

Irish Boxing Review

2011 Edition



Steve Wellings

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**IRISH BOXING REVIEW:
2011 EDITION**

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STEVE WELLINGS

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ISBN 978-1-4467-8990-2

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INTRODUCTION

Hello and a very warm welcome to the Irish Boxing Review. Many annual assessments of the fight game adopt a statistic-heavy approach, so this format may seem a little unusual to fans. My thinking is that through revisiting articles, features, previews and viewing some of the photographs taken throughout the year and beyond, we may evoke fond memories of the year's action. I hope you have had as much fun following Irish boxing in recent times as I have.

There are some great books on the market covering our sport and while they are all excellent reads, I personally have always enjoyed reading about events and stories I could relate to - the fights I was at, the fighters I saw in person or on TV, all offer us priceless memories. The Bernard Dunne autobiography that was released in late 2010 offered the fight fans of our generation a chance to look back at someone whose journey we followed from the start. It allowed us to relive a career that we remember so vividly, but through Bernard's thoughts and words. So I have created this review with those points in mind. It's for the Irish boxing fans of today, to look back, as I will, on the shows they attended and fights, interviews and talking points they had long consigned to the memory banks. I also find it interesting to look back on the things that didn't happen, the dead certs that fell by the way side and the surprise moments that came out of the blue. In the middle of the review I have included a selection of essays, fight reports and articles that I have accumulated over the past year. Organised in date order they are intended to serve as a running chronology of the main talking points and events in the Irish boxing world. Printed in a variety of outlets, there have been a number of highs and lows, controversies and triumphs during a slow burning year that really ignited in the second part of the season.

As well as that, at the beginning of the book there is a selection of special interest feature articles included. I have mused over the digital and print media's role in our sport; including a feature on Irish-boxing.com, a website that is celebrating its tenth year in 2011 and a site I am pleased to say I have been closely involved with in

recent years. We shall take a look over the national boxing awards, an event now running into its third year and proving immensely popular with both fans and fighters alike.

Although not strictly limited to Ireland, the issue of alphabet titles continues to spark debate within the boxing community and we shall look over this subject by speaking to some of the fighters who have claimed such titles, as well as the sanctioning bodies themselves. Two further pieces cover the role of the clubs themselves in keeping the grass roots spirit of boxing alive and the clear differences that now separate the amateur and professional codes. America has always been a popular hunting ground for standout Irish pugilists and the Fighting Irishmen speaks to some of our latest hopes, and some established names, trying to make a career for themselves across the water.

While compiling this book I have sought out the views and opinions of as many knowledgeable and accommodating experts I could possibly find. I am indebted to the time and patience of all who have contributed and made this work possible. I wish to thank everyone who made themselves available; the list of names would no doubt fill a substantial number of pages! This review was compiled for no other reason than to archive an exciting period of Irish boxing, to organise it and find it a place in the history books. It was written by a fan, for the fans. I know you are out there. Please enjoy.

Best Wishes, Steve Wellings.

THE BEAUTY OF BOXING

It is almost inevitable that boxing, like any sport where two participants routinely swap blows to the skull, will have its detractors. Many erroneously perceive the sole objective as being to bludgeon your opponent to the floor or beat him to a pulp, clearly missing the basic art of pugilism which is to hit your opponent while not getting hit yourself.

Boxing is a sport that evokes strong opinions. There are drawbacks and negative points, of course. For example, the initial costs involved (which compared with many other recreational activities are often relatively small), the fact that you could end up with a flattened nose or cauliflower ears and the rather more severe risk of suffering serious injury in the ring.

In 2007 a ban on professional boxing was lifted in Sweden. There were various stipulations imposed, such as the rounds being restricted to 12 minutes per contest and a stringent vetting process for aspiring professionals, many of whom had previously pursued their careers in neighbouring Scandinavian countries like Denmark and Finland (boxing is still outlawed in Norway).

Those focusing on the blatantly obvious negatives often fail to see the overwhelming positives that exist. In an era of increasing health issues, lack of exercise and an obesity crisis, the increase in personal fitness, endurance, intensity (from strenuous exercises) and self-discipline that boxing provides cannot be ignored. Some could justifiably argue that the individual could build those disciplines through alternative endeavors, but boxing is an independent sport and participation can increase the individual's levels of self respect and boost those with low confidence or poor self-esteem.

It can be used in competition, or self-defence, and helps remove troubled individuals from the streets, channeling their aggression positively instead of against one another in violent or anti-social situations. It improves confidence and fitness, aids socialising and making new friends and gives younger people in particular a chance to

travel to new places, experience different cultures (through worldwide tournaments for example) and broaden their horizons.

During my relatively short time covering the sport, I have visited many clubs in and around the Belfast area to interview, photograph and generally annoy the inhabitants. Each and every time, I have received a warm welcome and been treated courteously. My subjects have been candid and truthful and have not yet shown any desire to forcibly remove me from their club! Boxing creates rich characters who tell amazing stories.

In a country like Northern Ireland, for so many years blighted by the hatred and mistrust of sectarianism, this is a sport that serves to unite rather than divide. Where people are now working together in other sports through cross-community initiatives, boxing appears to have always been that way.

"The greatest cliché is cross-community which should be spelled B.O.X.I.N.G. because this sport has been like that all the time," argues Sean Canavan of St. Agnes' ABC in Andersonstown, West Belfast.

"You're in Andersonstown at the moment which is a predominantly Catholic area, and we get local Catholic kids because geography dictates that you can't bus kids over from the other side of town every night. You then get clubs like Monkstown that have Protestant kids using the club every night and the two come together, always have done, so call that cross-community if you will."

Canavan wastes no time in extolling the virtues of our sport and its undoubtedly positive impact upon the youth of Belfast - on both sides of the political spectrum. On my second visit to St. Agnes' I spotted among the Gaelic football and Celtic shirts, a solitary figure using a skipping rope in his Northern Ireland football jersey - an image in itself of the cross-community spirit Sean referred to.

"We've always been able to take our kids anywhere in Belfast, from all sides of the community, and never had any problems. On any particular night, whether it was a show in a pub, club or whatever we would have been respected and no issue made with who we were and where we were from. It doesn't matter where a kid in Belfast is from, whenever they go down to Dublin then kids from the North shout and support one another no matter what their religious background."

I visited several clubs while compiling this review and received plenty of interesting feedback from many authorities on Belfast's amateur boxing scene.

Head trainer in Eastside boxing club, Alan 'Alio' Wilton has trained all manner of fighters for many years, in what he calls "the worst gym in Ireland." Wilton's wife Jane promotes professional shows through her Belfast Promotions organisation.

"They say we need places for the kids to go and I know they are on the streets fighting each other," says Alio. "We have got 70 or 80 kids in here on any given night and they aren't the ones out there fighting, they're in here training."

Eddie O'Neill, former treasurer at Ligoniel ABC, agrees: "You can see the effect this club has on the community; it keeps them all off the streets and gives them somewhere to go. If this wasn't here then where would the kids all go? This way it gets them in, two nights a week, and gives them something to do."

"I view boxing coaches as social workers in tracksuits!" says Monkstown supremo Paul Johnston, who also involves himself with the Northern Ireland international team. Johnston's North Belfast club has forged connections with Michael Hawkins' Holy Trinity outfit, from the Turf Lodge area of West Belfast.

"Monkstown's a Protestant club and we're a Catholic club so for the past five years we've been involved in a cross-community initiative," Hawkins explains.

"To be honest though, boxing has always been cross-community right throughout the troubles and you had to be careful sometimes where you went because we were looking after children. People use clichés of how boxing brings us together etc. but it's just a fact that even though we're doing work with Monsktown, we're just doing what we've always done basically. It's more a friendship than an agreement and we're all very good friends having travelled to Washington and boxed out there."

Veteran coach Patsy McAllister concurs, "Boxing has always crossed the divide and I've never, ever seen any problems with sectarianism. We have teams come and go all the time from...I don't even like to say where, because we all just get on with it, without any question of who or what you are - you're a boxer and that's it.

"Since ten years of age, through all my involvement in the sport, I've seen boxing instill discipline into lads and keep their criminal records to nil, by teaching a respect that carries with them outside the gym. A boxing club is a breeding ground for good citizens - all sports are great, but boxing holds that close camaraderie. They spar and train together; this club in particular is open every night of the week. Even

during the troubles when things were hot and heavy we stayed open every night. Boxing is an individual sport with a team flavour, and good sportsmanship combined with focus can produce a good boxer who knows his responsibilities.”

These are just a few voices, with many more spreading the same message of the good that boxing has done, and will continue to do, in and around the Belfast area. Billy McKee thinks so: “If we knew the exact reason why boxing stuck together from all sides of the divide, even during the troubles, then we would all be millionaires!

“We don't have any issues in boxing around Belfast, or even south of the border, you're just a boxer and that's it. I've always had a mixed club here, even through the height of the difficulties, and other clubs will be the same.”

“Truthfully, in all my time around the sport, I've never encountered bigotry in boxing,” chips in Sean Canavan.

The final word rests with McKee, who sums up the situation: “Amateur boxing is a good influence on kids anywhere you go and I don't care what anybody says - long may it continue.”

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NATIONAL BOXING AWARDS

The official Irish boxing awards are moving into their third year and the event has successfully attracted the cream of the boxing world in its previous two outings.

The 2010 ceremony, sponsored by Bogart Menswear, took place on Saturday January 23 in An Culturlann, Belfast. Event organisers Cormac Campbell and Bobby Lavery dished out the cut glass prizes to the deserving winners, in celebration of another great year for national boxing in Ireland.

Bernard Dunne was named boxer of the year. The Dubliner, who claimed the WBA super-bantamweight title from Ricardo Cordoba in March 2009, beat off stiff competition from European champions Matthew Macklin and Paul McCloskey. Dunne was unable to attend due to prior commitments, leaving his coach Harry Hawkins to collect the award.

Hawkins recalled the highs of the title win as well as the lows of Dunne's subsequent defeat against Thai puncher Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym. The Holy Trinity coach also hinted that a decision on Dunne's future was due to be made in the coming weeks. Just weeks later, the announcement was made and the rest is, of course, history.

23-year-old Carl Frampton was named prospect of the year. The Barry McGuigan-managed, Gerry Storey-trained box-puncher has already caught the eye of the boxing fraternity and looks set to make a push into title contention in the next 18 months.

The Irish champion of the year award was presented to super-featherweight champion Eddie Hyland from Tallaght, Dublin, in recognition of his victories over domestic rivals Kevin O'Hara (April 2009) and Oisin Fagan (July 2009).

Belfast's John Breen was recognised as coach of the year after another successful year in his Lombard Street gym.

Boxing historian and author Barry Flynn gave a special presentation on the careers of boxing legends John Caldwell and John

McNally – inducting the duo into the Hall of Fame. The opening address was given by Boxing Union of Ireland President Mel Christle.

The inaugural event had taken place on January 25, 2009 in the plush Newry Arts Centre, conveniently located to accommodate visitors from both north and south of the border.

There was Irish boxing talent in abundance and here is the after show report cataloguing the night's proceedings:

“British light-welterweight Paul McCloskey lifted the boxer of the year award after fighting off the challenge of gym-mate Martin Rogan and British super-middleweight kingpin Brian Magee.

Belfast featherweight Martin Lindsay, who will fight Paul Appleby for the British title at the Ulster Hall in April, lifted the prospect of the year award. Also nominated were Andrew Murray, Stephen Haughian and Paulie Hyland.

Ireland's Olympic boxing heroes Darren Sutherland, Kenny Egan and Paddy Barnes were all honoured for their outstanding achievements at the 2008 Beijing tournament.

Former world flyweight champion Rinty Monaghan was posthumously inducted in to the Irish boxing Hall of Fame. Monaghan passed away in March 1984 and enjoyed a fantastic ring career that spanned from 1934-1949.

The event was extremely well received and attended. Organiser Cormac Campbell stated that: “Representatives from boxing clubs in Counties Down, Armagh and Louth were in attendance at the event, which also saw the official launch of the Irish Boxing Supporters Club.”

BERNARD DUNNE RETIRES

The speculation was finally confirmed when former WBA super-bantamweight world champion Bernard Dunne announced his retirement from boxing. At the age of 30 the Neilstown man departs with a 28-2 (15 KOs) record.

“After a long thought-out process and speaking with my family I’ve decided to announce my retirement from boxing,” Dunne told RTE sport.

“I’ve achieved all my life dreams and ambitions in the sport and it is the right moment for me. I’m 30 years of age and it is time to step on and face new challenges.”

After beginning his paid career in the United States under trainer Freddie Roach, Bernard returned home to Ireland under promoter Brian Peters and coach Harry Hawkins. It was a fruitful partnership that garnered European and world titles, cementing Dunne’s place in Irish sporting history. He claimed the European title in November 2006, outpointing Esham Pickering in Dublin, before embarking on two successful defences.

An unblemished slate –boasting 24 straight wins- was dramatically shattered almost two years later when Spanish mandatory challenger Kiko Martinez blitzed Dunne in 90 seconds to take his crown.

The rebuilding process saw Bernard beat three international opponents at venues across the Isle to re-insert the confidence he had displayed prior to the Martinez mauling. In March 2009 Dunne made an audacious bid for Ricardo Cordoba’s WBA title, at home in front of a fervent Dublin crowd at the O2 arena. The atmosphere was awesome, the setting perfect and the stage set for Dunne to follow in the footsteps of Barry McGuigan and claim world title glory.

Dropped twice in the fifth-round, those who thought Dunne could not take Cordoba’s punching power were seemingly correct, but the Dubliner was made of sterner stuff. Gritting his teeth and

heeding the expert advice of Harry Hawkins he was dragged through the tough moments by his home crowd and after some savvy boxing completed a remarkable turnaround in the eleventh-round.

An exhausted Cordoba succumbed to Dunne's pressure in the heat of battle and hit the canvas three times before referee Hubert Earle called time and crowned a deserving world champion. Irish president Mary McAleese was one of the first on the phone to the new hero, who was physically and mentally shattered and failed to make the post-fight press conference.

When the dust had settled, following a period of rest, Dunne was scheduled to meet his mandatory challenger Poonsawat Kratiengdaenggyim, a dangerous heavy-hitting Thai with scant regard for reputations. Following a promising start Bernard walked into a hefty combination and was floored in the third-round. Despite a rousing level of volume and a spirited attempt to fight fire with fire, there was to be no dramatic reversal this time. More blows reined in and Dunne was stopped, his world title torn away in the first defence.

"Thankfully I have realised all my dreams and achieved all my goals since I followed my dad into boxing," continued Bernard. "To win a world title is something I will never forget and something I am so proud of. I would like to thank everyone who helped make that possible."

Promoter Brian Peters added, "As Bernard's manager throughout his career we've enjoyed an incredible rollercoaster journey that has been shared by the nation and Bernard is retiring safe in the knowledge that he has established himself as an Irish sporting icon."

Ever since the Cordoba night, Dunne's next move has been speculated on. At other fighter's press conferences Brian Peters was asked continuously whether Dunne would continue fighting, if so who would he return against and had he decided to retire. Bernard has chosen the latter route and whether or not the lure of ring could, a few years down the line, change his mind only time will tell.

Dunne (below with Hawkins) reinvigorated the sport in Ireland and brought not only exciting fights but also great occasions back to domestic boxing.



The above piece was written in February on the day Dunne decided to hang up his gloves. Looking back almost one year later and little has changed. Bernard has made no indication that he wishes to return, he offers his expert insight as an analyser on RTE television's Pro Box Live shows and appears physically trim and generally contented.

