

# STAMFORD

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Starts  
pg.



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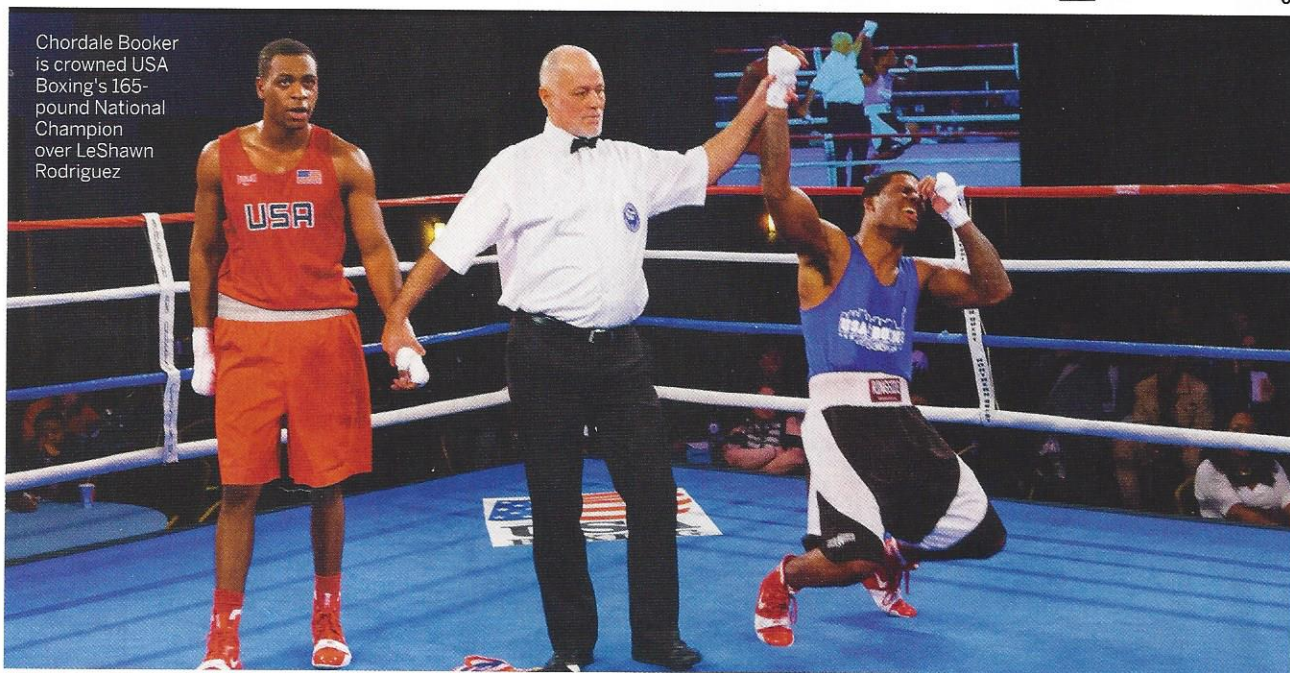
**SPECIAL  
WEDDINGS  
SECTION**

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**ITALIAN STALLION:** The *Figazza* by Riko's Pizza received top ratings from our tasting team



Chordale Booker is crowned USA Boxing's 165-pound National Champion over LeShawn Rodriguez



Chordale and his coach Ahmad Mickens celebrate his national championship victory

## Packing a Punch

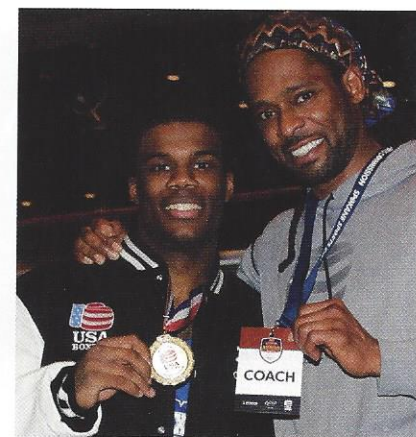
After qualifying for the 2016 Olympic Trials earlier this year, boxer Chordale Booker dares to dream of gold **BY DAN HAJDUCKY**

