

Skilled in sweet science

Neil Devey meets the Perth boxing mum who's going the distance

It wasn't Las Vegas, there was no pay-per-view and if anyone pocketed a nine-figure cheque, they weren't letting on. But the same weekend Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao returned boxing to the wider consciousness, a Perth mum did her bit to show success in the sport isn't restricted to the Main Event millionaires.

Jasmine Rio Torto was one of two West Australian boxers to win gold at the national championships last Saturday.

And while Jayden Hansen's victory in the men's 56kg division should not be overlooked, it was the achievement of the 28-year-old practising chiropractor that stood out on the Gold Coast.

Rio Torto had seven years away from the ring from 2007 until last July as the demands of studying, a fledgling career and marriage and starting a family dominated her schedule.

An "all or nothing" kind of woman, the former athletics and taekwondo competitor says she didn't want to waste the time of her coach and uncle Pat Devellerez by not being able to give 100 per cent.

During her absence, women's boxing blossomed, culminating in its introduction into the 2012 Olympics where the likes of Ireland's Katie Taylor and Nicola Adams, of England, became national heroes. It was thinking ahead to the Rio Games four years later that rekindled her interest.

"Female boxing was introduced into the Olympics and that was the goal (reaching the 2016 Games) that sparked the interest again," Rio Torto said.

"Boxing was definitely not as big when I started as it is now. I was 16 or 17 when I started training with my uncle and I was 18 when I had my first fight.

"But it was quite hard to get any fights back then.

"Even now people are shocked that you are doing boxing.

"But once you are in the gym, everyone — boys and girls — are equal.

"We just complain a little bit more."

The popularity of women's boxing in WA has grown rapidly in the past five years and so has the quality. In 2012, Naomi Fischer-Rasmussen became Australia's first woman to box at an Olympics, while 19-year-old Caitlin Parker, who took silver at the nationals last week, won medals at the youth world championships and Youth Olympics last year.

Despite their success, there are more than a few diehards who would still rather not see women belting each other.

Rio Torto, Australia's new 54kg champion, takes any concerns on the chin.

"I've never had a problem



Family time: Jasmine Rio Torto, who has returned to boxing after a seven-year absence, with her children Damon and Ciana. Picture: Ben Crabtree



When you are fit and moving well, you don't get hurt that often.

with getting hit," she said. "I don't think I get hit in the face that often anyway.

"If you are training hard enough and you are fit, that part isn't too bad. I haven't really been rocked.

"I've had a couple of black eyes here and there but the adrenaline kicks in and you don't really feel



In the swing: Rio Torto in the ring. Picture: Craig Clifford/www.sportspics.com.au



the hits. Getting back after so long out, it was more fitness than anything else. When you are fit and moving well, you don't get hurt that often."

So what does non-boxing husband Hugo think of her lacing up the gloves again? And would she let her children — four-year-old daughter Ciana and two-year-old son Damon — watch her compete?

"They've seen my fights on video and seen me train every now and again," Rio Torto said.

"They've been to a

few fight nights but not when I've fought. But, yes, I would let them watch me now.

"Initially, I was anxious but I'm starting to get back to how I felt before, where I'm confident I'm not going to get hurt.

"As for my husband, we've been together 10 years now so he was with me when I used to box and he's all for it.

"I even asked him the other day if he gets nervous when I fight and he said, 'No'. I was kind of a bit shocked.

"I thought, 'Oh, I thought you might be a little bit more worried about me boxing'.

"But I don't think he's ever seen me get hurt."

The logistics of living in Morley, working in South Lake

and having to go to Mullaloo for training mean Rio Torto needs more than moral support.

This is where her wider family kicks in.

"My biggest concern has been getting babysitters for when I am training," Rio Torto said.

"All my family have stepped up a lot, especially my parents, my brother and sister and my in-laws. The aunts and uncles have watched the kids.

"That was probably the hardest thing for me, emotionally. I didn't want to be relying on others looking after kids when I'm training.

"But now I realise how happy they are going to other people's houses and getting treated great anyway."