Brian Peters is correct when he compares Dunne's journey to a rollercoaster. This description describes perfectly the final stages of Dunne's career, from winning the European title against Esham Pickering onwards. The first time I got to see Dunne live was in Castlebar 2008, when Bernard mixed with former world title challenger Cristian Faccio. Faccio was slippery but Dunne always retained control with his superior boxing skills, eventually winning on points after a nasty cut (from a clash of heads) caused the scores to be totalled early. After that somewhat unsatisfying conclusion the next time we saw Dunne was spectacularly winning the WBA world title in Dublin's O2 arena, on a night never to be forgotten.

One man close to the eventual world champion, throughout his highs and lows, was trainer Harry Hawkins.

"The choice to retire was always going to be Bernard's own and I was never going to influence that," says Harry.

"He's quite capable of making his own mind up and he'll decide what he wants to do with his time, so if it's the right choice for him then

that's great. Bernard had a lot of charm and people didn't really know what to expect from one fight to the next, which was part of the appeal. We always knew he had the ability to succeed at the highest level.

"It was an exciting, rollercoaster ride and one that I enjoyed every minute of," continues Hawkins, "and Bernard's still young so who knows what the future brings – you can never predict boxing. He could decide to come back; many have retired and come back at some point. He's happy with himself at the moment. Bernard's doing media work and is still a big draw, particularly in the south, so he holds an appeal with the public whether he's boxing or not."

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IRISH-BOXING.COM IS TEN!

Since its inception in 2001 Irish-boxing.com has consistently provided news, views and information, keeping the boxing public informed on a daily basis. In modern times, having a strong online presence is vital to any sport and the growing phenomenon of social networking (Facebook, Twitter etc) and the likes of YouTube mean that all manner of boxing material is uploaded and circulated on a daily basis. We are now in a situation where a number of outlets provide quality output on the Irish circuit, although when Irish-boxing.com first came along the domestic scene had grown stagnant. As founder Tomas Rohan explains, the site appeared from humble beginnings.

"It should be said that the first ever Irish boxing website was Irishboxingnews.com which was run by Gerry Callan's son David. It carried news, fight reports and Gerry's columns from the [Irish Daily] Star but David wasn't able to devote as much time as he would have liked so he actually gave me the archives of his site to use on Irish-Boxing.com. I initially set up the site on April 20 2001 to ensure that Irish boxing continued to have an online presence.

"Back then the professional scene was still pretty dormant here but there was enough going on between the UK and US-based Irish pros and the amateurs to keep things ticking along and it slowly gathered momentum thanks to a whole host of regular contributors and we had columns by Wayne McCullough and Sam Storey.

"It's funny now looking back on a lot of the early articles to see guys who were then only emerging in the amateurs and have since gone on to enjoy huge success both in the amateur and professional ranks."

Tomas supplied me with a web archive file which made the trip down memory lane even more fascinating. There was a story about Bernard Dunne turning pro with Top Rank (which failed to materialise), news of Neil Sinclair lining up a challenge for the British title and the early rumblings of Eamonn Magee vs. Ricky Hatton.

As the countdown to the 2001 World Amateur Championships gathered pace, a story from 27 April 2001 catalogued the results from an Ireland vs. USA International event at Dublin's National Stadium. Rohan points to two standout results that read: John Duddy 4-5 Andre Ward (middleweight) and JP Campbell 7-4 Andre Dirrell (featherweight).

When Tomas departed in 2007, to take up a role working for promoter Brian Peters, he left the website in the capable hands of Cormac Campbell. A former reporter with Setanta Sports, Campbell revamped the look of the site and adopted the form of a monthly magazine, pumping out the information via RSS feeds while adding various new features over time and establishing a supporters club.

"I first started writing for Irish-boxing.com in 2003 while at university in Belfast so it was something I had cared about for a long time," explains Campbell.

"In the early days shows in Ireland (never mind Belfast) were few and far between and only a handful of the Irish papers were covering the sport properly. As such, Irish-boxing.com was filling the void for many fight fans.

There was, however, a belief that things would change and for a spell (2003/2004) Brian Magee breathed life into the industry with a string of shows at the King's Hall - but the real change in direction came when Bernard Dunne returned from Los Angeles in 2005.

"Finally, regular boxing was here. What's more, it was on terrestrial television and in the newspapers. Ironically, this nearly put an end to Irish-boxing.com as Tomas began working for Dunne's promoter Brian Peters and as a result the site was put on hiatus.

"Then in late 2007 I asked Tomas if I could take over the site and he agreed. The site was redesigned and re-launched the following March. Whereas in the past it focused not only on Irish boxers but also on the British and International scene, the growth in the Irish industry allowed us to focus solely on Irish boxers."

Cormac rates Bernard Dunne's famous world title victory over Ricardo Cordoba as the undisputed highlight of his time as editor.

"Despite this there have been countless other outstanding moments and the revitalisation of the Irish title is something else that has pleased me greatly," he adds.

"More and more young boxers of real talent are coming through and the standard of coaching in Ireland is second to none. So as long

as the economy doesn't collapse entirely (and that is possible), the future for boxing in Ireland appears bright."

It is never easy to predict what the future holds for Irish boxing online but it appears we have plenty to look forward to over the coming years. Journalist Jonny Stapleton provides freelance coverage for The Daily Mirror and regularly contributes to Irish-boxing.com. Jonny will also be taking a more hands-on role in the coming months as Cormac Campbell prepares to pass over the reins of the ten-year-old site.

"I am both proud and grateful for the opportunity to work with Irish-boxing.com over the last few years," declares Stapleton.

"The first stories I submitted were interviews with amateur stars Kenny Egan and the late, great Darren Sutherland and fittingly were probably of an amateur standard. However, Tomas Rohan and subsequently Cormac Campbell continued to take and publish my copy enabling me to combine two of my favoured past times in boxing and writing. Despite working with local press before upgrading to national press with the Irish Mirror I always continued to submit stories to the Irish-boxing.com. Partly because I wanted to share the news, views and reactions with the international audience I know the site commands and secondly because I felt the site had done so much for me and boxing over the last 10 years that I owed it good copy."

Jonny is keen to be taking over the site and extremely capable of doing the longstanding institution justice as it enters its tenth year.

"Irish-boxing.com has been at the forefront of the Internet revolution in Irish sport and I firmly believe the development of the website and the constant source of news it provides has helped boxing roar over the last 10 years even after the Celtic Tiger began to whimper.

"The website has played its part in aiding the great Bernard Dunne to generate interest beyond the fanatic and played a big part in courting TV and sponsorship too. Other sites have now followed suit including Boxing-ireland.com run by Leonard Gunning and Irishboxers.ie and these help further expose the great boxing traditions on this small island."

Inevitably, in keeping with the times, the majority of media outlets have gone digital and now run their own websites to compliment traditional print. Indeed, boxing content still appears on a daily basis in newspapers and regular fight columns provide a staple for fans. The Irish News, Belfast Telegraph and News Letter cover the

Belfast market alongside local newspapers, while The Irish Daily Star and Irish Independent are among many outlets operating in the Republic.

As the Irish boxing scene flourished, new websites emerged, most notably Boxing-Ireland.com and Irishboxers.ie. In 2009 Leonard Gunning set up Boxing-Ireland from his Manchester base and David Walshe created Irishboxers as a celebration of Irish pugilism past and present.

Boxing promoters and the fighters themselves have realised the massive potential of online resources as a means of reaching and appealing to fans while regularly interacting with them. Furthermore, some professional bouts have even been made on the ever-popular Facebook website! Podcasts, dedicated fight forums, video interviews and radio shows have added a whole new dimension to the sport worldwide.

Paddy Cronan hosts a radio show for Onthegrindboxing.com and can be heard exercising his vocal chords across the airwaves on a regular basis.

"Podcasts are about opinions," enthuses Paddy. "Onthegrind packs its fair share of them. While there are those who say reporting on boxing should be unbiased, there is an added dimension you cannot get from a neutral article when representatives of conflicting positions debate both sides of the argument. Our format allows callers to voice their opinions on the sport's happenings, or speak with their favourite fighter during an interview segment. This is something unique to podcasting.

"I started doing Onthegrind in February 2009. It began in the States as more of a hobby, than the standard bearer in boxing podcasting it would later become. The format was what we can kindly call "loose." The show began to get more serious in format and content in approximately September 2008.

"In 2010 we knew we needed an independent platform to broadcast from, which led to the creation of our own website. A graphically appealing home for Onthegrind's vast archives (approximately 1000 audio interviews at press-time) supplemented by the written works of the show's correspondents, ensures that the creative control for the world's number one boxing podcast remains in the hands of the team. After several months of hard work and late nights for our designers Davo Smith and J. Sugenero, the website was launched. This was one of our proudest moments, as it looked much better than I expected it to!"

Jonny Stapleton also is another believer in the online revolution. "The Internet in general has revolutionised how boxing is covered, consumed, discussed and debated," he says. "News and views are instant. Results shared in seconds. You can follow round-by-round action of a Thai fight in the comfort of an Irish office. Whilst the referee is administering a ten count to a bamboozled fighter, social network sites are concededly administrating it to an excited global audience.

"One of the world wide boxing web's biggest achievements is to give a voice to fans and the little men of boxing. The net has lessened the dictatorship element of boxing coverage and created a more socialist boxing press. All fighters are equal and have a say online. As a result the boxing fan can consume news of what is generally viewed as a minority sport by the wider media in massive proportions and gleeful abundance. Debutants, journeymen and those without serious backing, who are not deemed worthy to be given a voice or column inches in national papers, receive website yards to scream at the top of their lungs until the Nationals listen and pay heed.

"The development of forums also gives the individual fan a say. I am reliably informed that promoters in Ireland, and abroad, study the forums for reaction, views and tips! Another facet of the internet is more creative writing. Indeed, some fight reports can be more entertaining than the bouts themselves and the battle to land the biggest and best puns can be more intriguing than the fight to land the biggest punch."

"For Irish boxing news online there are only really two places to go," adds Paddy Cronan. "Irish-Boxing.com, which has been around as long as I can remember, and now there's Boxing-Ireland.com. Both sites deliver up-to-date news and have their own exclusives. I find Irish-Boxing.com presents a more traditional, straight to the point, no frills style of reporting with some very good writers. Boxing-Ireland is a little racier and has more of a tabloid feel to it. They report on the drama and excitement of boxing in their own way. I check both websites regularly and have a lot of respect for both teams."

So as far as Irish-boxing.com is concerned, here's to another 10 years?

"If the next ten years in Irish boxing are as good as the last 10," concludes Tomas Rohan, "then there will certainly be no shortage of material to keep Irish-Boxing.com going."

THE FIGHTING IRISHMEN

Right back to the 1920s and the heady days of the ‘Gorgeous Gael’ Jack Doyle, fighting Irishmen have made the journey across the pond in an attempt to crack the American market. In recent times the likes of Steve Collins, Bernard Dunne, Andy Lee and James Moore have followed their illustrious predecessors, with the first three also carving out successful reputations back home.

Two of the latest Irish stars to come off the amateur conveyor belt and try their luck in the States are exciting light-welterweight pairing Jamie Kavanagh and Dean Byrne. Both have based themselves in the world renowned Wild Card gym, headed by reputed trainer Freddie Roach.

“I always wanted to turn pro,” admits Kavanagh. “There was the option of trying to aim for the Olympic Games but it never stuck in my head to go for it, it’s always been the pro game for me. Don’t get me wrong, if I had got the chance to go the Olympics then I wouldn’t have turned it down but I got the opportunity to train with Freddie Roach after I met my manager Steven Feder in Vegas and he just said to come over. I don’t think he thought I was going to come but I just showed up on the Wild Card gym doorstep one day!”

Boxing was in Kavanagh’s blood after ‘The Nuisance’ followed in the footsteps of his uncle. Kavanagh is level headed and recognises a need to improve before the Irish title appears on his radar: “I’m just learning my trade at the moment but there is always the Irish title to go for so maybe next year could be the time. The NABO and NABA titles are good belts, but there are a lot of steps to be taken before I start fighting for titles.

“My style is kind of a mix because I’m a good boxer and a good fighter. I can box a bit because of my amateur career, which was a good one. I’m working on my boxing skills with Freddie and he is teaching me all the tricks and giving me the right spars to help me mature as a boxer.”

Kavanagh's compatriot Dean Byrne identifies with the strong sense of history involved in Irish pugilists attempting to crack the American market.

"I am always thinking about the proud history of Irish fighters in America and that is one of the main reasons I train here with Freddie," reveals Byrne.

"Steve Collins was over here and got a few defences in and it was actually Steve's brother Paschal who told me to come over and touch base in the Wild Card. I would love to be the next big Irish star in the States."

Byrne's international experience did not begin and end in America. The Crumlin man started off his pro career with six fights in Australia, training with Kostya Tszyu's former coach Johnny Lewis. While out in OZ, Byrne won and successfully defended the Australian light-welterweight title. However, he took another life changing trip across the water to find fame and fortune in the United States.

"Even though I was too young to properly remember Barry McGuigan, he was just a legend and an inspiration to so many young Irish boxers. Steve Collins, Michael Carruth and Wayne McCullough were all big names as well. When I was up and coming in the amateurs I always liked Bernard Dunne who was a great talent, very smart and skilful. He also trained with Freddie and went on to win a world title so hopefully I can be the next name in the line. It's only a matter of time before I break through.

"If I just keep doing what I'm doing then there's no reason why I can't do the same. If I can get TV exposure in Ireland then the public can see what I'm all about, both in America and back home. A big fight in Ireland would really rally up some support."

Dean also keeps in contact with fellow US-based Irishmen like James Moore and John Duddy.

"When James Moore was getting ready for the Yuri Foreman fight he came over to LA and we went about together. We did a bit of running and some sparring because he needed a fast guy who throws lots of punches so I helped him out as best I could. I knew James from the seniors and Irish championships back home so it was good to see him over from New York. Jamie Kavanagh is a different story; we grew up together from an early age and boxed out of the same gym. I introduced him to my manager Steven Feder and we have a good connection with each other and hang out together. It makes it a little bit easier."

Onthegrind's Paddy Cronan has spent plenty of time out in the States tracking down talented interviewees. "I will never forget my first interview as part of the online team," he says. "I had spent the week running around like a headless chicken trying to track down a phone number for a kid named Dean Byrne. Also known as 'Irish Lightning', Byrne grew up on the same road my aunt once lived on, in Crumlin [Dublin]. After a lot of searching and dead ends Paschal Collins was able provide me with a number for Dean in L.A. This was before Dean had created a buzz. It was a fantastic experience. Unfortunately Dean remains on the cusp of stardom, a still unrealised commodity."

Byrne and Kavanagh are both handled by Steven Feder of Standing Eight Management. Feder manages a variety of prospects from around the world, forging links with Freddie Roach and his Wild Card base in Los Angeles. He envisages good times ahead.

"In just his first year of turning pro Kavanagh has been in camp with both Manny Pacquiao and Amir Khan. Jamie has made tremendous strides in transitioning from amateur to professional. Along with Sedano Ruiz, his coach from Spain, he's been under the guidance of the greatest trainer in the world Freddie Roach.

"Freddie has really helped Jamie sit down on his punches and work effectively off the jab. There are many impressive things about Kavanagh, including his ability to adapt, his work ethic in the gym and ring savvy for such a young fighter. He faces off against world-class fighters every week and he is just totally relaxed in the ring. Along with his promoter Golden Boy, we look forward to 2011.

"We hope to fight in the east coast again as we did for his pro debut so that the large Irish communities can get to know Jamie. New York, Boston, Chicago are on our list and of course eventually a trip home to Dublin to fight in front of his homeland fans."

Before returning home to train in Ireland with Paschal Collins, lightweight prospect Stephen Ormond had a four-fight spell in New York.