Chordale Booker's warm-up with trainer (and fitness studio owner) Ahmad Mickens is an intricate dance. He is light on his feet, his rosy calves explosive, behemoth forearms and biceps like that of a *Mortal Kombat* character. He lands deft jabs into Ahmad's padded palms, evades the returns with ease. He then takes to the hanging punching bag. His finesse and deceptive flair fade away as his thunderous blows to the bag—literally—shake fold-out chairs across the room.

This is a frighteningly gifted man on the cusp of greatness. In 2012 he was a two-time Golden Glove winner before turning twenty-one. A year later he won bronze at the USA Boxing National

Championships. And in 2014 he took home the silver in a crushing controversial split decision. After Ahmad consoled him, Chordale vowed: "Next year, I will win the gold medal." It was a promise he'd keep.

At twenty-three, he's a Connecticut and New England Golden Glove champion, a qualifier for the 2016 USA Boxing Olympic Trials, a member of USA Boxing, and the current No. 1 American boxer in the 165-pound weight class. With the 2015 Pan Am Games in Toronto this summer, and the Olympic trials next year, Chordale is poised to take on the world. "I feel like I deserve this. I've put in the work; it's not by accident. But it is indescribable," he says. "I open



my closet in the morning and I see that National Champion jacket and I'm like, 'Wow. Finally. I did it. All this hard work paid off.'

A moment later, Chordale adds: "Just to be among the boxers who are Olympians—Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray, Pernell Whitaker—it's unbelievable to even be considered. I can't even explain what it would mean to be an Olympian. Even the top professionals can't say, 'I was an Olympian,' not all of them." »



Mother's Day  
is Sunday, May 10



GOOD FOR MESSAGES, FACIALS AND  
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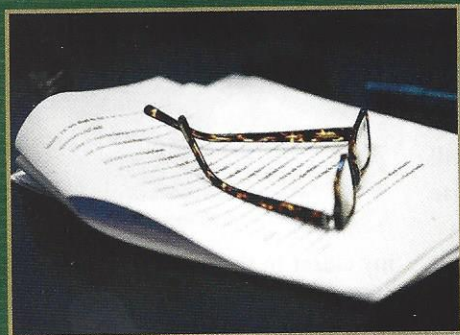
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While Chordale doesn't shy away from discussing boxing, he's just as happy to discuss the vehicle that introduced him to the sport: Ahmad's Revolution Fitness Youth Boxing (RFYB), a fitness program for at-risk youth. Shortly after graduating from Stamford High in 2009, Chordale had a brush with the law, which landed him at RFYB as a condition of his probation. Chordale calls this incident a blessing in disguise.

"I graduated from the youth program and started to train the youth," says Chordale, with palpable pride. "Once I started working with the youth, I felt good, like I was doing my part for the community, for these kids. A lot of them don't have positive role models. And that was my trouble growing up; I didn't have a positive person to look to. This program gives people the foundation."

While Ahmad—also an experienced and successful amateur and pro boxer—realizes that the youth program isn't just about boxing, he saw a hunger in Chordale, and briefly let him train for free. "He would still be there hours after sessions," says Ahmad. "He would keep coming back up to me and say, 'How did you do this? How do you do that?' So I started testing him. From day one, he showed me that level that I was used to seeing. I know what it looks like when you have a goal and you want something."

Despite all of the success that the Chordale/Ahmad team has achieved in more than five years together, both of them are equally motivated by the mentoring support that RFYB provides. "When someone motivates you, like Ahmad did for me, it gives you that drive," says Chordale. "It's not all glitz and glamour; you're going to go through failure. I have that much more respect for the sport, for my position right now, because it wasn't easy to get here. I just want everybody to understand: Go hard, no matter what. [Even if someone] tells you that you can't do it, do it." And that's exactly what he's done. **S**