't overshadow the satisfaction of knowing that he could win amidst adversity.

He did that with decisive victories over New Brunswick's Adam Goguen in the quarterfinals and Cedric Langlois of Quebec in the semis.

Recognizing that his endurance might not hold up under the strain of sickness and topnotch competition, Burnett made sure to get out to a dominating start in the latter fight. From there, he worked his jab particularly well and neutralized most

of Langlois' assault with some impressive defence.

"Being so sick, I wasn't able to hit as hard as I usually do, but my jab was working good and I managed to stay calm in there. And getting ahead (of opponent) really helped," said the five-foot-11-inch, 165-pound pugilist, who now holds a record of 23-3 and sports a belt from a victory at a Canada-versus-U.S. card last fall in London. "It was disappointing that I couldn't compete in the finals, but overall I was pretty happy with how I did in Quebec, especially having had the flu."

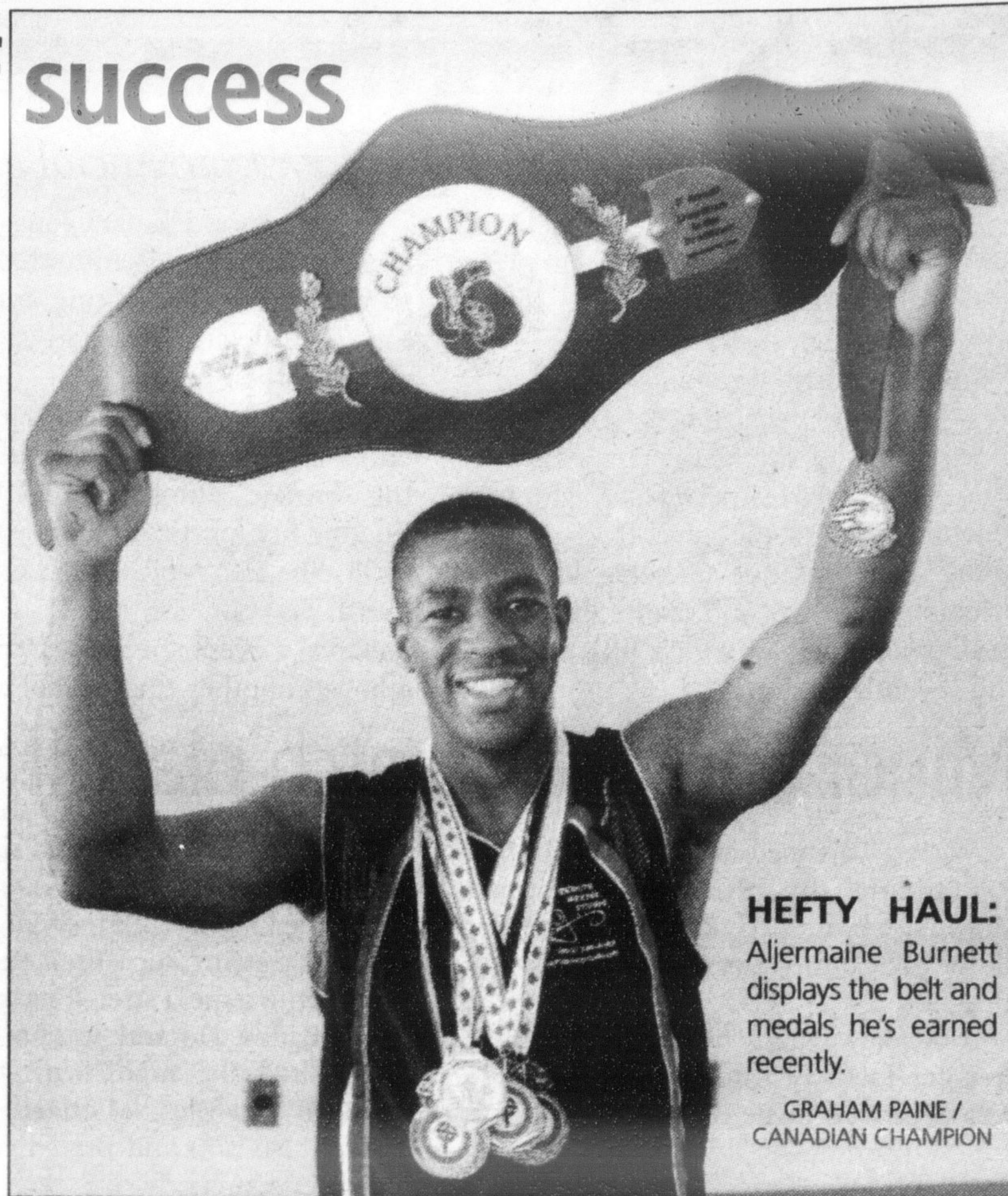
His coach seemed equally pleased, viewing the silver-medal showing as another key stepping stone for Burnett.

"Aljermaine is overachieving and would have won (finals) if he wasn't injured," predicted Frazer. "He's improving at a very fast pace over boxers with a lot more experience. He's a hard worker and loves to learn and compete. That's what's making him successful."

While making great strides in the ring over the past few years, Burnett knows he has room to improve.

"I'm a hard puncher, but if I keep working on my cardio and quicken the pace, I can get more shots in," he said.

Burnett will look to do that next



HEFTY HAUL:

Aljermaine Burnett displays the belt and medals he's earned recently.

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week in Halifax, where he'll be part of a box-off to determine spots for the national team. A successful showing there will go a long way to qualifying for this fall's Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India.

Also high on his 2010 to-do list is

another strong run at this summer's Ringside World Championships in Kansas City, Missouri — where he went 3-1 for silver last year — as well as turning pro.

Said Burnett, "I've just got to keep working hard and taking advantage of every opportunity."

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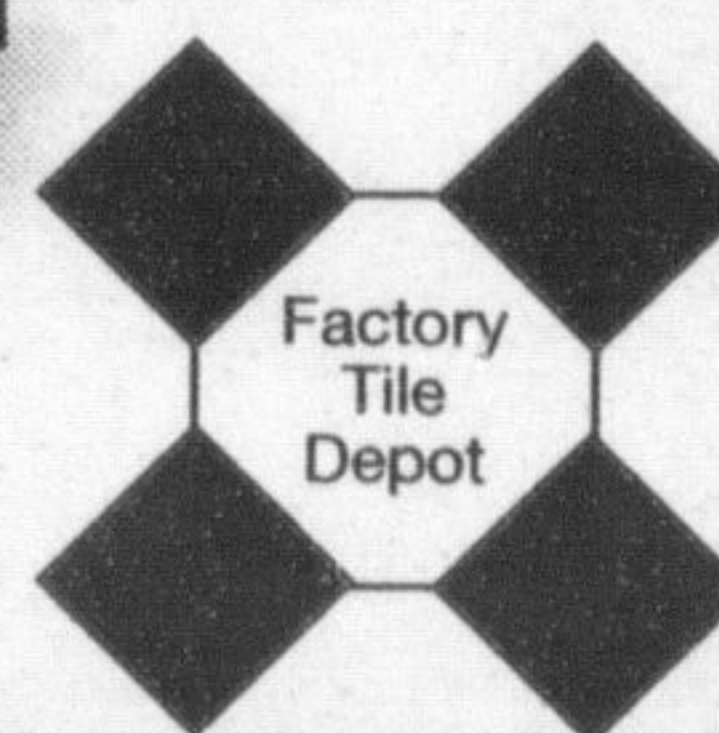
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