A boxing gym is not always the prettiest place in the world, but there isn't always a direct line between beauty and effectiveness. The gym, in all its squalid glory, is the place where champions are built. King's Gym in Oakland, Ca, the headquarters of Andre Ward's training camp for his fight on November 21st, is no different.

Ward is attempting to acquire star status by defeating Mikkel Kessler, his toughest opponent to date, and Kings Gym is where he lays down the ground work.

Inside the building off of 29th and 35th street, the white walls are plastered with pictures of past great champions and old fight posters. Photos of Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Julio Cesar Chavez are placed next to a poster of Foreman vs. Ali, not to mention a huge banner across the back of the room, which spotlights Ward's 2004 Olympic gold medal. There are boxing images everywhere. I scoped the room in search of enough space to place another fight poster and did not find much unused area.

It was both interesting and entertaining walking through the gym as I waited for Ward to arrive. The place has a smell of sweat and old rusty, but perfectly usable, dumbbells. The weights are placed in the front, and the ring is in the back of the room, surrounded by five heavy bags and a few speed bags.

A couple of heavyweights were sparring as I walked in. Funny thing was that I felt that I was the only one paying attention to them besides their corner man. All the other gym members were doing their own thing. There were a couple of guys lifting weights, a young lady shadowboxing on her own, and another young amateur, who happened to be Ward's god-brother, jumping rope like an expert. The sense of the boxing culture and family-like environment was clearly there.

The place reminds me of the part in Rocky III when Apollo Creed took Rocky to Los Angeles to train with the other fighters that had the "eye of the tiger," except Kings Gym was not as dark.

Actually the gym was lit up pretty nicely. Members of the Showtime production team were there to set up for their countdown show to promote the Super Six Tournament, and Ward's upcoming bout with Kessler. As soon as Ward walked in and greeted people in the gym including myself, he was asked to go upstairs into the locker room for an interview with the Showtime team.

There was no Jim Gray, Gus Johnson, or Al Bernstein in sight; instead, Ward was being asked questions by the same guys that were setting up the lighting arrangements near the ring downstairs. He was up there for what seemed like an eternity. One member of Ward's camp said, "I don't know what is taking so long. They are probably only going to use about five minutes of what he is saying."

Meanwhile Virgil Hunter, Ward's trainer, and the rest of the camp were waiting patiently. During

the waiting game, Hunter had a few choice words about the upcoming Ward/Kessler fight. The ultra confident trainer laughed confidently when I asked him if he thinks Ward is going to knock Kessler out. “Let’s just say that my fighter is going to hit him real hard,” Hunter said. “My guy can hit. You have heard what they said. They say that he is a slick boxer. But I think Andre is the strongest puncher in the super middleweight division.

“You see Kessler is a good fighter and he is very good at what he does. But there has been no evidence of Kessler coming out of the box.”

The box Hunter is referring to begins with the way Kessler plants his feet. Hunter feels like Kessler has a very wide stance and does not have much range on his punches. Hunter said that Kessler like to lure people into his “box” in order for him to land more accurate, and solid punches, otherwise Kessler is reaching and tends to get caught. Hunter also thinks Ward will keep Kessler off balance, and he used the Edison Miranda fight as an example.

“Miranda said it himself,” Hunter says. “He said ‘I did not think it was going to be this hard. I spent 75% of the fight trying to find where this guy was.’ Andre does that to you. He is fast, athletic, and powerful.”

For the Kessler fight, Hunter is taking the blueprint of Joe Calzaghe’s attack against Kessler and putting his own twist on it. Calzaghe won an entertaining but one sided fight over Kessler by using his speed and keeping his hands in Kessler’s face. But the Welshman did not use much power. And power is what Hunter thinks will be the difference between Calzaghe and Ward against Kessler. The trainer believes that Kessler does not respect Ward’s power or his chance to win for that matter.

