On Saturday, Ireland's Oisin Fagan will face hot British prospect Amir Khan in Khan's backyard of London. In Kahn, Fagan is facing a fighter with superior power, hand speed, and financial backing (very few fighters get sponsorship checks from Nike, but those who do usually have more expensive training gear than their opponents). But Fagan has an intangible quality that Khan does not: a proud Irish heritage rooted in the tradition of Gaelic prizefighting.

Throughout its history, Irish boxing has produced numerous skilled and brave warriors who have served their country proud through bloody battles and fistic fireworks. Legends like Barry McGuigan and Stevie Collins will be forever etched in the hearts of fans for their desire, talent, and achievement.

Today, Irish boxing is still rolling strong. Several world-class fighters from Ireland are making waves in the modern fight scene through their exciting styles. Some Irish pugs are even knocking on the door of a world-title chance.

With Fagan's biggest career clash just days away, Irish fighting is back in boxing's spotlight. So as a celebration to the warriors of Ireland, I've put together a little Irish pound-for-pound list, which follows. Ratings are based on an even basis of fighter talent and accomplishment.

1. John Duddy (25-0, 17 KOs):

He fights down to the level of his competition and he cuts easily, but Duddy is without a doubt a world-class middleweight. The Derry native throws punches in bunches in every round of every fight – and every blow he delivers with conviction.

In his most recent fight, Duddy looked strong in a ten-round thumping of the tough Charles Howe. Duddy evinced tremendous skill and stamina in the bout.

Throughout his career, Duddy, 29, has fought at 160 pounds. But he's recently announced that he plans to fight six pounds south at light middleweight in his next fight, which is against Ronald Hearns in January. Duddy's power should be more effective at the new weight class.

2. Bernard Dunne (27-1, 14 KOs):

Dunne was Ireland's hottest fighter until was blitzed in one round by Kiko Martinez in August of last year. But don't let the loss fool you – Dunne is still the real deal. Against Martinez, he was simply caught cold. A rematch could see a different result.

A super bantamweight, Dunne, 28, has all of the tools necessary to become a world champion. He's a smooth boxer with robust power in both fists. If he can continue his three-fight win streak, he has an excellent shot of contending for a title in 2009.

3. Oisin Fagan (22-5, 13 KOs):

Fagan's story is rather remarkable. He only fought thrice as an amateur, but through sheer guts and will as a pro, he's become one of the best light welterweights in the world.

The road has been rather rocky for Dublin's Fagan, 34. Three of his five losses have been very controversial. And all of those defeats came in his biggest bouts.

Still, Fagan has carried on, and with any luck, he'll get a title shot before the end of 2009. Because of his all-action, come-forward style, he stands a chance against any 135 pounder in the world, including Khan, who is a heavy favorite on Saturday.

4. Andy Lee (16-1, 13 KOs):

Lee, of Limerick, carried the world on his shoulders going into his bout with Brian Vera in March of this year. The Irishman had a full plate of pressure in front of him: a large fan base, the immense praise of his legendary trainer/manager Emmanuel Steward, and a possible world title shot to think about in the near future.

But against Vera, everything came tumbling down.

Although he is 6'2, Lee did not use his size to keep the powerful and stout Vera at bay. Vera was able to get inside of Lee's lanky frame to pound away at his body.

After six competitive rounds of back and forth action, Lee was eventually TKO'd. His run as Ireland's top contender was over for the time being.

After the loss, Lee rebounded nicely with a tenth round TKO of tough man Willie Gibbs. But it will take more than one win for Lee to put himself back into contention. A rematch with Vera is in order if Lee wants to erase doubts that he's an overrated prospect.

Lee has an outside shot of one day capturing a world championship. A southpaw with snappy punches, Lee can make some noise at 160 pounds if he's able to capitalize on his immense potential. His biggest weakness is his defense; he needs to improve his strength to keep stocky fighters like Vera off of him.

5. Paul McCloskey (17-0, 7 KOs):

McCloskey is young and almost as green as the Irish flag, but many pundits, including myself, have put their faith in this smooth southpaw. His lopsided win against former champion Cesar Bazan is his most impressive performance to date.

McCloskey, 29, has a bout scheduled for Friday against an opponent to be named. A win plus an active 2009 could put him in position for a title shot down the road.