"I'm enjoying training with Paschal in Cork but being based in America, especially New York, was a great experience," Ormond says. "My girlfriend and baby were over with me and it was hard for them to adapt. I kept in contact with the other Irish lads for company. John Duddy and Andy Lee were both in the same boat as me."

One man who has always enjoyed the US lifestyle, and copious benefits of being the Irishman in New York, is light-middleweight

James Moore. For Moore, the decision to take the leap across the pond was a no-brainer.

"I always had trouble getting good sparring as an amateur so i reckoned as a pro it would be the same," Moore states.

"Training is great, I love getting away up to the Catskills to camp. There's always a former world champion floating about with a story or some advice. I've been sparring with Kassium Ouma lately (most enjoyable sparring every time). But through the years I've sparred with Ike Quartey, John Duddy, Paul Malignaggi, Dmitri Salita and Michael Katsidis, to name but a few."

Moore keeps in regular contact with his fellow Irish pros. "I talk to John Duddy pretty much every day, I also see Andy Lee from time to time. After training in the Wild Card for a month, Dean Byrne showed me about the place and was a good help to me while I was there.

"Wayne McCullough and Steve Collins were guys I looked up to and tried to follow a similar path. I have no plans to fight in Ireland any time soon; it's just not worth it. Why travel half way round and get paid less to fight? Pro boxing is a business and unless you have people around you who are straight up, you're wasting your time. There are a few things on offer at the moment for me in 2011 so keep an eye out."

James mentioned two well respected boxers who enjoyed successful stints in the States. 'The Pocket Rocket' Wayne McCullough now resides in Las Vegas, Nevada. The 1992 Olympic silver medal winner contested 23 professional bouts in America during his 15-year career. Steve Collins participated in 20 contests, the majority in Boston, from 1986-1990. An Irish title victory over Sam Storey was included among his successes as well as a WBA title defeat to Mike McCallum. Bernard Dunne had his first 14 fights under the tutelage of Freddie Roach. Benefitting from exposure on the likes of ESPN TV, Dunne later returned home to fight under the Brian Peters promotional banner.

Many American nationals with Irish blood have tapped in to the St. Patrick's Day phenomena and built strong fan bases. Boston's 'Irish' Micky Ward wowed fight fans with his blood and guts ring wars during the 1990s and other crowd pleasers like Maureen Shea, Bobby Gunn and, most recently, Ryan Coyne draw strong interest, just like Jack Dempsey did all those years ago.

For the lads travelling over, the reality of living in a foreign land can also take its toll. Despite the potential riches on offer the problem

of homesickness could become a factor in how long they are willing to follow the dream.

“To be honest it is hard being over here sometimes,” confides Byrne.

“I have a young kid and it’s a big sacrifice to make but he’s on my mind, my motivation to train well and make the dreams come true. At the minute it is hard and I’m putting my head down and getting stuck in until I can go and spend some time with my son.”

It can be a tough price to pay, but if a fighter can tap into the Irish-American market, as many have already done so successfully, then the rewards are there for all to see.

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TRANSITIONS: AMATEUR TO PROFESSIONAL

In 1957 Olympic heavyweight gold medallist Pete Rademacher jumped straight out of the amateur game and made his professional debut against world champion, and 33-fight veteran, Floyd Patterson. Today, with such vast differences between the two codes, the very idea would seem inconceivable.

The styles, objectives, equipment and controversial computer scoring system all help to set the sports apart, leaving some critics likening the amateur game's emphasis on touch and move to Olympic fencing. Aspiring boxers in Ireland face the same issues when making the transition from amateur to pro.

"I don't like the amateur style of boxing; I much prefer being a professional," admits Irish middleweight champion Gary O'Sullivan.

"The amateur style is more about hit and run and I think the computer scoring system ruined it. I prefer to have a bit of a fight or a tear-up and get stuck in, whereas the amateur game means holding the hands up to the face and there's less opportunity to unleash the bombs.

"I changed over fairly quickly and my style didn't need much adapting so it didn't take me long to adjust," Gary adds. "The professional game suited me so it helped make up my mind to change over."

The amateur game has always held its roots firmly in the local community, with a spit-and-sawdust approach to training, in the numerous gyms across the country. Professional boxing, at the highest level at least, is synonymous with razzmatazz and the glitz and glamour, pay-per-view extravaganzas and excesses of Las Vegas.

"The pro game is a business nowadays if we are honest," states Michael Carruth, a man who has tasted the bitter and the sweet of both codes.

"The amateur game is more of a family run sport where people help each other out and there's more fun involved in the grass roots of boxing. The pro game has been tarnished over the years and the most

honest people are the boxers themselves. Saying that, I would have regretted not turning professional – I had to give it a go.”

Boxing is a sport that has always attracted the money men and plenty of cash now filters its way around the amateur game as well as the professional. Very rarely does a top-class amateur not flip the coin and ditch his head guard and vest to try his hand as a professional prizefighter. As the sports continue to separate, the old adage that a good amateur does not necessarily make a good professional resonates now more than ever.

In the amateurs the main objective is to land more correct scoring blows on the opponent's target area and knockouts are more of a pleasing bonus rather than a clear objective. Whenever a fighter turns pro he must learn to set his feet more to generate power, the stick and move aspect is less evident and he/she must learn to fight on the inside, become savvy and expect plenty of rough treatment from grizzled veterans.

“My brother [Paddy] and I see this as a completely different game from amateur boxing,” says JJ McDonagh.

“Amateur boxing was all about points scoring from a distance and plenty of movement, while this is more about power and throwing hooks on the inside. If you like professional boxing it's a great thing to learn the tricks and watch what other people do.”

“They are stylistically opposed. Amateur boxing is a sprint and professional boxing is a marathon,” agrees Michael Carruth.

“I turned pro because I wanted to become a world champion as well as an Olympic gold medallist. It's filled with money, questionable loyalties and the rivalries of promoters; you have all that to contend with. You're a number to them, a way of making money.”

In pro boxing the onus is almost exclusively on the individual. Even for those fortunate enough to get an ethical management and promotional team around them can experience a feeling of isolation.

Super-bantamweight prospect Carl Frampton misses the camaraderie of the amateur game: “I'd be lying if I said I didn't miss the set-up and I miss the banter and comradeship, having a bit of craic with the other lads.

“Fighting as a professional was what I wanted to do from an early age and I just have to deal with the other things and get on with it. I got a lot benefits from the High Performance unit including quality sparring on a daily basis. Guys like David Oliver Joyce, Eric Donovan, Ross Hickey and Paddy Barnes kept me on top form. Coaches like Zaur Antia and

Billy Walsh were fantastic and it helped me improve a lot. When you're boxing for Ireland they don't send you to Mickey Mouse tournaments, they are all tough challenges filled with teams from Eastern European countries. These experiences brought me on as a fighter."

One major point of contention continues to be the issue of computer scoring. While younger coaches are now training their aspiring medal winners to box to the system (a skill so finely tuned into the Cuban boxers for example), older hands are still sceptical of the merits of the button pushers.

"Throw the computer in the river," laughs Midland ABC head coach Billy McKee, "that's the best place for it."

While Billy McKee is a veteran, from the old school of the amateur game, Peter Neill, a coach at Monkstown club, believes we should be constructive and sees good and bad points in the system: "My opinion is that the computer is only as good as the person pressing the button so if somebody can't see a shot going through, even if everyone else can, then the button's not getting pressed. We can all sometimes be on the end of wrong scoring and I would rather see it back to the way it used to be with judges seeing who's winning the contest as opposed to using a computer."

Michael Hawkins is a prominent figure in Irish amateur boxing who holds constructive views on the old scoring chestnut.

"It's all well and good people criticising the computer system; I was there in Seoul 1988 at the infamous Roy Jones vs. Park Si-Hun Olympic final. After that contest the Olympics council said to boxing, "clean your act up or you're out" and the sport introduced computer scoring.

"Amateur boxing isn't like the 100 metres where you run a distance and the first over the line wins, clear cut, because there are five judges who need to push the button at the same time to score points. It's basically down to individual impressions and button pressing, which unfortunately is not foolproof as people can cheat and not press the button or press it too late. However, until something better is thought of then we cannot complain.

"Don't throw the computer in the river until you come up with something better to judge contests with and so far that hadn't happened. Some very astute journalists have said that all you need is three honest men – well, where are they?"

Not only does St. Agnes' ABC supremo Sean Canavan boast vast experience on the domestic front, but he has been present, on an

official capacity, at Olympic Games and seen the evolution of the amateur code, for good and bad.

"There have been big changes in the whole game of boxing since I started," says Canavan, "especially after the 1988 computer controversy in the Seoul Olympics involving Roy Jones.

"The worst thing that can happen to any sport is to be thrown out of the Olympics and that threat was genuinely hanging over amateur boxing. They brought in the computer and not every agrees with it but after such a long time they aren't going to replace with it paper again are they?"

It doesn't appear likely and as I have found on my travels, while the computer is not infallible it may be the fairest system around at the moment - at least until someone offers a viable alternative.

"Personally I preferred it the way it was," says Sean, "and the reason I would never have become a judge is because of the massive pressures on them now."

Nomadic coach Seamus Deeds is in favour of the computer: "As a boxing judge I can see that the computer system has its faults but we aren't going to change that and I think it's okay because you can't knowingly cheat the computer.

"Back in the old days there were dodgy decisions and I think the computer system helps clean that up and because it's relatively new, people are still learning from it. With the computer there are no personalities as in who the judges' like or who they don't like; it makes it straighter down the line. There's a good judge and a bad judge. There will always be conflict, whatever is used."

Oliver Plunkett coach Patsy McAllister holds a view that he believes is concurrent with 90 per cent of the amateur game.

"The scoring system is okay, but the people that push the buttons are the problem!" Patsy exclaims. "They're told to score good, clear punches but when you see scores like 2-0 and 3-2 [low scores] it becomes hard to believe. The art of boxing seems to be dying out and it has become more like fencing, with a strong back hand, and the jab - which in my opinion is the greatest punch in boxing- has been taken out of the equation and there are no points for displaying fine defensive skills. The scoring system can be confusing and baffling to the general public.

"If you go to different competitions in Europe, or even just in England, there are different things being told to the judges regarding scoring. We need a uniform system so all judges know what to score

and what to ignore. Still, they say that the computer always throws up the winner..." McAllister shrugs "...but I suppose you could disagree with that too."

Finally on my travels I encounter Desi Hill and Gerard McManus from Gleann ABC.

"I'm a bit bitter about the computer from my time in boxing after some dubious scores against me," McManus recalls from his competitive days.

"They're hammering people for running in the last rounds and deducting them points when they know they're ahead.

"I was going to turn pro but then I didn't bother with it and I think that the way the amateur game is run now is ruining the professional game because people are fencing instead of boxing and we have two different sports [amateur and pro]. They're coming out of the amateur game and they have to learn a whole new sport, after training for so long with the box and move tactics. You stick two men in the centre of the ring and let them box how they want to box. Tip-tap boxing makes Olympic gold medals but I prefer the old style of fighting."

Desi Hill intercedes, "People are always going to argue about the computer but whenever they used the sheets, everybody had a complaint about them as well because of bias. I could run with the computer if it was worked right, but what happens is that sometimes politics means that someone isn't hitting the button for you. We all complain about the system."

Gerard McManus likes the way the American amateurs approach their work: "The Americans' box like professionals, they like to trade a bit more than the Europeans' who box and move."

Boxing Union of Ireland president Mel Christle has this advice for any amateur boxer seeking a professional license with his organisation: "I would very shrewdly weigh up the trainer and the manager before turning pro. You need a proper trainer who is adept in the language of professional boxing, someone who will put greater emphasis on technique and proper sparring.

"You can punch a bag or pads all you like but it's the high-class sparring that really brings a fighter on and sparring is the middle ground between the basic gym work and full on competition. The pool is getting bigger over here [in Ireland] but not big enough, it can still improve. There is a greater pool of sparring partners available in the hotbeds of pro boxing, in England and the ultimate destination - America."

So as we have seen, the amateur game does not encourage punch combinations or pressure fighting, both of which are imperative in the pros. Amateurs are encouraged to throw single shots that the three judges can see clearly. As for the computer scoring system, well, it seems to add even more confusion. The differences in boxing style and the way the two sports are organised point to two separate entities, the gap between them apparently widening.

One thing is for sure regarding most issues in the boxing world. Such a wide range of viewpoints and opinions means that you truly cannot please all the people all the time. In the days of Pete Rademacher, one code seamlessly led to the other. That no longer appears to be the case.

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ARE ALPHABET TITLES THE SCOURGE OF BOXING?

Of all the many problems in Boxing, one subject is bound to stir up debate among any ardent fans discussing the sport. Affectionately known by many as ‘Alphabet Belts’ in reference to the mind boggling jumble of letters, the minor organisations are now part of boxing, whether we like it or not.

Aside from the trivialities of knowing the IBA from the WBU, the argument rests on a more serious note of whether these titles really do irreparable harm to the state of the game.

Representative of the World Boxing Empire (WBE) Mark Chang doesn’t agree with all the negativity surrounding minor belts: “While we agree that it is easier from a fan’s perspective to recognize a single champion, with the infrequency of title defences, this is not a model that allows worthy contenders to fight for a title in a timely manner.

“More sanctioning bodies mean more opportunities for boxers,” continues Chang, “which is why we rarely hear the boxers themselves complaining about too many sanctioning bodies.”

This may be correct, but it is the likes of the WBE that are raking in excessive sanctioning fees while milking the sport for all they can get.

Individual boxer’s views on sanctioning bodies would certainly vary depending upon whose opinion you were seeking. The chance for a lower ranked fighter to proclaim himself a ‘world champion’ would hold significant appeal, not to mention potential financial benefits. Veteran Rob Calloway has held his fair share of trinkets during an 18-year pro career.

“Basically these belts are just a stepping stone to bigger things,” admits Calloway. “If, for example, you are fighting out in the Midwest then the promoter can bring in a title and it makes things a little more interesting for the fans. They aren’t much good for anything else though.”

Australian middleweight Jamie Pittman generally agrees. He used the WBF belt as a learning process. “The WBF is not really worth much

but it was a stepping stone fight and the first time I had trained to fight 12 rounds. I never classed myself as a world champion though.”

In a break from the general consensus, Ed Levine’s International Boxing Organisation (IBO) use computerised rankings to determine their ratings. Furthermore, they do not impose mandatory defences on champions and sternly announce “we are not controlled by promoters.” The latter a clear backbite at the political relationships between some promoters and sanctioning bodies.

Aiming to become established as a credible organisation, IBO representative Jeremy Levine states, “Boxing doesn’t need more titles, but it needs an honest one.”

While their credibility may be in question, the IBO’s website is at least full of seemingly honourable intentions.

“When you associate with the IBO,” it says, “you send a message to boxing. It’s a statement of your commitment to maintaining credibility in the greatest, purest contest of human ability in the world. We’re “The Champions of Integrity”, and we invite you to be part of the revolution.”

While the lesser outfits are widely chastised, it is hard to suppose the so-called ‘Big Four’ are indeed any better for boxing. The WBC’s famous U-turn in the late nineties involving Roy Jones Jr and Graciano Rocchigiani almost put them out of business. Like many of their esteemed contemporaries, the organisation is beset with a swarm of splintered belts, ranging from Emeritus status and FECARBOX champions to the bewildering CABOFE. Acronyms aside, this just serves to confuse the casual fan even more. The American writer Jim Brady famously tackled corruption and the sanctioning outfits in his 2002 book *Boxing Confidential* and Brady tirelessly scrutinised their every move right up until his death in 2005.

