To most of the die-hard New England fight fans who made the trip to Lincoln, Rhode Island on Saturday to watch local heavyweight contender Jason Estrada outpoint veteran Derek Bryant over eight rounds, a night of boxing is a night of violence, fun, and beer. Watching a 250-pound man throw bones with someone just a few pounds lighter is a true man's form of entertainment.

Because of boxing's violent nature, many throughout history have condemned the sport as a barbaric business that ruins lives. And to the ignorant eye, Estrada's thumping of Bryant on Saturday could look very barbaric. He did, after all, pound another man to a pulp for money.

But anyone who knows Estrada and his story could not possibly see his lifestyle as anything other than special. Boxing is not a barbaric business, and Estrada's day-to-day routine, along with the people he shares that routine with, is the perfect testament to that statement.

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About five miles south of downtown Providence, Rhode Island, you'll find a small, blue-collar neighborhood nestled in the side streets off a major highway that leads into Connecticut and eventually New York City. Just one glance around the area, and it becomes evident that the neighborhood is far from Beverly Hills.

Teens walk in groups down the street, projecting toughness and machismo.

There is little use for sit down lawn mowers, so prevalent in nearby suburbs.

There are no traffic lights; there is little public parking.

This is no fairy tale neighborhood; this is an area where working class families must show tremendous inner strength to rise above their surroundings and create a better life.

But amidst this atmosphere lies an oasis from all of the area's troubles. Here, you don't see shootings and drug use. You don't see anger and hate. Here, you see good people, sticking together and trying to better both themselves and the surrounding premises. Their vehicles: sports and recreation. The Davey Lopes Recreation Center is the epitome of the good sports can do for a community.

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This past July, I made the trek down to the Lopes Center from Boston. As I walked in, I was greeted cordially by the center's director, George Lindsey. I was there, I told him, to do a story on the Big Six Boxing Academy, which is located in the building's rear.

I walked into the gym. Several fighters and trainers who I didn't know cordially welcomed me.

I wandered around the building, absorbing the gym's aesthetics. The walls, covered with newspaper clippings about the gym's fighters, particularly "Big Six" Estrada, who the gym is named after, are painted red and black. There are two boxing rings, a half-dozen heavy bags, two speed bags, two sway bags, and one sand bag. The gym is clean, well-organized.. Of every gym I have ever been in, this one is probably the nicest.

My goal here was to get to know the heart and soul of the gym. Now that I had taken in the environment, I wanted to meet the fighters and trainers who made up that inner-core.

The first man to introduce himself to me was Phil "The Killa" Miller, a 4-0 heavyweight based out of Boston. Miller began his career roughly a year ago by outpointing Robert Irizzary over four rounds in Boston. Since then, Miller has been hot and cold, blitzing two straight opponents via first round knockout and most recently struggling to a four-round unanimous decision. Miller, who serves in the United States Coast Guard, got his start in boxing at the age of 27. Now 33, he trains alongside Estrada and cruiserweight contender Matt Godfrey, hoping to learn as much as he can as fast as he can.

Miller travels over an hour every day to train in the Big Six Boxing Academy because of the character the gym possesses.

"I used to train in a big gym that was for both boxing and mixed martial arts, but they had air conditioning, and I'd rather not train in a place like that," he said. "Here, people train hard, everyone helps everyone, and there is no competition. We hang out together when we're not in the gym. It's like a family."

A tough family, that is. In the Estrada gym, there is no air conditioning, and pugs are notorious for wearing sweat-suits and winter hats while training.

Roland Estrada, the gym's head honcho and father/trainer of Jason Estrada, embraces the rugged training conditions.

"Our guys toughen up and get used to [the heat]," he said.

Roland Estrada is one New England's top trainers. He's guided his son Jason to a 15-1 career record, and two of his other fighters have yet to lose. Now that he has his own gym, fighters of all kinds get to train under him. His dedication to his gym has earned him the respect of all who train in it.

"He never stops working," said Jason, his son. "He's always watching videos and incorporating the techniques he learns into our training."

