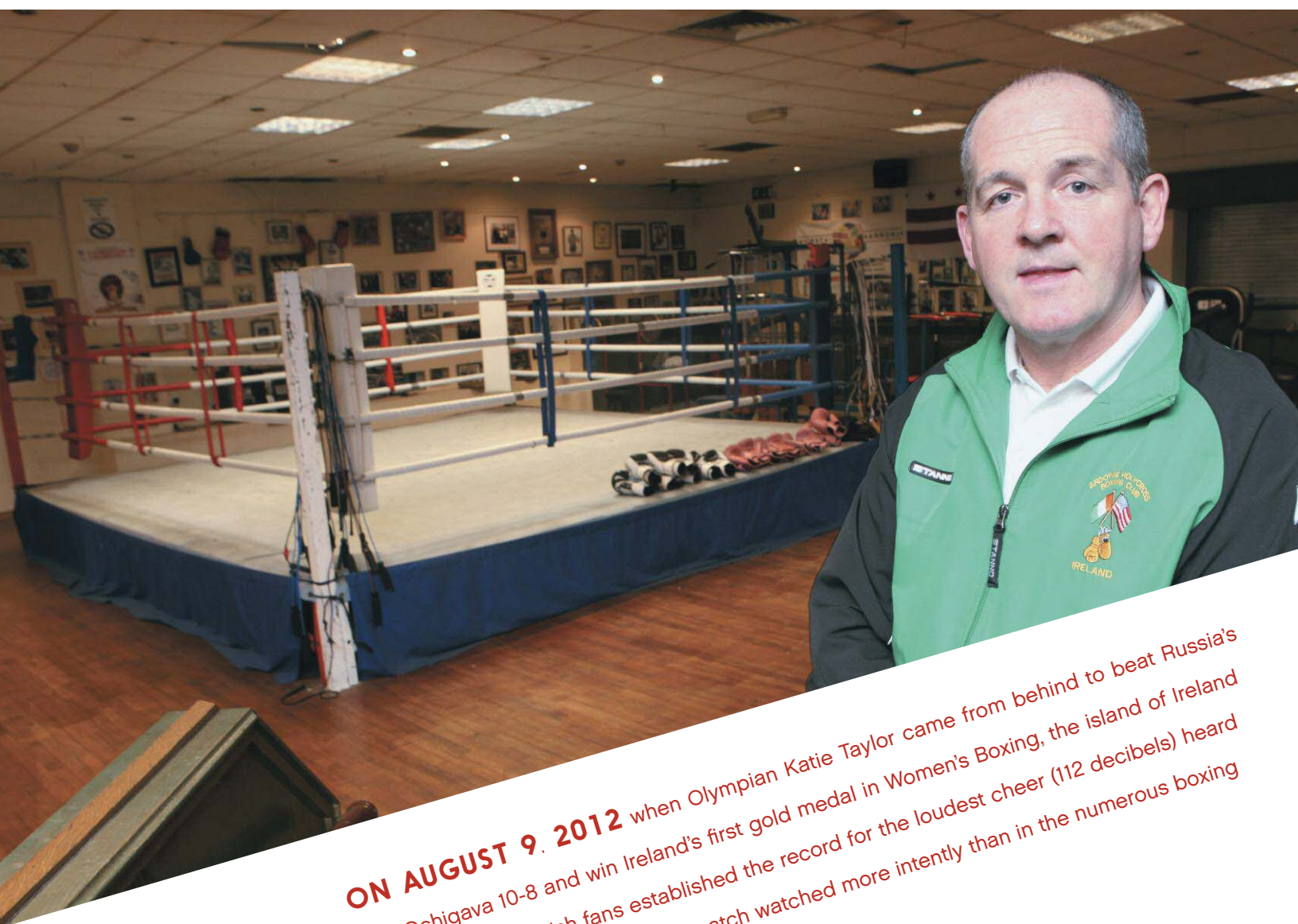


INTO THE RING

The Ireland Funds Are Building Confidence and Community Through Boxing Clubs





ON AUGUST 9, 2012 when Olympian Katie Taylor came from behind to beat Russia's Sofya Ochigava 10-8 and win Ireland's first gold medal in Women's Boxing, the island of Ireland rejoiced and in fact, Irish fans established the record for the loudest cheer (112 decibels) heard at the Games. And nowhere was the match watched more intently than in the numerous boxing clubs across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Ireland Funds have long-recognized that the tradition of boxing clubs is not only integral to the fabric of many Irish communities, but are truly a conduit for delivering positive lessons for boxers of all ages and genders. Many communities that were formerly challenged by a lack of facilities for their youth have found boxing clubs to be an activity that young people enjoy while they learn pride and responsibility. As Eanes Keenan, Trainer at the Ardoyne Holy Cross Boxing Club said, "If they are in the ring, they're simply too busy to get in trouble."