The WBA, another member of the valued foursome, offers a confusing Super Champion status which allows a boxer to fight for their world championship while the true champion is elevated to a higher status. It kicks in when the WBA wishes to retain a champion who has unhelpfully unified one or more of the other belts at the weight! Incidentally the Japanese boxing commission only sanctions ‘world’ title bouts when the WBC and WBA are involved.

Charismatic president of the Atlanta, Georgia based International Boxing Union (IBU) Don ‘Moose’ Lewis set about re-forming the IBU in 1997 out of the ashes of a former European-based organisation.

Lewis feels he has a key role in the sport: “The IBU aims to give the fighters a chance at a world title belt but without the politics

involved in Boxing. That's what we need to eliminate," he says. "We can offer a springboard to fighters. Peter Manfredo Jnr was our world champion before he went on [reality TV boxing show] *The Contender*. Shannon Briggs won his first title with the IBU and Scott Pemberton 'got his first cup of coffee' with us too."

But what about the IBU ratings system?

"Rating are overrated," quips Moose.

Similar to others from such bodies that I spoke too, Lewis's reasons for creating an organisation are admirable, but his presence is arguably just adding to the clutter.

Based out of Australia and in function since 2004, the World Boxing Federation (WBF) has a comprehensive and balanced ratings system on their website. The top ten of each weight class appears fair and many fans would probably be in agreement. The issue usually lies in the man at the top of the tree; the WBF belt holder, sitting above the world's best fighters and often only a domestic level operator in his own right.

After starting life in the US, the WBF relocated to the Pacific under current president Mick Croucher, a former pro during the 1960s. "The sanctioning bodies provide opportunities for boxers and promoters to pick and choose who they want to work with," states the Aussie veteran.

"It is not uncommon for a promoter to seek and ask bodies for a price to sanction a bout and often go to the cheapest supplier (sanction body). I know there are multiple titles out there but they are usually filled by boxers, not all of which are in the elite class. Like tennis and other games they have B, C & D class competition and a lot of bodies provide for this. It gives a chance for a boxer to achieve a title and end up with a belt."

Croucher appears far removed from the stereotypical image of a greedy businessman trying to make a quick buck. The WBF heavyweight title (once in the capable hands of Audley Harrison) was later cared for by Albert Sosnowski. Interestingly enough, whenever Sosnowski held the esteemed crown, his WBF top ranked contender was the widely recognised No. 1 heavyweight on the planet - Wladimir Klitschko.

In the boxing mainstream with its multimillion dollar television rights and sold-out arenas, it is easy to forget about the promoters at the grass roots level, trying to break even on a local show. Ken Purchase, the head of UK based Ringside promotions, argues that a

title, no matter how frivolous, can bring in vital extra revenue come fight night.

"It's important for boxers to be fighting for titles to encourage the public to come along to these spectacles," says Purchase.

"Professional boxing at grass root level is going to be about the boxer being able to put bums on seats because the promoter can't do it all for him. Part of the negotiation about his pay is going to be about how many tickets he can sell."

Purchase is shrewd enough to know that the belts on offer may mean little, but that matters not when it comes to selling out a small hall.

"I know the hardcore boxing people understand that it's not much of a title, but to the fighters, who are selling tickets to people that know them, like family and friends -not necessarily boxing fans- it allows more money to come into the promotions."

"You used the word 'minor' titles but Ricky Hatton held one for a very long time," adds veteran manager Jack Doughty, who guided featherweight Choi to WBF and WBU title successes. "As did many of Frank Warren's fighters, so they're not minor to the boxer."

"It would be simpler of course if we could all say who the world champion is, but we can't anymore so we need to face reality. These titles are important for the boys who win them because they can earn some money. Even with the WBF title Choi became a big hero in Mongolia, so in the long term they're a good thing."

Now all too familiar to British boxing fans, the World Boxing Union (WBU) have recently been up for sale and proclaim on their website: "The WBU has a reputation for honesty and integrity throughout the sport of which it is rightly proud."

Attempts to contact them remain futile due to the official listed phone number belonging to a perplexed resident in the local area, wondering why she is receiving their calls. The current situation has seen the WBU remain on the market but still functioning on the UK circuit mainly due to promoters' inclinations to make use of their various trinkets.

"Every title is a good title and I want to win as many as I can," enthuses former WBU lightweight champion Lee McAllister. "The WBU is obviously not recognised so much, I want to be a WBC or IBF champion. Ricky Hatton made a lot of money off it though and if it's good enough for him then it's good enough for me."

The road to a genuine world title (if such a thing exists) is even more blurred than ever and while some still tread the traditional route,

others now take a shortcut. The quality of the boxer still makes the belt and this fact will remain. The perceived threat of the MMA and UFC shook boxing out of a deep sleep in 2007, making it a year to remember, where great fighters fought one another and the appearance of any belt was relegated to the sidelines. While this trend did not necessarily continue in the following years, some TV channels have put a stop to minor titles appearing on their boxing broadcasts. Our sport, however, is a lucrative business and it seems everybody wants a piece of the pie.

From the financial incentives on offer to the genuinely bizarre, world title organisations spring up for a variety of reasons, both personal and business. In 1981 Pat O’Grady unashamedly devised the misleadingly named World Athletic Association (WAA) after his son Sean was stripped of the WBA lightweight crown for failing to defend against the number one contender. Running with the slogan “Boxing People for Boxing” the WAA interestingly have a statement of intent posted on their website which reads exactly the same as the WBU.

Mostly inactive, the team are little involved in world affairs and fulfil a role as a boxing side note. In a similar fashion, so do the International Boxing Association (IBA) founded by former Baseball star Dean Chance, who gives the impression that his organisation is more of a hobby than a serious venture into sport.

Perhaps with the established organisations straining the patience of the fans, it is time for us to embrace the new members of the boxing world.

“Just because they have been around a long time, does not mean they are any better,” IBO’s Jeremy Levine comments, in response to the ‘Big Four’.

As long as bodies continue to get licensed, sanction fights and hold a purpose among promoters and television companies alike, I believe they will continue to play a part in the business of boxing.

****THE YEAR IN REVIEW: ARTICLES****

Frampton could be Ireland's next big star – 3rd January

Going back in time to Rinty Monaghan and Johnny Caldwell, up to the more recent Dave ‘Boy’ McAuley and Wayne McCullough, Northern Irish boxing has had a lengthy association with its lower-weight heroes. Super-bantamweight Carl Frampton is the next man hoping to step into the shoes of his illustrious predecessors and pack out famous local venues like the King’s or Ulster Hall.

Training in the reputed Holy Family gym under veteran coach Gerry Storey Snr, and his son of the same name, Carl has been realising the rigours involved when aspiring to reach the highest level. “The training has been a lot tougher and Gerry has me up at 7am every day, running up the Cave Hill, doing sprints and plenty of road work,” enthused the 22-year-old. “My fitness has improved a lot and I’m feeling a lot better all round.

“I’m sparring here with all four Upton brothers [amateur prospects] and getting a bit of light sparring with Paddy Barnes, which with me being a little bit heavier means I get good speed work off him. Paddy is the fastest person I’ve ever sparred with. When I was across the water I got a few days sparring with John Simpson, who holds the Commonwealth featherweight title.”

Carl was back across the water, living and training with manager and mentor Barry McGuigan, straight after recording his latest professional scalp – a third-round knockout of Hungarian Ignac Kassai in Magherafelt on the Paul McCloskey-Daniel Rasilla undercard.

“I’d sold around 200 tickets for the fight so I wanted to impress,” admitted Carl, who had been relishing his first domestic appearance in the pro ranks. “They produced a great atmosphere and my opponent came out swinging wildly, trying to knock me out. I had to get the

measure of him by throwing short punches down the middle. Barry and Gerry were both pleased with my performance.”

Tutor McGuigan is also excited about the prospects of his new charge, although Carl assures me he is not feeling pressured by the press releases that are lauding his undoubted potential. “It was great getting on the McCloskey undercard and I would love all my fights to be in Northern Ireland, but I know that’s not going to happen. I’d like to fight in and around Belfast as much as I can.

“I think overall the transition into the pro game has gone well and I really enjoyed my first two fights. In the first one I stopped the boy in the second round while the second one saw me win a unanimous decision. In that fight my opponent was just trying to survive, but on the whole things are going well.

“The [8st 10lb] weight’s easy enough to make and I’ve been coming in around 8 stone 12lb so, after fighting at featherweight as an amateur, I’m finding it relatively comfortable.”

There was a reason so many high-profile names were sniffing around for Frampton’s signature when he decided to hand in his vest and head guard. The Irish international had won plenty of silverware, yet possessed a pressure-fighting style that neatly suited the professional game.

“After I won European Union silver in 2007, Barry was talking to me and suggested I had a good style for the pros,” he continued. “Just after the senior final when I beat David Oliver Joyce, he got in touch with me and a few other boys did as well, about turning pro, and in the end I decided to sign with McGuigan.”

One of Carl’s amateur highlights was a silver medal at the European Union Championships, where he lost to future Olympic silver medallist Khedafi Djelkhir of France after a short notice call-up.

Veteran trainer Gerry Storey, an MBE and celebrated stalwart of Irish boxing, concurs that Carl has the talent to succeed and he has seen a few champions pass through the club in his time, including Michael Ayers and son Sam Storey.

“There’s no doubt that Carl is looking great at the moment and has massive amateur experience, winning titles and getting better each time,” said Storey.

“One of the best amateurs in Ireland, along with Carl, was Joyce and the two fights they had were some of the best we’ve seen in a long time. The second fight saw massive improvements in Carl’s game and

he's only getting started in the pro game. But as time goes along we're expecting big things from this lad."

Gerry sends Carl on three and four-mile runs in the morning along the nearby Belfast Docks and ups the ante even further when fight night is closing in.

"You get people saying that anything after a British or European title can be a bonus," concluded Gerry Storey. "But we're not looking at that. We think Carl can go all the way to the very top."

FLYWEIGHT CONLAN AIMING FOR TITLES IN 2010 – 9TH JANUARY

Belfast's hot prospect flyweight Jamie Conlan is aiming to keep busy in 2010 and believes title opportunities could come knocking by the end of the year. The domestic talent pool at his eight stone weight class is relatively thin on the ground and Conlan is striving to keep active.

"I'm not sure what they have lined up next but there was talk about a date in March," explained the 22-year-old. "I'm back in training already working hard; I love training and always give 100 per cent. I'm still getting great sparring – I've actually sparred Luke Wilton in the past as he's in and around my weight class."

Fellow prospect Wilton is also hovering around the lower weights and the Eastside man is steadily building his record and confidence following some early setbacks. Conlan, meanwhile, is still smarting after an untimely injury forced him off the recent Matthew Macklin headliner in Dublin.

"I was gutted to miss out on that Dublin card, especially as I attended the fight and sampled the atmosphere," said Jamie, who would have been making his second pro outing. "I think a ligament in my shoulder went. During the last days of sparring I threw a left hook to the body and everything went numb. It isn't a long-running problem; I saw the physio and got advice on strengthening the muscles over Christmas. The most frustrating thing was that come fight night it felt great."

Coming from the same neck-of-the-woods as the popular Martin Rogan, the West Belfast man was able to shift plenty of tickets for his Odyssey debut in November – a points win over tricky Anwar Alfadi. Solving the rubix cube style of Alfadi is difficult enough for any debut fighter, yet Jamie used his range finding jab and right hand to measure the Sheffield man. A bad cut in the dying seconds of the contest (six stitches required) proved a marginal disappointment on an otherwise

good night's work as he ran home a 39-37 victor on Ian John Lewis's scorecard.

Playing his trade under veteran coach John Breen, Conlan is delighted with the amateur to professional transition: "Everything's working brilliantly with John; we're back on pads and strength work. Everyday I'm doing something different. I want to get as much time in the ring this year as I possibly can."

MAGEE HEADS TO DENMARK FOR EURO TITLE SHOT – 11TH JANUARY

Brian Magee has landed a crack at the vacant European super-middleweight title and holds no reservations about travelling to Denmark on January 30. Now training out of his former amateur home of St. Agnes' in West Belfast, the 34-year-old is feeling refreshed and ready to go after linking up with Panamanian trainer Bernardo Checa.

"Training's going very well and for the short period of time I've been with Bernardo I feel rejuvenated," enthused the former IBO ruler, now with a 32-3-1 (22 KOs) record.

"A year out is a long time so Bernardo's been polishing me up and putting me back on track; introducing a few new things to compliment the strengths I already possess.

"No doubt the new surroundings have had a positive impact on me, coming back to St. Agnes'."

Magee split from 21-year trainer Harry Hawkins to link up with Checa and will have been absent from the ring for over a year when he steps inside the ropes in Aarhus for his title chance. Opponent Mads Larsen is a former world title challenger who, due to promotional disputes, has been inactive himself in recent times, but Brian sees his world-class credentials as a threat.

"I think I'm catching Mads at a good time but they could say the same about me because I've been inactive for a good while as well. I feel it's an evenly-matched fight and he's undoubtedly a world-class operator as you can see from his record. Make no mistake; it will be a tough fight.

"I don't mind travelling at all and if you want a title you have to do these things. The main issue was getting the fight and I was willing to do what was required to secure my shot. There are no concerns about going to Denmark whatsoever."

Magee circled the globe as a top-class amateur and travelled to Germany in 2005 for a shot at this very belt. He dropped a close split

decision to Vitali Tsypko before landing a fight with Carl Froch which was still in the balance when Brian was caught with a quality uppercut and dispatched in the 11th session. He trod the undercard scene for a while (also drawing with Tony Oakey for the British light-heavyweight belt) before some classy body shots stopped unbeaten Stevie McGuire for the domestic super-middleweight strap.

In 2008 a mixture of injuries and politics meant he has remained out of action until now, but Brian sees the positive side: "If I had been defending the British title over the past year then this is where I'd liked to have been at this stage anyway. The European title was in our plans way back last year so I'm glad it worked out."

Former pro Checa, meanwhile, has been plotting a strategy of his own to ensure the title comes back to Belfast. "Pat Magee asked me if I was interested in training Brian and I said 'why not?' so here I am," Bernardo explained.

"Brian's working very hard in the gym. We've been concentrating on defence and movement as well as footwork and punching power. He's getting good sparring with two guys from the South who are both southpaws like Larsen. We are well prepared to travel to Denmark and I believe we will be 100 per cent ready.

"It's the right time to take Larsen, I think he's past his best and Brian will win."

Brian's manager Pat Magee (no relation), gave me an insight into why his man felt he had to change trainers. "Harry [Hawkins] wanted Brian to go with another promoter in Brian Peters," Pat said. "Harry found it difficult to work with myself and [promotional partner] John Rooney after the Poonsawat-Bernard Dunne situation [we cannot explore this further as it is the subject of an ongoing court case]. Brian wanted to stay with me. Don't get me wrong, Harry's a great coach and if I had another fighter who was better suited to him than Bernardo, I'd have no hesitation in recommending him.

"Bernardo has a long history of training world champions here. He came to Belfast in the 1980s when he was still boxing; he was No. 1 in the world super-bantam ratings. He used to struggle with the weight and he had a bent for coaching so he retired at 26-28, and joined the Barney Eastwood stable when Barry McGuigan, Dave McAuley, Crisanto Espana and Victor Cordoba were there. Brian knew of Bernardo by reputation and I used Bernardo for Kiko Martinez in the last Rendall Munroe fight. He was in town and the obvious choice."

Hawkins disputed Pat Magee's version of events. "Pat told me there was nothing in the pipeline for Brian so I asked if we could put him on a Brian Peters bill in Limerick," he countered. "He's fought on three Brian Peters bills before as well as for Matchroom, Hennessey Sports, Panix. I didn't want him to work with Peters permanently but Pat did not want him to fight on a Brian Peters show because of the whole Poonsawat thing.

