



Trench Warfare

Let's face it! You need to know where you came from in order to know where you are going. I was taught to be myself, to be the best I could be. I have been given the opportunity to be a leader and to do something new different in Philadelphia boxing.



When I think of boxing I think of a gym before I think of a casino ballroom. I think of the **Blue Horizon** before I think of Atlantic City. I think blue collar before I think suits and ties.

My next boxing show will be a pro-am card on Friday evening, March 9, at the **Front Street Gym** (formerly known as **John Hennelly Boys Club**) at 2074 East Clearfield Street in Kensington, the only gym in the city that has been open every week for over 50 years. This venue has housed many wars over the years and it is so small that the fights seem like trench-warfare.



After talking with my father, **Mike Rogers**, as well as **John Gallagher**, of the Veteran Boxers Association (VBA) and Harrowgate Boys Club, and former teamster and current boxing manager **Eddie Woods**, I learned a lot more about this venue.

Gallagher told me that the John Hennelly Boys Club was established in the early 1960's by **Mickey Grandinetti** and **Billy Durkin**. The carpenters union did most of the work in the gym. When they were working there a carpenter named **John Hennelly** died, but they went ahead with the work and named the gym after him.

Woods gave me more insight to the historic building. Back in the late 1950's early 1960's there was a boxing gym in Kensington above a Post Office. It was called the **Nonpareil** gym. The directors of that gym were told they had to shut it down and remove the ring. That same ring now sits in Front Street Gym. It was mentioned that the gym had conveyors, bailers and other equipment upstairs. The workers emptied it out and built the locker room and the office.

Nearly every well-known fighter from Philadelphia either boxed there, trained there, sparred there or came to watch amateur fights there. They include: **Gypsy Joe Harris, Buster Drayton, Matthew Saad Muhammad, Jeff Chandler, Calvin Grove, Joe Frazier, Bennie Briscoe, Bobby “Boogaloo” Watts, Willie “The Worm” Monroe, Ivan Robinson, Anthony Boyle, Mike Jones, Danny Garcia** and on and on.

ESPN TV analyst and trainer **Teddy Atlas** once said: "I would not change a thing about the gym." Stories are told that back then **Von Clay, Joey Giardello, Dick Turner** and **Joe McIntyre** sparred in that ring. Back then the fighters trained there and fought at The Cambria AC at Kensington and Somerset, which could seat 1,200 people.

A lot of fighters never made it big, but their dreams to succeed were born in that gym. The work ethic that they got from men like Grandinetti, **John Mulvenna, Jack Costello, Mr. Ben** and **Charlie Sgrillo** stayed with them.

Fighters are humble, secure and confident, whether rich or poor. I see it in people like **Wade Hinnant, Robert “Bam Bam” Hines, Jimmy Deoria, Monty Sherrick, Richie Kates**. History can blow your mind, this can be said over and over again, from the **Juniper Street Gym to Frazier’s, Shuler’s, Back Alley, Joe Hand’s, Champs, Philly Rumlbers, Philly Ramblers**--any gym that has been in this city, or any city, the stories are the same the characters change.



The Blue Horizon hosted its first boxing venue was in 1961, one year before Hennelly’s (Front Street) got started. The Blue Horizon currently is closed and we often hear people talking about it. Even if it did not sell every seat on every show, you still hear the stories about the Blue. We no longer have the Blue Horizon but we have memories. We don’t have **Connie Mack Stadium** but we have memories. Frazier’s is gone but we have memories. We still have the Front Street Gym to make more memories.

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