

Boxer Duddy has Irish eyes smilin' in U.S.

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Unbeaten middleweight John Duddy's (7-0, 7 KOs) classic Irish blood-and-guts style of fighting and matinee idol looks has helped him capture the hearts and minds of boxing fans in his native Northern Ireland, as well as a growing number in the United States, particularly on the East Coast.

Duddy has followed the same Emerald path across the Atlantic earlier taken by fellow Irishmen such as former world champions Steve "Celtic Warrior" Collins and Wayne "Pocket Rocket" McCullough. In less than a year and one-half, despite seven months of inactivity due to passport problems, the Derry (Northern Ireland) native and now Queens (NY) resident has continued the strong Irish tradition in boxing, already establishing him as one of boxing's most exciting prospects.

"Things were still good back home," Duddy explained his move, "but boxing is a dying sport in Ireland, and there was nothing more there for me. I saw a lot of Irish fighters step across the water who've done well like Collins and McCullough. The reason I came here (New York City) was for boxing knowledge. Nowhere could I learn as much about boxing than working and training in New York City. I don't feel any pressure here being an Irish fighter."

Duddy was born into boxing. His father, Mickey, fought professionally as a lightweight in 1981-83, posting a 3-4 (1 KO) record. He sparred with former world champions Barry "The Clones Cyclone" McGuigan and Ken Buchanan, as well as ex-European title-holder Charlie Nash. John started training at the age of five, made his amateur debut at seven, and won his first National title at 15. After registering a 100-30 amateur record. John's amateur coaches, his father Mickey and Charlie Nash in Ireland, as well as Neil Ferrara in New York City, all advised him to turn pro and relocate in New York City.

"I was lucky enough as an amateur to travel to Russia, Cuba, Romania, America and other countries," John noted. "I knew I had to come to New York City to get to where I want to be."

The McLoughlin brothers took Duddy under their wings and eventually became his manager. The late, great Al Gavin served as cutman for his first four fights, Harry Keith has taken over as his head coach, and John now works out of the Irish Ropes Boxing Club in Far Rockaway, New York.

Unbeaten in his first seven pro fights, all by knockout, Duddy has been somewhat surprised by his KO streak because he had very few as an amateur. "I think I'm a better boxer as a pro than amateur because there was a lot I didn't know as an amateur," he explained. "I'm planting my feet, opening my toes, and punching better. All of the little things I'm learning add up into results."

Duddy hasn't been fed a steady diet of tomato cans, either. Three of his last four victims have been (10-4-1) Ken Hock and a pair of previously undefeated boxers, (7-0) Victor Paz and (3-0)

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Glen Dunnings.

John's long-range goal is to become the first Irish-born middleweight champion of the world since the original, "Non-pareil" Jack Dempsey in the 1880's. "I'm just happy to be fighting at this time," the modest Duddy remarked. "Any fighter dreams of winning the world title. I'm very realistic and don't like shouting too much about myself. You're only as good as your next fight.

"I've been very fortunate. The only sport I've loved since the first day has been boxing. Everything else fell by the wayside. Hopefully, I'll be good enough to be mentioned with the likes of Barry McGuigan and Sugar Ray Leonard. I'm excited about the start of my career."

So are his many fans on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.