"Sure, when Pat signed Poonsawat, it put me and Brian in a difficult position, as I was Bernard's coach as well. I think we were both caught in the middle; I was angry and Pat and John might not have been welcomed in the gym but they didn't have to be in the gym. I could have carried on training him and Pat managing him. At the end of the day, it's Brian's decision, Pat can only advise him."

The two southpaws brought in for fine tuning are the unbeaten McDonagh brothers, JJ and Paddy (both 2-0 novice professionals), managed by Gary Hyde. Brian's manager Pat Magee is understandably delighted by the reported £270,000 purse that will be split 50/50 between the challengers. Magee has retained some ties with his former Holy Trinity residence with conditioning guru Alex Doherty still in camp.

Sparring partner JJ McDonagh has opened his professional account with two first-round knockouts and feels he is benefitting from the gym sessions.

"Being in the ring with a quality operator like Brian is great experience for me," said the Mullingar man, when he caught his breath back following a heated three-threes. "I'm still making the transition, style-wise, from the amateurs and I realise that not every opponent will fall as easily as the first two. Brian is fit and strong and will be in great shape come January."

MCDONAGH PREPARES MAGEE FOR LARSEN – 15TH JANUARY

As Brian Magee worked up a sweat in preparation for his European title fight with Mads Larsen on January 30, a young sparring partner at the opposite end of the scale was pushing Brian through his paces. 24-year-old novice pro JJ McDonagh has made quite a stir on the Irish scene since switching codes in late November, knocking his first two opponents – Jevgenijs Kiselevs and Mario Lupp – out in just one round. The latter of those two victories was achieved two weeks after his debut triumph, on the Matthew Macklin-Rafa Sosa Pintos undercard in Dublin, yet the Mullingar man realises they'll not all be falling as freely when he moves up the domestic rankings.

“In Belfast [his debut, November 20] my opponent caught me with a good punch to the body at the very start and from then on I just kept hitting him with hooks and he went down,” said JJ. “My second fight also ended in the opener and I’m hoping to get more experience as my opponents improve. The first two wins have been quick and I know you won’t get them all like that.”

First adversary Kiselevs was 4-5 going in so knew what it felt like to win. McDonagh soon battered that feeling out of him, dropping the Latvian twice before referee David Irving called a halt at 1-56. Second foe Lupp was fairly inept and arbiter Mickey Vann was always looking for an excuse to jump in. I was ringside for both contests and McDonagh’s spiteful left hook and southpaw jab could prove to be formidable weapons.

Meanwhile, in Belfast’s St. Agnes’ gym, the super-middleweight has been lauding the professionalism of Brian Magee in his preparations.

“Brian’s in great condition, even last week he was on top form,” McDonagh opined. “He gives me a great workout and it shows his class that he’s been out of action for about 12 months and comes back

to European title level. I see an improvement from last week's sessions.

"My brother [2-0 light-heavyweight Paddy] and I are just after turning pro and this is a completely different game from amateur boxing so sparring someone with Brian's experience is great for both of us. Amateur boxing was all about points scoring from a distance and plenty of movement, while this is more about power and throwing hooks on the inside. If you like professional boxing it's a great thing to learn the tricks and watch what other people do."

Guided by Cork businessman Gary Hyde, McDonagh is content to put his head down and quietly work under the heated spotlight caused by Hyde's headline-grabbing Cubans Mike Perez, Alexei Acosta and Luis Garcia.

"I'm very happy with the transition. Gary Hyde is a great promoter and I reckon there will be plenty of fights in the pipeline," he added.

BELSHAW'S LAST CHANCE – 19TH JANUARY

Lisburn heavyweight Scott Belshaw realises the importance of his January 22 assignment in Brentwood when he meets once-beaten prospect Larry Olubamiwo. In a brutally honest assessment of his career so far, Scott admitted he has not given the best account of himself and is aiming to put that right.

“It was meant to be Tom Dallas originally but then Frank Maloney made the offer and I can’t wait to get in there with big Larry,” he said. “I want to get my career back on line and Larry’s the man in my way. I’m not silly; of course this is a must-win fight for me.”

Both men hold a common opponent in the form of rugged journeyman Daniel Peret. After stringing together seven early-career wins, six by knockout, Scott suffered his first pro loss to Peret in Nottingham (March 2008). Three subsequent confidence-building wins (including a revenge win over Peret) were eroded when a short-notice loss to Tyson Fury and Prizefighter defeat to Audley Harrison placed Belshaw in this precarious position.

“I’m confident and realise what’s at stake,” added the 24-year-old, now 10-3 (7 KOs). “I’ve been over in London training with Johnny Eames since just before the Prizefighter and Johnny, who I see as a well-respected trainer, was very honest with me. He told me that three weeks wasn’t enough notice to train properly but he saw potential in me and said at the time, regardless of what happened in Prizefighter, that I could come back and he would see what he can do with me. Here I am now, firing on all cylinders.

“I was outclassed in Prizefighter, as simple as that. Audley had too much experience and class for me but I came back to London at the start of November and have had good sparring with Albert Sosnowski. I’m hoping to spar Matt Skelton later this week but due to the weather he hasn’t got down yet. Dereck Chisora could be on the sparring list so I’ve no excuses this time and I’m confident that I will

beat Olubamiwo. This is my full-time job, my heart and soul's back in boxing so I just need a promoter backing me now."

Scott had become somewhat of a boxing nomad, who initially relocated to London when previously promoted by Frank Maloney and trained with Brian Lawrence. Their relationship never quite matured and was terminated following a lacklustre win over Pavol Polakovic at York Hall. A brief spell back with Alan Wilton in Belfast and Scott is now enjoying his time under the stewardship of Eames.

"I had thought about going to the USA but London is the place to be," Scott explained, "especially with this new training camp. The environment is full of champions and top fighters like Tony Oakey, Billy Joe Saunders, Kevin Mitchell and Matthew Marsh. I believe that I have to be over here to get that type of training, alongside future world champions.

"I've seen plenty of Larry's fights and he was in the gym one day so I spoke with him when he was sparring Ali Adams and he seems like a nice fellow. In my opinion he's a big, strong guy with an incredible physique who clearly does lots of weights and can certainly punch hard. He's also raw, a bit like myself sometimes, although I'm learning new things and using my brain not just the brawn. Larry maybe lacks the boxing brain at this early stage of his career but he can clearly wallop so I won't underestimate him."

Olubamiwo is a late starter at 31 and will be looking to improve on his 6-1 (5 KOs) record. A win could boost him into domestic title contention but the experience, for a man who has never faced an opponent with a winning record, will be invaluable. He has won twice since his sole loss to the aforementioned Peret in May 2009. Belshaw, meanwhile, is looking to erase his losses from public memory.

"Wherever I go, the topic of conversation always comes back to Tyson Fury!" laughed Scott. "I definitely believe that people haven't seen the best of me yet and I know deep down that I can give a better account of myself than in the last couple of years.

"The Olubamiwo fight is just what I need to springboard myself back into the domestic mix. Winning comes first but if I can put a good performance on as well then it's a bonus – I'm up for it and no excuses this time, I'll win."

FEATURE ARTICLE: GERRY STOREY – 22ND JANUARY

In the middle of Northern Ireland's troubles Gerry Storey drove down Belfast's Antrim Road, hearing the customary rumble of gunfire in the distance. Entering the Holy Family BC, the club he has now coached for the best part of 60 years, Gerry collected documents from his car and closed the door behind him. Then all hell broke loose outside.

"I didn't even realise," recalls Storey, "but a full scale gun battle was going on between the Provisional IRA and the British Army. Shortly after, the army stopped two of my boxers and threw them against the wall. The soldier asked them who the guy driving the bronze Cortina was and they told the army it was Gerry Storey's. They refused to believe that I was the trainer of the club and thought I was a high-ranking IRA member."

It was no coincidence that the moment Storey's car had reached the top of the estate there was an IRA ceasefire and it wasn't until he entered the club that they started firing again. The veteran of Olympic games, countless amateur championships at club and international level, and producer of world champions, is still revered not just in Belfast, but across Ireland.

Austin Carruth (father of 1992 Olympic gold medallist Michael) once labelled Gerry "The daddy of all Irish trainers, amateur or professional". The 73-year-old has continuously trained both Catholic and Protestant boxers from his Holy Family base in the nationalist New Lodge area of Belfast.

"The actual Holy Family club started in 1942 in Chichester Park," Storey remembers. "It moved down to the New Lodge road in 1953 and in 1969 it came here. We whitewashed the paratroopers 10-0 in the downstairs hall and there's a plaque outside about the biggest defeat the 'Red Devils' suffered since Rommel!"

Gerry boxed until the age of 18, when a lazy eye developed and threatened permanent blindness. After seeking medical advice he understandably retired – as an amateur schoolboy champion.

“I joined the Holy Family in the late 1940s, “he explains, “and I’ve been involved ever since – some 60 years in total. My mother was worried every time I boxed with the bad eye, which was quite right, and my career was cut off before it started. But the trainers at the time had seen coaching ability shining through even at that early stage. My first coach Jim McStravick, who was a world-rated flyweight, picked me up one night fighting in the street and bought me up to the old club. My mother and father were long parted and Jim was looking out for me without my knowing.

“I used to run around the main professional gyms in Belfast, slipping up to see in between the cracks in the door and watch the likes of Rinty Monaghan and Kid McCauley. It gave me the bug for boxing.”

More than just a role model, McStravick would influence Storey’s coaching style as he mixed with the likes of Boxer Hall and Gerry McAllister (who competed as the legendary Patsy Quinn).

“If I was looking for advice then I always went to the older coaches,” says Storey. “One day I saw a book in a shop window called *How to Box*, by Joe Louis. It must have taken me over a month saving the money to buy it and I read it over and over trying to learn the techniques. I went down to the old cinema and watched Louis box Jersey Joe Walcott. Jersey Joe didn’t get the decision but I was amazed at the boxing skills he had that night.

“Jersey Joe was doing the shuffle way before Ali and he would have been my favourite heavyweight -not the best ever- but my favourite. To meet him, in the 1970s, and spend time in his company was a big plus for me. It was such a proud moment and we met many times in Atlantic City until he died.”

A scrapbook containing photographs of Gerry, with the likes of Fritzie Zivic, Billy Conn and Cuban legend Kid Chocolate represents links to a bygone era. His style is planted in the old-school way of thinking and, just as in 1942, club rules remain simple: “No swearing, drugs or political talk whatsoever,” he states. “We are very proud to have held on to those values throughout. Our champions have been from all backgrounds and different parts of the town.”

By the 1960s a burgeoning reputation saw the Irish amateur commission come knocking with an offer to coach the senior squad at

the European Championships in Rome. Storey's lengthy international career had begun.

He coached at three Olympics: Munich (1972), Montreal (1976) and Moscow (1980); four Commonwealth games: Christchurch (1974), Edmonton (1978), Brisbane (1982) and Victoria (1994); while seven European senior championships also adorn the CV.

Five Olympic representatives were all guided under the Holy Family tutelage: Gerry Hamill (Montreal, 1976), Hugh Russell (Moscow, 1980, won bronze), his son Sam Storey (Los Angeles, 1984), Paul Douglas (Barcelona, 1992) and Paddy Barnes (Beijing, 2006 bronze medallist). All five names sit in separate Olympic rings on the gym wall.

Coaching at the highest level in the world was one challenge, but a call came in 1981 that would present Gerry with his toughest assignment to date. At the height of the hunger strikes, paramilitary organisations inside the politically-charged Maze prison required a boxing coach and would accept only one man for the job.

"The sports council came out to me and said they were making exceptions," explains Storey. "The paramilitaries in the Long Kesh cages wanted me to come and coach them and they refused to take any other coach. I was training the UVF and UDA in one spot of the prison and the Provisional and Official IRA in another.

"I went into the cages on my own and we were locked in. While all this was going on there were about four assassination attempts on my life. I worked at the docks and bombs were planted underneath my car. That led to people saying that throughout my life I've walked with the angels."

Gerry lived to tell the tale and continued his remarkable run of champions in the amateur game, when a chance meeting on the club stairs, in the early 1990s, saw him enter into the pro game for the first time.

"A lady I knew met me going down the stairs one day and she wanted to know why I schooled all the amateur champions and when they went pro I turned my back on them and left them to the sharks. I just looked at her and agreed that it wouldn't happen again.

"I was the first over here to coach both amateur and professionals side-by-side and also stay on the Irish Council. In those days in England the amateur boys couldn't even get into a pro gym. I ran a pro-am gym and broke the mould when I started looking after Darren Corbett but I eventually got the Council's blessing. I later took on Jim

Webb, Tommy Waite [from the Loyalist Shankill Road], my own son Sam, Jason McKay and Neil Sinclair who had won Commonwealth gold with us. Barry Hearn sent Michael Ayers over for me to train in the mid-to-late 90s and I was with him for both Wayne Rigby wars.”

Obviously, with such a long list of achievements and experiences Gerry doesn’t harbour too many regrets, although does believe skullduggery prevented him from obtaining a larger gym space, when the opportunity arose a few years ago. But the positives long outweigh the negatives.

“I boxed an exhibition with former middleweight world champion Tony Zale in San Francisco and any time I was in New York, Ray Arcel came down and we talked long into the night about boxing,” Storey smiles. “I first met Ray Arcel in Boston and Ray told Eddie Futch I could have been part of his team anytime.

“Arcel told him all about me before he came over, so that’s why Eddie came around to meet me. I was in the dressing room after a fight one evening when a knock came at the door and it was Ray, asking if it was alright to come in and have a few yarns!”

A family man, whose three sons Gerry Jnr, Martin and Sam all boxed (daughter Jacqueline also took active involvement), Storey lost his wife and rock Belle in 2005.

Irish president Mary McAleese visited the Holy Family club after Gerry had claimed the prestigious Laureus Sport for Good award in 2004. He later won an MBE in 2008. After years of service to Irish boxing, he remains strongly active in training and his youthful optimism still shines through.

“I’m always working on the pads with Paddy Barnes and Carl Frampton; they’re the new breed coming through,” Storey opines. “Paddy won a fantastic bronze medal at the Olympics while Carl is a professional who we feel can win a world title. All four Upton brothers who box here are successful amateurs and Ryan Burnett is Under-21 champion. Our young blood coming through is very promising.

“I can assure you, 60 years in the business and I’m only starting!”



MARTIN LINDSAY IN FULL TRAINING – 29TH JANUARY

British featherweight champion Martin Lindsay has revealed his satisfaction at taking on mandatory challenger Jamie Arthur in a neutral location on March 19.

Although the Belfast man (pictured below) would have preferred to be defending his belt in front of a home crowd, the Immaculata clubman believes that his dedicated away following could make all the difference in the Leigh Sports Centre.

“I would have loved to have been fighting in Belfast,” Lindsay admitted, “but Frank Maloney is there to look after Jamie Arthur and I’m not signed with anyone at the moment, so I’m just happy to be fighting at a neutral venue.

“I’ll prepare accordingly for whatever happens and I have big support heading over with me to Leigh so I’m expecting it to be a good night.” Martin has been sparring with local fighters preparing for the Ulster and Irish senior tournaments.

“My main sparring partner is European bronze medallist Eamonn O’Kane who, being a middleweight, pushes me to the limit,” he said.

“The further my preparations go along, the more I’ll pick up the sparring.”

Preparing under the scrutiny of coach Gerry Nugent in his West Belfast base, Lindsay is aware of the dangers that his hungry challenger may pose but explained that Nugent is taking care of the tactics come fight night.