The Big Six Boxing Academy opened in July of 2006 but had to be shut down because of a lack of leadership. George Lindsey, the recreation center's director, wasn't about to fund a tribe without a chief. But in July of 2007, Estrada stepped in and took the reigns. The gym was reopened, revamped, and Providence-based boxers now had a classy place to train.

Estrada runs the gym under his terms. He likes the family atmosphere, and he hates unhealthy competition.

"At the end of every month," he said, "we have a group meeting where we air out all of our problems. If two guys don't get their problems straightened out, they're out of here."

Estrada understands the importance of boxing in the lives of kids. That's why he lets youth train in the gym for free (for everyone else, the cost is $50 a year). This kind of unselfish attitude has helped Estrada become a leader for other trainers in the gym.

One of those trainers is Ernest "Tuna" Shelton. Shelton has been training fighters with the Estradas for roughly six years. He's the second man in the corner for every Jason Estrada fight, and he is head trainer of seven fighters in the gym. He describes the Big Six Boxing Academy as "home."

"I can come here whenever," he said. "I sometimes come here in the middle of the night."

Shelton looks at the Estradas like brothers. He takes after both of their hardworking, humble attitudes.

"Roland is like my older brother, and Jason is like my younger brother," he said. "I model everything I do after Roland. What he's done for me – money can't buy it. And he never takes any credit. I want to let the world know what a great man he is."

Shelton has three sons who train in the gym. His two oldest sons, Ramiel and Davhon Shelton, are each hot amateur prospects. Ramiel, 16, is ripped from head to toe. He fights at 165 pounds and has a record of roughly 14-4. Davhon, 15, is soft-spoken, but in the ring, he's a fireball. A 120 pounder, Davhon has had over 40 fights. Both teens plan on turning pro when they turn 18.

Ernest's other son, Bubah, is only 3 years old. But he already does 150 pushups a day (sometimes with only one hand), and he shadow boxes with a smooth rhythm that kids several years his senior have yet to achieve.

"He was born to box," said Ernest. "He was born the night Jason beat Demetrice King."

Keenen Moses is a sixteen-year-old cousin of the Sheltons who also trains at the gym. A 154 pounder with a record of 10-3, Moses often spars with Ramiel, creating a friendly family rivalry.

"I'm better," he says with a cocky smile.

For these teen fighters, perhaps the greatest part of training in the Big Six Boxing Academy is fighting alongside world class fighters like Estrada and Godfrey. But even though Estrada has been on national television on several occasions, the boys look at him like any other guy. He's their older brother in this tight-knit boxing family.

The Big Six Boxing Academy also plays home to dynamic trainer Greg Townes. A former 9-5 light heavyweight pro, Townes stresses the gym's kid-orientated nature.

"There are so many benefits to kids boxing," said Townes. "It builds character, pride, and establishes a sense of identity.."

One of the gym's most prominent characters is former fighter Rufas Pittman. Pittman was an outstanding amateur fighter before he turned pro.

"Hagler, Leonard, they all avoided me," he said.

But then he found drugs, and his life took a turn for the worse.

Now, however, Pittman has turned his life around, and he is giving back to the community. He keeps the gym clean and organized (it looks fantastic), and he trains an amateur fighter. He gives the gym's kids advice on which path not to take.

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As I left the gym that day, I was reminded of why I love boxing. The sport is not all corrupt; there are still good guys out there using the sweet science as a vehicle to do good for the earth. The Big Six Boxing Academy is the home of class, dignity. Other gyms would be wise to follow suit.

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I returned to the gym just two days later for the first ring-card girl photo shoot for my former Web site, BoxingHerald.com. There training hard, and alone, was a female fighter named Kay Reese. As I did everything in my power to look cool in front of the models, I saw Reese pounding the heavy bag, jumping rope, and shadow boxing; and I noticed a sharp contrast between Reese and the others in the room.

Unlike the models – or myself – Reese was not being watched. Her work was not for show but rather for improvement. I couldn't help but admire her dedication on this Saturday afternoon when all other fighters were home relaxing.

But then again, she'd be welcome in at any time. The Big Six Boxing Academy is a home for a family.

Both Roland Estrada and Greg Townes reiterated the same praise of the gym.

"We're like a family. And like all families, we sometimes have problems. But in the end, we always come together."