“I know he did not want to come across the water. But he did not feel like he was going to be challenged. At the press conference Mikkel said that he does not think Andre has any power and I was happy because that is going to play right into our hands.”

As our conversation about Ward/Kessler turned into a debate the greatness of Joe Calzaghe, and about how Roy Jones has evolved as a fighter, and whether or not Jones has a chance to defeat Bernard Hopkins, I look to my right and notice Andre Ward shadowboxing alone in the ring. Hunter and I both glance at Ward and continue to talk boxing. Then the discussion returns to focus on the 2004 Olympic gold medalist. “Let me tell you one thing about that guy in the ring,” Hunter states as he gestures towards Ward. “He does not think anyone could beat him. And that is the key right there.”

After another few minutes of going back and forth with me, Hunter walks into the ring, throws on the mitts and puts his young fighter to work. As Ward circles the ring and hits the mitts, Hunter follows him, and talks in his ear after every thudding punch. I cannot make out what Hunter is saying in there, but it was obviously getting Ward fired up. The shots that Ward was throwing were getting harder and harder.

Combination punches, POW, POW, POW. There were other people working out in the gym. But at that time, it seemed like the only noise that could be heard was coming from that ring. And it

was about a twenty minute session with no breaks in between, mind you.

Afterwards, Ward went from the heavy bag to the speed bag and did a few other routines before I had a chance to speak with him for a few minutes. (According to my mind clock, Ward trained for about an hour without taking breaks and was yet to be finished).

Do you work on the same things everyday I asked him? “Everything just gets monotonous. I don’t do the same things every day but things just get monotonous in training. I never really stop training during the day. It is constant. I just want to go in the fight,” Ward said. “I am ready to go to war right now.”

How do you stay motivated?

“I keep myself motivated by what is up ahead. I mean, if work gets monotonous it doesn’t mean that you stop working. Winning the championship of the world, and how it is going to change my life, that’s it right there. That is enough to get me motivated right there.”

Back to Hunter, the trainer stated that Kessler has little chance for victory, and the only chance Kessler does have to defeat Ward is if we see a Kessler that we have never seen before, which in his mind is practically impossible. However, Ward had his own thoughts on the possibilities of a Kessler victory.

“In my mind I don’t think he is going to win even if we see another Kessler,” Ward said. “He is going to make some adjustments. The way he fought Calzaghe is different from the way he fought Librado Andrade. He will be slightly different but at this point, it doesn’t matter. I am putting in the work. I am ready to go to work. I am ready to fight. I am ready to do what I need to do to bring this belt home. That’s it.”

Ward also relishes the fact that Kessler his little respect for his power.

“I don’t know what it is. But Miranda said the same thing. Miranda said that he did not think it was going to be this hard. My most powerful weapon is being underestimated. I don’t know if I am going to be underestimated after this fight. I don’t know what it is but we’ll see.”

About his weight, Ward feels like he is on the right track come fight night.

“I am right where I want to be. You can’t be right there. I learned this from Bernard Hopkins, you have to train on something. You need extra pounds to train on. You have to have some calories on you. You can’t be at 169 right now when you are fighting at 168, it does not work like that. But I am right where I want to be three weeks before the fight.”

Hunter spoke of an interesting note about their game plan going into the fight. He does not believe in his fighter going in the ring with a textbook like assignment to dissect his opponent. Hunter would rather rely on Ward’s athletic ability and instincts to take over the bout.

“There is no real game plan. You don’t want your fighter going in there thinking about a plan

because things change in a fight. There is going to be adjustments. And we have been working together for so long, that we see the same things," Hunter said. "Sometimes he comes back to the corner and says 'Did you see that?' And I agree with him by nodding my head, uh huh."

No matter what Ward and Hunter plan to do, it is clear that they are taking Kessler very seriously, and they are motivated to, in their own words, "shock the world" on November 21st.

"This tournament is not set up for us to win," Hunter said. "When we win this fight I think it is going to change a lot of things."