“To be honest I haven’t seen much of Jamie Arthur although my coach has the tape of him against Akaash Bhatia. I’ll let Gerry study it and plan how to fight him. I didn’t watch that much of Paul Appleby before our fight; again, I just left it to my coach to form a game plan.

“I remember Jamie from the Commonwealth games and I know I’m going to be in for a tough night’s work. He’s the challenger and he feels he’s under performed as a professional so he’ll want to give his best and try to win the British title.

“I have to be at my best to stop him doing that,” Lindsay declared.

Jamie Arthur has amassed a 16-2 (4 KOs) record since turning pro off the back of a sparkling amateur career. The Newport man thought he had snared home advantage for this bout, before the change of location, and is coming off the back of a points win over Mickey Coveney. This followed a career-best verdict over Akaash Bhatia in an eliminator for a crack at Lindsay. The champion, however, has no such plans to relinquish his hard earned prize, “I’ve been ticking over since Christmas and I just take these things in my stride and deal with what happens at the time. The same thing happened with the Appleby fight because I had an injury and that was postponed.

“Everything’s going according to plan; the weight’s not too bad,” concluded Lindsay.

“I’m only about seven or eight pounds over at the moment with seven weeks to go and my fitness is flying. I can’t wait.”



BRIAN MAGEE WINS EUROPEAN TITLE IN DENMARK – 30TH JANUARY

Brian Magee breathed new life into his career with a comprehensive knockout win over Mads Larsen to claim the European super-middleweight title. 34-year-old Brian dominated the fight and led on all three judges' scorecards before ending the affair in the seventh-round with body shots.

The classy southpaw, now trained by Bernardo Checa in St. Agnes' gym, had been inactive for a year but showed no signs of ring rust once the first bell rang. World title fights and possible EBU title defences in Belfast are already being mentioned by manager Pat Magee.

Shamrock Shorts: Irish boxing promoter Tommy Egan is hoping that a TV deal with Setanta Sports can help solidify a clash between Irish light-middleweight champion Neil Sinclair and potential challenger James Moore..... John Duddy opened his New Year account with a routine first-round stoppage and is targeting a showdown with one of the belt holders at middleweight. The popular Derryman blitzed overmatched Mexican Juan Astorga in 115 seconds at Madison Square Garden, New York on Saturday January 23.

HYLAND TARGETS DUNNE AND MUNROE – 2ND FEBRUARY

Fresh from going over old ground against Eugene Heagney, Irish super-bantamweight champion Paul Hyland feels he is showing marked improvements in his game and is relishing an EU title shot pencilled in for early March. Brimming with a renewed confidence as the best in Ireland, in and around his weight class, Paul is open to suggestions of a Bernard Dunne fight and feels ready to challenge European king Rendall Munroe.

“In my mind I want to win the EU belt and then call out Rendall Munroe for the European title,” stated the Dubliner, shortly after disposing of Heagney in three one-sided rounds. “If Bernard comes he comes, if he doesn’t then so be it. I’m that confident I don’t mind fighting Bernard tomorrow! I feel like whoever I meet next I’m going to beat them; there’s no point getting into the ring if I don’t believe that.”

Hyland had previously formed a link-up with Frank Maloney as he sought a shot at Ian Napa’s European bantamweight title. But when Napa submitted the crown to Frenchman Malik Bouziane, Paulie was left exploring other avenues, which will next lead him to Italy.

“They were originally looking at February 26 for the EU fight in Italy but it’s been moved to March now. I can’t pronounce my opponent’s name! He’s European-rated and has a nice stand-up style from what I’ve seen.”

The man in question is 36-year-old David Chianella, a resident of Umbria who sports a 16-5-2 record which, interestingly, reveals four of those losses coming via stoppage, including back-to-back first-round knockouts, both times to fighters with losing records. Chianella has done most of his work at Italian title level yet once contested the EU belt at featherweight. In his last bout, at home in June, David won a spurious WBF title, and has been largely inactive.

Hyland must be considered favourite, although travelling to anywhere across Europe always carries the possibility of having to

battle the officials as well as the opponent. Father and trainer Paddy is rightly concerned that his son may not get a fair shake of the dice and needs to win convincingly.

Paul, on the other hand, is unfazed: "I'm not at all worried about going there because you have to travel to these places to get the belts – it's part of the business."

"It was the same when I beat Eugene Heagney," added the 25-year-old. "I knew exactly what I had to do in there and just relaxed myself and I felt so comfortable. After studying our last fight [w pts 6, Dec 2008] it was noticeable that I mainly threw jabs, lefts and right hooks to the body and I watched Eugene dropping the left shoulder after he jabbed. The research paid off because I realised the right hand over the top could work on him.

"The overall preparation was great, I was really calm and after fighting him last time at 8st 6lbs I was back up to my weight, with my belt, in my ring! I boxed like a champion. I was faster and stronger than Heagney and so confident that I wouldn't lose; it was all about the mentality. I have a buzz about me at the moment that I am the man and I can't get beaten."

MURRAY AND FAGAN SHAPE UP FOR BIG CLASH – 5TH FEBRUARY

Brian Peters' Dublin headliner on February 13 will be a classic battle of skill versus will as Cavan stylist Andrew Murray defends his Irish lightweight belt against hometown veteran Oisín Fagan. Should all go to plan, the main event will be the fourth Irish title clash on a card packed with domestic talent. For the unassuming Murray, who has also claimed an EU title at lightweight, the story is particularly uplifting. Medical complications in Andrew's early years not only threatened his chances of boxing at championship level, but also his ability to walk.

"I had Perthes disease and my hip joint came apart from my leg so I was a bit limp and couldn't move the leg," explained the 27-year-old who went on to claim three Irish senior titles as an amateur, before turning pro under Mick Helliott in London. "I had it in plaster of Paris for a couple of years and was on crutches for about a year-and-a-half.

"I was one of the lucky ones because I've seen cases where the one leg is shortened by the hip not sitting in the right place. I think I got it at the right time and the procedures were put in place early, plus my boxing training has helped strengthen it over time. It can be very disheartening when you're young because you want to be running around and doing things that the others are doing but we all have our own stories and I'm okay now."

Andrew has found a new lease of life since hooking up with Brian Peters and training in Belfast under John Breen. A broken collarbone kept him out of the ring from July last year until a December slot on the Matthew Macklin-Rafa Sosa Pintos undercard in December against livewire Ecuadorian Alex Bone. Murray had little time to shed the rust as Bone put his fitness under immediate scrutiny.

"Bone threw plenty of big digs at me and it took me a while to get back to my best but I started moving my head a bit more and used my reach to keep him under control," said Andrew. "If I hadn't fought Bone then it would have been a long layoff so I needed to get active.

I was a bit rusty starting off but under the circumstances I thought I did pretty well and my shoulder was a wee bit sore during the middle rounds. The shoulder's not too bad now though.

"Oisin Fagan is all heart, he's mentally strong and I know he'll keep coming at me despite the age gap; he's very fit. Alex Bone was a bit like Oisin, style-wise, so it's perfect preparation."

Fagan's tactics will be no secret. As he readily admits, effective aggression is the order of the day.

"Technically Murray's a much better boxer than me, in every sense of the word," conceded the 36-year-old Fagan. "Saying that, I believe he's never fought anyone with my heart or faced the pressure I can bring."

"Sometimes you have to be in that position to see how you cope with aggression and I'm hoping to bring it on and force him all the way. I've never sparred Andrew but we've been on many shows together so I've seen quite a bit of him and I look through the tapes and study them for weaknesses. He's fundamentally sound and there's nothing he does wrong."

Since Fagan relocated to his native Ireland – following a productive career in the United States – coach Phil Sutcliffe has taken the man nicknamed 'Gael Force' under his wing at the Crumlin gym in Dublin.

Oisin is enthused by the new regime: "Training's going great, I've got good sparring partners in the Crumlin gym, guys like Dean Byrne who has been out in LA with Freddie Roach and he's mimicking Murray's style to make sure I get a good workout. I'm training every day and feel well prepared; the weight poses no issues."

"If Andrew beats me then he'll probably be targeting a crack at the European title and if I beat him I could fight for his EU belt and get a top five European ranking."

"Alex Bone gave it a good go and Bone's style is not unlike my own. He came forward and I'd try and get in with hooks like Alex did. My trainers Phil Sutcliffe and Joe Clifford have been working on a secret weapon; I think we may have spotted one or two slight weaknesses in his game that we can exploit."

Fagan enjoys being based in his home city. "Being up in Belfast meant I was miles from home and it was tough driving up all the time," lamented Oisin, "so it suits a lot better for me to train in Dublin and be closer to my family and a lot more comfortable."

Murray, meanwhile, lauds the training camp he has enjoyed.

“I’ve been sparring Michael Kelly and Jamie Conlan for speed work and can’t wait to get in there and give the Irish public a great scrap,” he said.

MURRAY HALTS FAGAN TO RETAIN IRISH LIGHTWEIGHT BELT – 13TH FEBRUARY

Andy Murray and Oisín Fagan served up an exciting bout on Saturday February 13 with Murray prevailing in the fifth-round with the Irish lightweight title still firmly in his possession.

Fagan had, as expected, given a good account of himself until referee David Irving stepped in to save the proud Dubliner from further punishment. Oisín vehemently protested the stoppage and after failing to show at the post-fight press conference issued a statement which catalogued his disappointment.

“Just because I went into this fight as the underdog against the new ‘Golden Boy’ of Irish boxing, shouldn’t make things inconceivable and unobtainable for me,” he said.

“If you watch the footage, you’ll see that I wasn’t hurt in the slightest at all during the fight and I was continuing to throw punches up until the very end. I wasn’t in trouble at any given time - it’s plain and simple to see. In fact, our gameplan was to up it a gear in the seventh round.

“Big congrats to Andy. He’s a very nice lad and one that I hope will do Irish boxing proud.”

Fagan started brightly and took advantage of Murray’s low left hand, landing repeated rights to head and body before Andy measured the range and started picking off classy combinations. Fagan’s eyes were swollen and mouth seeping blood when Irving waved it off, much to Fagan’s chagrin. Murray was ahead on my card but the stoppage did come as a surprise considering the action was at a lull when the ending arrived. Referee Mickey Vann, seated at ringside and officiating on the night, told matchmaker Tomas Rohan that it was the sort of contest when a referee is looking for an excuse to step in. Irving found one and acted swiftly.

Murray felt that his stellar amateur pedigree and superior movement provided the keys to victory. "The stronger the opponent, the better you will see me perform. There are even bigger performances in me yet," he added.

The Irish heavyweight title had lay dormant for 13 years until **Coleman Barrett** defeated **Colin Kenna** over ten rounds to claim the belt and set-up a possible clash with Martin Rogan, who was an interested spectator at ringside. Barrett used his southpaw skills to frustrate Kenna and survived a potentially devastating second-round knockdown to box his way home.

Kenna, in no great shape at just over 17 stone, lunged forward but was never able to recreate his success and was comfortably beaten over the course of the bout. Barrett was upbeat post-fight, "He has good punching power and caught me with a great shot but I got up, continued and went on to win it, because that's what champions are made of.

"I'm happy to fight whoever Brian Peters or the boxing board puts in front of me," Coleman added, when quizzed about a potential showdown with Rogan.

Tallaght featherweight **Patrick Hyland** did not take full advantage of a primetime TV slot as he went through the motions against tough Londoner **Mickey Coveney**, stopping the away man in the seventh with a chilling right hand. It was not all plain sailing for Pat who had problems dealing with Coveney's southpaw stance and short stature.

Mickey qualified for his chance courtesy of a Cork-born father and said afterwards that he was proud to have contested the national belt. Hyland shrugged off his loose start and promised a better showing next time. The local man is skilled and I would read little more into this showing than an off-night. Hyland has been sparring Ricky Burns, in preparation for the Scot's upcoming 'world' title challenge, and is eyeing a crack at European title holder Oleg Yefimovich.

"I see it as a good workout even though I was a bit sluggish in the first few rounds getting to grips with his style and improving the accuracy," said a philosophical Hyland at the press conference. "These small boys are hard to hit with the ducking and rolling and he was picking his shots against me.

"I was off my game for the first four rounds and he wanted the Irish title off me and no doubt trained hard for this opportunity, so hats

off to him. I was comfortable and I knew it would come eventually but I was a little frustrated until I got back to my boxing and finished the job,” he concluded.

Irish champions together, Patrick Hyland and Coleman Barrett, show off their titles in the photograph below.

Dublin pug **Anthony Fitzgerald** outpointed **Ciaran Healy** of Belfast to claim the vacant Irish super-middleweight title. Referee Mickey Vann scored it 98-94 for the local man in a 10-round attraction that was hotly contested from start to finish.

There were wins for the other three remaining ‘house’ fighters.

Cuban **Alexei Acosta** overcame the frustration of his negative opponent’s movement to beat Venezuela’s **Felix Machado**. The veteran campaigner quit from a cut left eye before the start of the sixth-round in a scheduled eight.

Belfast’s **Jamie Conlan** competed in an eight-rounder in only his second professional outing. Bulgarian journeyman **Itsko Veselinov** was the victim, falling in the fifth session following a classy body shot and flyweight Conlan will soon find himself in line for a title shot of some description.

Limerick’s **Willie Casey** lived-up to his puncher’s reputation when starching hapless **Fernando Guevara** in the first of a scheduled six. It was clear from the outset that overawed Guevara would not present too much of a challenge to the improving featherweight and so it proved as the southpaw used his skills to bludgeon Fernando to defeat.



PETERS THINKS THE IRISH FUTURE IS BRIGHT POST-DUNNE – 13TH FEBRUARY

Speaking prior to Bernard Dunne's announced decision to quit the sport, promoter Brian Peters ran the rule over the next possible moves of some of Ireland's professional starlets as the search for a headlining superstar begins.

"Matthew Macklin started sparring Manny Pacquaio on February 15 and Dmitry Pirog is definitely out of their clash but we're still fighting on April 16," Peters explained.

"The Armenian southpaw Khoren Gevor is next in the queue. Remember too that Pirog is world-rated, as is Matthew, so if you're in line as a possible mandatory assignment for the WBO title would you risk that status against someone as dangerous as Macklin?"

"Macklin has two fights left with Hatton Promotions and if it's not Gevor then Mahir Oral could be in the mix. Some of the other fighters are tied up in legal issues with Klaus-Peter Kohl."

With four Irish title bouts and several local prospects on his most recent National Stadium card, Brian saw an opportunity to remind people that the domestic scene can still provide a solid breeding ground for novice pros.

"The Stadium supplied us with a good opportunity to keep boys busy and it provided a run-out for all involved," Peters recalled. "We need to remember that for all of the European or world titles there is still a good domestic scene and with all the talk about individual stars, that night was all about the boxing with the next generation coming through."

"Patrick Hyland, or even his brother Eddie, could be possibilities for Andy Murray and we are assuming that the European title will be tied up for a while. John Murray is a good undefeated fighter; we work closely with Hennessy Sports so if he wins the European belt it could happen."

“Dean Byrne is another possibility for Andy and I was talking to Freddie Roach about him recently so a few good domestic fights remain for us to pursue.”

With Bernard Dunne now off the radar, the spotlight will fall on the likes of Paul McCloskey, Martin Lindsay and Andy Lee to provide Irish boxing with more memorable nights.

“Paul McCloskey is still nursing a bit of a back injury and we are expecting him to return in May,” Peters added. “Andy Lee is sorting out a few things at the moment and there is a good possibility he could also feature on that May show.”

Peters then revealed that he had been discussing with Matchroom Sports the possibility of holding a Prizefighter tournament in Ireland, at super-featherweight or lightweight.

Irish featherweight champion Patrick Hyland successfully defended his belt against Mickey Coveney in Dublin and as well as British ruler Martin Lindsay being mentioned, some familiar names cropped up when discussing his next opponent.