The Ireland Funds are proud to have supported the following boxing clubs:

- Fermoy Boys and Girls Boxing
- Ardoyne Holy Cross Boxing Club
- St. John's Amateur Boxing Club
- Brosna Boxing Club
- St. Fergal's Boxing Club
- Clonmel Boxing Club
- O'Hanlon Park Amateur Boxing and Fitness Club
- Esker Amateur Boxing Club

ARDOYNE HOLY CROSS BOXING CLUB

"Ardoyne has always been one of the most challenged areas of Belfast. We had one of the largest losses of life during the Troubles.

The boxing club was formed by six members of the community who saw the high suicide rates here and said, 'What can we do to help?' So we got the boxing club started to get young guys off the streets and give them something to do. We still have suicides and issues, but we can see this place has made a difference.

We have kids travel to Washington DC to participate in the Belfast-Beltway Boxing Project—which is funded by The Ireland Funds. That experience has been life-changing for these kids. To be able to travel and see communities beyond Northern Ireland has been such a positive thing and gives them something to work for. For them to meet and compete with American kids and be able to see the similarities has been a great lesson.

Funding from The Ireland Funds hasn't just purchased equipment. It has kept kids off the street here. It's been massively helpful and has really allowed us to move forward."

— *Eanes Keenan—Trainer at the Ardoyne Holy Cross Boxing Club*

"We've had over 30 suicides in this neighborhood and unemployment is high. There's not much else in this community to go to, so the first night I came here was amazing. When I first came, my uncle had just committed suicide. Boxing here allowed me to forget about everything in the world and just let me release my stress. If we didn't have this Club, I really don't know where I'd be. I felt like giving up but coming here has given me a huge group of friends and something I've never had before. "

— *Kirstie, Boxer at the Ardoyne Holy Cross Boxing Club*







O'HANLON PARK AMATEUR BOXING AND FITNESS CLUB

"We had our origins in O'Hanlon Park Community Hall, five years ago due to lack of space and growing membership we had to rent a hall from the local Parish in Philip Street. We hold all our training sessions in this hall. We cater for children from seven years of age right through to adults who have reached retirement age. Special needs children, adults with low self-esteem, people who have suffered from obesity, former addicts and anyone who needs a friend are welcome to participate in special training programmes to help them in their everyday life.

To date we successfully competed at local level winning numerous county and provincial titles and are very proud to say we have won two All-Ireland juvenile titles.

In 2010 we received a generous gift from American Ireland Fund Board Director John Fitzpatrick and The American Ireland Fund that was a great benefit to the club. It enabled us to purchase much-needed boxing equipment which allowed us to have more children to take part in sparring sessions without having to share training gear.

Since John and The American Ireland Fund got involved with our club it has given everyone concerned a magnificent boost, to think that a business man from New York would seek to help us build a brighter future for our young children is just incredible. Everyone in O'Hanlon Park Boxing Club will be eternally grateful to John Fitzpatrick and The American Ireland Fund."

—Paul Moore, O'Hanlon Park Amateur Boxing and Fitness Club

"Thanks to The American Ireland Fund we are able to give our members more time to develop their skills in the art of boxing, it is what every coach aspires to do."

—Paul Taaffe, Head Coach at O'Hanlon Park Amateur Boxing and Fitness Club



ESKER AMATEUR BOXING CLUB

"With over 50 members of the club ranging from 8 years old to 26 years old, the club draws its membership from a wide range of socio-economic, socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Esker ABC prides itself on its diversity of members from Irish Travellers to recent immigrants to Ireland, to our large number of female participants.

One of the main disincentives for some of our members joining sporting clubs would be the cost of equipment because of limited finances. Esker ABC has taken on all boxers and provided gear and equipment free of charge to every one of them. The club, which is run completely by volunteers, puts the participation of these marginalised youth as the number one priority.

Esker ABC has several promising female and male boxers at present and we would be fully confident that some of them will participate for Ireland in the future. Notwithstanding this, we recognise that the priority for ourselves is to produce good people and show them that the good values and respect they learn boxing will stand to them throughout their lives and not just when they step between the ropes.

Recently, our leadership visited an American Ireland Fund event at Lansdowne Rugby Club. The generosity of spirit of both Irish people and the Irish diaspora shown at this event and throughout the organisation as a whole mirrors in spirit what being Irish and boxing is all about, that is, respect for others, bettering yourself, standing shoulder to shoulder with the less fortunate, pride in yourself and Ireland and so much more.

With the current economic crisis in Ireland, The Ireland Funds have provided Esker ABC with an extraordinary opportunity to change the lives and outlook of these young Irish people. The work that The Ireland Funds perform without looking for recognition in all aspects of Irish life is one of the reasons that these important activities can take place."

—Ed Griffin, Secretary of the Esker Amateur Boxing Club