“Kiko Martinez is a name opponent, well known in these parts, and he’s only lost to the better fighters like Rendall Munroe and in an IBF eliminator to Takalani Ndlovu,” Brian stated. “They’re quality opponents and a world title eliminator is a serious level, a level Patrick has yet to compete at so a scalp of Kiko would be a great win for him.

“To make the big fights both lads will want to be well paid so you’d ideally want at least a European on the line. Eddie Hyland has been sparring [European title-holder] Oleg Yefimovich who’s a very good fighter. Oleg could be a possibility for Patrick but there are loads of things going on at the moment so we’ll see what develops.”

While Irish boxing searches for a new star, the eclectic list of talent behind Bernard Dunne appears promising.

SINCLAIR'S PRIZEFIGHTER LIFELINE – 18TH FEBRUARY

If ever a fighter was suited to the Prizefighter format it is Belfast's Neil Sinclair. He starts fast (15 knockouts inside three rounds), hits extremely hard (26 opponents stopped in 33 wins) and has a solid amateur pedigree (Commonwealth Games gold medal in 1994) – handy traits to have in a tournament that requires the ability to compete in bouts that flow thick and fast.

As far back as 2000 Sinclair was challenging Daniel Santos in Sheffield for the WBO welterweight title, dropping the defending champion before being halted himself in the second-round. Ten years later and Sinclair is enjoying something of a renaissance, with the Prizefighter crown a realistic target for the man who has already won a Lonsdale Belt outright.

"I'm really looking forward to the Prizefighter tournament and I see it as another lifeline they've thrown out to me and I plan to grasp it with both hands," enthused the 35-year-old.

"Even before Bradley Pryce's name was mentioned I just had a feeling he would be involved, especially after his camp won the last Prizefighter with Gavin Rees. Pryce is an old adversary of mine and fighting him would not be easy but I feel I have the beating of him and the beating of any of the others.

"There are a couple of middleweights coming down in weight who'll fancy the job but I'll not concern myself with that; I'll just let them worry about me. This time next week it'll be all over and hopefully I'll be sitting as the next Prizefighter champion."

Sinclair admits fate could throw him in with Pryce at some stage during the event. 'Sinky' starched the Welshman in eight rounds at Belfast's Odyssey Arena, in 2003, in the third defence of his British welterweight title. Over the years that followed, a mixed bag of results ensued and Sinclair ventured to the US in an attempt to revitalise his career. It didn't work out, but since returning to Belfast and hooking

up with trainer John Breen, Neil has found himself linked with another Irishman who has found a home in the States.

“My name was linked with John Duddy through the press as I’d just won the Irish light-middleweight title [beat Henry Coyle, rsf 3, last May] and there was talk about Duddy coming down in weight, it wasn’t like I was calling anybody out,” admitted Sinclair.

“The promoters thought it was a natural fight at the time but I now believe he isn’t moving down and I would consider a move up to meet him if that was necessary. I’ve sparred with middleweights and there’s never been a problem, in fact I see a bigger target and I can use my speed to good effect. Naturally I’m a light-middleweight and hope that one day I could even get back down to welterweight, but that’s all in the future and I could even end up fighting [US-based Wicklow light-middle] James Moore. There are plenty of big fights out there for me.”

With the likes of Matthew Macklin and Andy Lee also campaigning in the surrounding weight classes, there are rich pickings for the North Belfast man, if he were to emulate his former gym-mate Martin Rogan and achieve Prizefighter glory.

“There’s great competition in Ireland at the moment around my weight,” he said, “but if I could win this Prizefighter tournament then that would open up the door for me. Look at what Martin Rogan went on to do after he won it. My last fight [w rsf 4 Janos Petrovics on the Sexton-Rogan II undercard in November] was shown on Sky but my next efforts will be live with plenty of boxing fans watching. Some people might not even realise that I’m still boxing, not knowing that I had a bit of a resurgence last year and thinking I’d retired long ago.”

Those fans who had consigned Sinclair to the memory banks will certainly remember him if he starts rolling back the years to the type of form that saw the likes of Harry Dhami, Derek Roche and Paul Knights removed with devastating force. The affable puncher is also delighted to be working under a former employer.

“Barry Hearn has offered me a springboard and I can’t be thinking about anything else but winning the whole thing because it lets me know where I am at the moment,” Neil said.

“I’ll be gearing my training towards the three-threes format, which I haven’t done since my last amateur fight. I’ve had a lot of two or three-round wins in my career and believe that I’m a fast starter so the format suits me, no doubt. I know that I have to be fit to enter this competition but I’ll not be neglecting my boxing skills even though I plan to fight busy and take things out of the judges’ hands.”

There appears little chance the former world title challenger will succumb to any pressure.

“If I can’t give a showing in this then it means that I’m not that good,” laughed Sinclair.

SWEENEY AND TIMS SET TO CLASH FOR IRISH TITLE – 25TH FEBRUARY

Light-heavyweight duo Ian Tims and Michael Sweeney are on a collision course with the Irish title at stake. Speaking recently, the respective fighters appeared keen on meeting in the near future.

“I’m in line for an Irish title and Sweeney is too so we’ll see what happens,” said Tims, speaking at the recent show held in Dublin’s National Stadium.

“I think Michael is ranked number one and even though I was campaigning at cruiserweight, and remained unbeaten, I’ve now dropped to light-heavyweight and I’ll fight anyone. Michael’s in the picture and we had a bit of banter the other night; I don’t know how he’s training at the moment but, regardless, let’s get it on. I’m always available.”

Tims turned professional in March 2008 off the back of a successful amateur campaign yet has made only seven starts (all wins) during that time and, by his own admittance, is eager for more ring time in 2010.

“I turned pro two years ago and only got two fights last year –one in January and one in December- but that appears to be the nature of the game so when the chances come along you take them. I’m always training or ticking over, I never let my fitness levels drop and anytime an opportunity arises I’m good to go,” assured Ian.

“Jamie Power or John Waldron, it doesn’t matter, at light-heavyweight or cruiser I’ll take on anyone, in Ireland or beyond; I can travel to England no problem and there’s some great prospects over there at the moment and a few seasoned pro’s as well.

“I’ve always wanted to box in America,” he enthused, “to get over to New York but you can’t pick and choose at this stage and I’ll take it one step at a time.”

Good sparring can be hard to find and Tims has been assisting two of Cork’s promising stars.

“I’ve been sparring a bit with the likes of [undefeated heavyweight] Mike Perez who was a great amateur and for a big man he moves like lightning. Whenever I’m looking for a spar I’ll give Mike a ring and I was moving around with Gary O’Sullivan just before his recent title fight. Sparring with the lighter fellows can sharpen you up and there are some good guys out there even if it is a bit tricky getting workouts in Ireland.”

Michael Sweeney appears open to the idea of facing Tims and the Mayo man recently found himself sharing the ring with German world champion and Super Six participant Arthur Abraham.

“Quality sparring isn’t hard to come by, because ‘Team Sweeney’ have a lot of connections in Germany,” assured Michael. “My agent John Hesnan, who recently got involved in pro boxing, arranged the sparring with Abraham. If the Tims fight comes off John will set up a training camp that involves top sparring with world champions. That’s experience you can’t buy.

“There has been quite a bit of talk about Ian Tims and myself fighting for the title. I see it as a good match because Ian is 7-0 as a professional and would represent a good scalp on my record. We sparred a bit before but I know how this business works – Ian’s a good friend but that goes out the window come fight night,” he confessed.

“It will be a clash of two big guys with loads of experience, a fight not to be missed. The way I view the situation is even if it’s not Ian in the opposite corner I’ll take anyone just to get that title and produce a TV-worthy performance.

“Training has been going well in the Ocean fitness gym (based in Salthill, Galway) and I’ve been itching for a ring return ever since I got back from Mexico,” added Sweeney, who suffered his first pro defeat out there; a situation Tims is well aware of.

“Michael was undefeated and had a blip in his last fight,” Ian said, “but he was boxing well from what I heard and just got caught. He’s got fast hands, was around a long time in the amateur game and overall not a bad guy. He has youth on his side but if we meet there has to be a winner and we’ll see how it goes on the night.”

If promoter Tommy Egan shows interest in putting this fight on his proposed April 17 card Sweeney insists he would have no issues working with his former manager.

“I would work with Tommy again but I haven’t heard anything from him about putting on a show. A fight in Mayo with a strong undercard would be great. Brian Peters, Gary Hyde, Tommy Egan,

whoever fancies it they will produce a sell-out because people here want the big fights.

“I wanted to fight Waldron,” Michael concluded, “or take a rematch with Jamie Power but I got no reply.

“If Sweeney versus Tims is what the fans want then let’s get it on.”

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WILTON TAKES AIM AT FLYWEIGHT RIVALS – 10TH MARCH

Belfast's Luke Wilton is open to offers in and around his weight class and the exciting 21-year-old wants to start mixing with the elite fighters on the domestic scene. Speaking after a well-earned rest period, Luke has his eyes on London's Ashley Sexton.

"I'm still learning but with a couple of eight-rounders under my belt I feel capable of pushing on to British title level. Usman Ahmed is an opponent I fought before and I will target him and Ashley Sexton; I would fancy my chances against Sexton," explained the man nicknamed 'Winky'.

"I haven't heard of anything [regarding upcoming bouts] yet but I've got back to training now, after a Christmas break, in anticipation of something coming up. I was out running in the snow and back to pads and bags. I was sparring Stevie Quinn Jnr while he prepared for the all-Ireland tournament."

A May date in Belfast could materialise on a Belfast Promotions card if things go to plan and with Wilton sitting fourth in the British rankings, a title opportunity could soon come knocking.

"Anything from flyweight up to bantamweight will do me, I'm in good shape," Luke enthused. "I saw Chris Edwards' last fight [a points Commonwealth win over Abmerk Shindjuu] and he walked on to a few shots in there – he's hittable."

Wilton lifted the lid on his sparring sessions with fellow flyweight campaigner Jamie Conlan and was complimentary on the chances of his contemporary making a noise in the pro ranks.

"Jamie and I sparred before our Odyssey fights and it was a good workout, he'll adapt well. The actual fight against Kevin Cogan, in the Odyssey Arena, was non-stop, neither of us wanted to give up and there was no way I was going to get beaten or draw another one. Kevin was very tough and took everything I hit him with and kept coming back for more."

By mastering Darlington novice Cogan, Wilton improved his record to 6-2-1 and has now put the disappointment of losing to 100-fight veteran Delroy Spencer (a man Luke had already beaten twice) firmly behind him. A first-round knockout of Muharem Osmanov shortly after was slightly tainted by the Bulgarian import's lack of resistance.

"The Holiday Inn outing was a disappointment and even though a win's a win he didn't put up much of a fight," bemoaned Wilton.

"I was expecting more from the guy but it kept me on a winning run and staying active is important.

"I want fights at flyweight or super-flyweight. I'm waiting for the first promoter who rings and I'll be ready."



FEATURE ARTICLE: MARTIN LINDSAY – 12TH MARCH

In a hot and heavy Ulster Hall, the threat of violence amongst a partisan crowd loomed large when Scotland's British title-holder Paul Appleby and popular local Martin Lindsay went toe-to-toe. Six rounds later referee Howard Foster jumped between the two and stopped Appleby on his feet. Post-fight, a victorious Lindsay appeared to have the world at his.

Almost one year later, much has changed since that raucous evening in Belfast last April. European honours, or more, beckoned but 2009 soon turned sour for the 27-year-old, resulting in inactivity, coupled with the demise of Setanta, subsequent split with Hayemaker Promotions and separation from career-long manager John Rooney. He was limited to just one more outing, a non-title eight-rounder against Alfred Tetteh in Magherafelt.

On March 19 Lindsay finds himself once again in British title action, this time on away ground against Newport's Jamie Arthur, defending at a level many expected Martin to have outgrown by this point. With the recent retirement of Bernard Dunne, Ireland is searching for a new superstar and Martin Lindsay may be the man to fill that gap.

"I would be happy filling Bernard's shoes, but while it's easy to say that, doing it is a different matter and results speak for themselves," Martin humbly admitted.

Do not mistake Lindsay's unassuming manner with a lack of confidence. Now boasting a 15-0 (6 KOs) record, he just prefers doing his talking in the ring.

"I'm fighting to be the best that I possibly can," he added. "It's no good retiring and wondering what could have been. After I'd won my first few fights and signed with Hayemaker, I told them straight away that I wanted to go for the British title. They got me Matthews and Appleby in quick succession. There are no back doors in boxing,

you have to go and test yourself, take a few risks against name opponents to know where you stand.

"I feel I could be further ahead in my career, but that was down to situations beyond my control, so there's no point wondering what could have happened. The Setanta collapse put me back a few months and ideally I would have liked a voluntary defence of the British title before now. But rather than getting frustrated I just need to get on with it and I'm sure my chance will come."

While the Appleby win appeared at the time as a springboard to more great nights, it has proved the pinnacle of Lindsay's career thus far.

"I just had a gameplan against Appleby and even though I tried not to play to the crowd we both ended up being drawn in," recalled Lindsay. "He was very gung-ho and offered plenty of aggression, so I had to stick to my boxing and we got into a bit of a war. So long as I'm coming out of fights like that as the winner, I'm not really bothered."

To earn that chance, Lindsay had displayed chilling power which belied the knockout ratio on his record. In September 2008 he came from behind to starch Derry Matthews with a picture-perfect left hook.

"I always knew the power was there but I like to get the rounds under my belt against the journeymen," he said.

"The better the opponent, the better I perform. When fighters open up and take a risk, I have more chance of landing the key shots."

Riding on the crest of a wave, Lindsay was looking forward to potential fights with domestic rivals when, in the summer of 2009, Setanta Sports, the television backers of promoter Hayemaker, hit financial difficulty and collapsed.

"I signed with Hayemaker because they seemed down-to-earth and I felt they were coming from a boxer's perspective," Martin recalled. "With David [Haye] being a boxer himself he knows how to treat the fighter. They offered me a good contract, along with TV, so everything was working out perfectly at the time if Setanta hadn't folded.

"Hayemaker were brilliant with me from day one. It was just a pity for everyone that Setanta fell apart. I'm not contracted to Hayemaker now but we are on speaking terms and if the chance came up to fight on a big David Haye undercard I'd jump at it."

Lindsay is in prime contention for a shot at European title-holder Oleg Yefimovich and happy to work with any promotional outfit to

reach his potential. The recent split from long-time manager John Rooney was the result of the relationship having running its course.

“The two of us just parted company and it was an amicable split - there were no hard feelings,” reasoned Martin.

“I was the mandatory for the European title but I gave it up to let Paul Appleby fight for it, but then he got injured. I’ve never seen Yefimovich fight and I couldn’t tell you a thing about him. Once I’ve got the Arthur fight out of the way and hopefully come out unscathed with a victory, I’ll be looking at other options. The European is a strong possibility.”

Lindsay is no stranger to travelling abroad, having enjoyed a three-fight spell in Canada in 2007-08, picking up the IBF featherweight Youth title.

“John Rooney met with Steve Molitor’s manager/promoter Alan Tremblay from Orion Sports and he was running plenty of shows in Canada,” Martin remembered. “There’s a big Irish contingent over there so after they saw a couple of DVDs of my fights they were interested in putting me on the undercards.

“I had three bouts and one was cancelled but overall it was good experience. I got a few good fights under my belt that I might not have had if I’d stayed exclusively over here.”

With many quality operators in and around Lindsay’s weight class, it is inevitable he gets linked with potential superfights against the likes of Patrick Hyland or even his British-level counterparts.

“I was in the amateurs at the same time as the Hylands and Patrick was at my weight in the Irish seniors on a couple of occasions but we never met due to being at different ends of the draw,” Lindsay explained.

“I’ve already beaten the top guys at my weight class [Matthews and Appleby] and domestically I don’t feel I have anything more to prove. John Simpson’s as tough as nails and he’ll keep coming forward while Paul Truscott’s a nice boxer, so either man could give anyone a hard night.”

As a professional, Lindsay has remained with the same trainer, Gerry 'Nugget' Nugent, at his boyhood Immaculata ABC club through an amateur career that drew in Ulster and Irish titles at senior level. The club sits in the shadow of the Divis tower block, which once housed a British Army base which monitored paramilitary activity across the predominantly nationalist West Belfast. However, for this Irishman holding the British belt provides no issues.

“Anything that can push my career on is good and whether I’m fighting for the Irish or British title it makes no difference to me,” Lindsay stated.

“My mother’s house is on the same street as the gym, so I grew up being close to the club and just joined it. The area I’m from would be a rougher part of Belfast and while some people go in other directions with their lives I just stuck to boxing.

“The way some lads are brought up they end up in trouble for most of their lives and some don’t know any different; they’re not necessarily bad people. The boxing game gave me a view of the bigger picture and showed me there was more out there in the world. Some of the other lads would never get that opportunity.”

Martin has few distractions out of the ring, allowing him to focus purely on his boxing as a full-time occupation; an only child, he lives with girlfriend Debbie just yards from the gym.

“Debbie is more of a girl’s girl,” he laughs, “and would watch boxing through her hands. She doesn’t come to my fights or take an interest in sports at all.

“I’ve been here nearly 20 years and I don’t think I’d be boxing today if it wasn’t for Gerry. I just feel comfortable with him training me and not since the amateur game have I worked with anybody else. I’m happy with my situation and if things didn’t work out in the ring I would never blame ‘Nugget’, because it’s me getting into the ring.

“Along with my mum he helped me stick with my education [a Bachelor of Science degree] and box at the same time, so he’s definitely a huge influence on me.”

For a hungry, ambitious young champion like Lindsay, the next time he returns to the Ulster Hall there may be an even bigger prize at stake for his vociferous Belfast following to enjoy.

“At the moment Irish boxing is spoilt for champions with myself, the Hyland brothers and Andy Murray all on the brink of big title chances,” Lindsay added. “I feel I’m ready to step-up to European level and have nothing to prove on the British scene - I’m looking to move up in class sooner rather than later.

“I’ll take my career one step at a time and all that matters to me is to stay winning because that pushes me into positions to move forward and on to bigger things.”

If Lindsay gets into the habit of winning major titles, then the backstreets of Belfast may be home to Ireland’s next superstar.

AMERICAN ADVENTURE FOR HAUGHIAN – 21ST MARCH

Irish welterweight champion Stephen Haughian is looking to put a bout of inactivity behind him and reignite a career that has threatened to hit the rocks. An impressive win in New York could be just the tonic for the Lurgan man as he hunts down British or Commonwealth honours.

“There’s been about five different names mentioned as my next opponent but the one I think we’re settled on is Jesse Davis who has a journeyman’s record but eight of his eleven wins have come by knockout,” 25-year-old Haughian revealed.

“I’ve seen a few of his fights on YouTube and he comes out swinging so it should make for an exciting bout and will hopefully get the ball rolling for me again.

“I wasn’t inactive through my own choice,” added Stephen, “but it was just the way things worked out because originally the talk was of a Commonwealth title fight with John O’Donnell and after I won the Irish title that was supposed to be my next fight. It fell through though and I heard nothing more about it.

“This will hopefully be the year that I push on to bigger things.”

Headlining in his native Craigavon last February, a dominating three-round blitz of Cork battler Billy Walsh brought home the Irish crown and promised to push Haughian on to a higher stage. A marking-time win in London was followed by a sketchy showing on Bernard Dunne’s WBA title defence against Poonsawat in Dublin. Surprisingly floored and generally off the pace, Stephen struggled to a draw on the referee’s scorecard.

“That performance was down to a lack of motivation as I was planning for a title fight and suddenly I was in for a six-rounder which was a bit of a comedown,” explained Haughian.

“I still thought that I’d done enough to win that fight even though I got caught with a stupid shot and was dropped.”

Rumours abound of Haughian defending his coveted domestic strap against gym partner and friend Willie Thompson but the Lurgan man admits talk is premature and sees unbeaten Burnley prospect Chris O'Brien as a more viable option.

"To be honest there's been no real word in the gym about the Thompson fight," he admitted. "The two of us are training together so it's not very professional and anything can happen in this game so I put it down to just talk at the moment.

"I hear that Chris O'Brien is looking to fight for the Irish title as well and even though I'd definitely defend my title against him I really want to be pushing for bigger fights after a win in America.

"My trainer John Breen is nominating me for the British or Commonwealth title and if we can put some pressure on the board then they might give us an opportunity. If that doesn't come forward and an Irish title defence is on the agenda then I'd take it."

For the time being Haughian's American adventure, and a chance to improve on his 18-1-1 (8 KOs) record, is all that matters.

"I'm definitely looking forward to showing the Americans what I have to offer. There's a big market out there for an Irish boxer so if I can get a good win they will get to know my name. We'll take it one fight at a time but if there's a chance of getting more work out there then I will certainly consider it as an option.

"My aim is to stay busy, keep motivated and I'm convinced the opportunities will come along."



OISIN FAGAN QUILTS THE RING – 23RD MARCH

Dublin stalwart Oisín Fagan has quit the ring to concentrate on his new role with the IABA. Fagan leaves with a respectable 25-8 (15 KOs) record and won an Irish title at light-welterweight in 2006 which he rightly views as the proudest moment of a seven-year career that started in Oklahoma in 2003.

36-year-old Fagan's biggest opportunity arrived in 2008 when he was chosen as the sacrificial lamb for Amir Khan, as the Olympic silver medallist eased his way back after a potentially devastating defeat to Breidis Prescott. Injured following a heavy fall in the first session, Fagan damaged his leg yet still tried to fight back gamely before being stopped by Amir in the second-round. It was a moment he always regretted, live on pay-per-view TV the proud Dubliner was unable to show SKY viewers what he was all about.

Defeats to Eddie Hyland (in an IBF title cracker in Tallaght) and a debatable stoppage most recently in the National Stadium to Andy Murray no doubt sped up the retirement process. If the 'Gael Force' can pass on just a small amount of the professionalism and commitment he showed throughout his own career to the next generation of young prospects, then Irish amateur boxing is in safe hands.

PAUL HYLAND'S SUPERB AWAY WIN – 25TH MARCH

Paul Hyland pulled off the best win of his career so far when the Dubliner outpointed David Chianella, in the latter's hometown of Naples, to claim the vacant EU super-bantamweight title. Now Hyland –who also holds the Irish title at the same weight – is aiming to push on to bigger things, starting with an away assignment in France sparring former European champion Malik Bouziane.

“Everything went to plan on the night,” said Paul, reflecting on the EU win. “I didn’t think he would be as tough as he was and it was pride keeping him up; my hands were sore at the end of the fight from hitting him all night. Honour and pride kept him upright – fair play to his resolve, he was strong for a 36-year-old.”

Worries over the notoriously fickle nature of continental European scoring were soon dispelled as Hyland gained his rhythm and brought a potentially intimidating crowd on to his side.

“The crowd weren’t hostile at all and they were actually cheering for me from the end of the seventh-round!” he revealed. “It made me feel right at home.”

“I’m going over to spar Malik Bouziane in Paris,” Paul added, “because he’s now gearing up for a world title shot. I’ll be over in France for a week and the experience will do no harm at all, especially coming off the back of a tough 12-rounder.”

Bouziane beat Ian Napa for the Londoner’s European bantamweight title in March 2009 before making two successful defences on home soil and vacating to move on to the world scene. The 32-year-old Frenchman next contests the IBF super-flyweight title against formidable champion Simphiwe Nongqayi, who outscored Jorge Arce last September to capture the vacant crown. That goes on in Massy on April 9.

This time last year, Hyland was rumoured to have been next in line for Napa had he seen off the challenge of Bouziane that night and the 25-year-old Tallaght man still harbours European title ambitions.

“I’ve had a week off and I’ll be ringing my manager soon to see what the story is,” he stated. “I’d love to defend the EU title in Dublin first, in front of my home fans.

“It’s all about taking the stepping stones to where I want to be. We have an Irish title and the EU belt now so they’re ticked off the list and the European title is on the agenda.

“I’m not sure if Rendall Munroe will defend his European super-bantamweight title against Jason Booth or whether he will go for the WBC eliminator. When that’s resolved we’ll hopefully get the phone call for a crack at the belt, but I’ll keep ticking over until then.”

Munroe is set to box Mexican Victor Terrazas in Coventry next month in the aforementioned elimination bout. Jason Booth occupies the No. 1 EBU challenger’s spot while Hyland lies further down the current pecking order at No. 7, but now holds the EU title which means that important phone call may yet come.

“I’m still Irish champion and I’ll keep hold of it until I get an opportunity for the European title,” Hyland asserted. “I don’t want to give the Irish belt up at the moment because it gives me another option.

“We have a plan and we’re right on schedule to achieve.”

FRAMPTON IMMORTALISED IN MIDLAND MURAL – 26TH MARCH

In Northern Ireland, a country littered with political murals on the corner of housing estates throughout its capital city and beyond, the news that a further work of art had been produced in North Belfast would usually be met with caution. This time however it is not designed to cause division, but rather as a celebration of a local boxer who made his name in the amateur game and is now a hot professional prospect.

Super-bantamweight Carl Frampton now adorns the entrance wall into Midland ABC and while the Tigers Bay native is honoured by the gesture, he's also a little self-conscious.

"I'm really proud but a little embarrassed too!" laughed Frampton. "I've trained at Midland since I was seven years old and I try to get down as often as I can to do a bit of light training or help out with the kids.

"The community groups were looking to paint over all the old paramilitary murals with fresh art and someone suggested putting me on the side of the club. They acquired a grant and it went ahead."

Fresh from a one-round mauling of hapless Hungarian import Istvan Szabo in Huddersfield, Carl has now moved on to the six-round level and the man who many believe is destined for titles in the near future is hoping his next opponent will provide a little more resolve. Manager Barry McGuigan will be looking to keep his prized asset busy over the coming months.

"Barry had mentioned May 5 as a possible date for my next fight, over in England; it will certainly be a six-rounder," reckoned Frampton.

"I took a few days off after my last fight but I'm back in the gym now and feeling fit. The aim is to get some sparring with Rendall Munroe and the experience would be great if I got that, especially with Rendall preparing for a WBC world title eliminator at the moment – he's bound to be sharp."

The plan is for Frampton to re-acquaint himself with trainer Kevin Maree for a few days work in Maree's Lancashire gym, before sparring Munroe and travelling to London for more preparation with McGuigan.

"I'm just ticking over at the Holy Family gym with Gerry Storey at the moment, working on the pads and maybe getting a bit of sparring in with Seamus McCann before stepping things up," concluded Carl, now immortalised in Midland's boxing history.

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THREE'S A CROWD AT FLYWEIGHT AS FARRELL JOINS THE PARTY – 2ND APRIL

With talk heating up of a potential clash between Ireland's premier flyweights, Jamie Conlan and Luke Wilton, one man from over the water is eager to put a spanner in the works and land himself a title shot.

Unbeaten Lancashire prospect Kieran Farrell has Irish roots and once the 19-year-old produces the appropriate documentation he aims to get involved in the title mix.

"My Granddad's from Dun Laoghaire," explained Farrell, who boasts a 4-0 (1 KO) record, "and I spoke to my manager recently about contesting the Irish title because it's the first belt I want to fight for, even before I go for a Central Area title.

"I'm waiting to sign a promotional contract with Frank Maloney and I know that Frank promotes Martin Lindsay as well so if he fights in Belfast I want to get on that card."

Kieran is not oblivious to the talents of John Breen-trained Conlan and East Belfast's Wilton. He is keen to engage with either in order to realise his title ambitions.

"I've never seen Jamie Conlan fight but I boxed his brother Michael as an amateur over in Ireland. He was a tricky boxer and slippery like a bar of soap, I couldn't catch him!

"A mate of mine told me about Luke Wilton so I said if Luke's ever in Manchester we'll have to spar each other. I've kept in contact with Wilton over Facebook but I see that he lost to Delroy Spencer so I'm not sure exactly how good he is."

Farrell won every round against Spencer (who had already been beaten twice by Wilton before hitting it third-time lucky) and has also faced off with journeyman Kemal Plavci. Wilton narrowly bested Plavci in the Shorts Social Club back in 2008, to make it two opponents they have in common.

"I beat Delroy pretty comfortably," continued Farrell, "but I was a little immature in that fight because I had it in my head to try and stop him as he never usually gets knocked out – when the rounds went by I was getting frustrated at not hurting him. I'd like to box Spencer again because I'd be more relaxed and if I just boxed him I think the stoppage could come.

"Plavci didn't really have a dig and I honestly could have walked through his shots all day. He was tough though and took his lumps well. I'm disappointed that my last three fights have gone the distance but I'll take the rounds and I'm ready to move on to six round fights next."

For anybody who has yet to see Kieran fight, the man trained by Bobby Rimmer describes himself as "an exciting come-forward stylist, with plenty of aggression and pressure." He boasts around 35 amateur fights, winning three quarters of them, claiming Junior ABA and four-nation titles along the way.

"My power was starting to show through, towards the end of my amateur career, and I won the last dozen or so in a row," he said.

Farrell is aiming to keep active under manager Steve Wood and get that all-important eight-round contest under his belt, which will then render him available for domestic honours.

"Luke Wilton's doing an eight-rounder in his next fight and I'm not far away from getting one myself and becoming eligible for the Irish title," Kieran enthused.

"I need to get a birth certificate to prove my Irish heritage and link the family line down to me."

So when can we expect to see him next in action?

"I'm looking to get on a SKY show in late May – I'm a good ticket seller as well for the local cards. I've heard plenty about Carl Frampton and I'd like to get sparring with him at some point. I'm told he's really strong and fights a bit like Miguel Cotto.

"I want the Irish fans to know that I'm a fighter to look out for and my next ambition is to get on a fight night over in Ireland.

"Those Hunky Dory shows look really good and the Irish fans love their boxing."

WILTON RESPONDS TO FARRELL – 10TH APRIL

As Kieran Farrell staked his claim for an Irish title shot, East Belfast's Luke Wilton has said he is happy to fight the unbeaten Manchester man if Farrell can make eight stone.

"I can make eight stone comfortably so there's no point in moving up to super-flyweight until I can no longer make the flyweight limit," stated Wilton, who is eager to compete in his natural division where a shot at the British title could soon materialise.

"I think I'd beat (former British king) Chris Edwards over 12 rounds," opined Luke. "Edwards fights at a fast pace and likes to keep it in your face but I box in a similar fashion. I can keep going non-stop or slow up the pace to suit."

Luke still has an eye on former conqueror Usman Ahmed but admitted that the Derby slickster was looking in other directions when his team approached 'Uzzy' as a potential foe on Alio's May 8 Holiday Inn show.

"We wanted Ahmed for the next fight but he's unavailable," Wilton confirmed.

"If an offer was on the table to fight the winner of Ashley Sexton-Shinny Bayaar (in Dagenham on May 15) then I'd certainly take it and that has been talked about. If I can get a good win in my eight-rounder then there's nothing stopping me from fighting for the British title. There are only five flyweights in Britain and everyone else has had a crack at the title so it must be my turn next.

"We can't find anybody suitable for the Holiday Inn at the moment. Francis Croes was mentioned, Ahmed's unavailable and I've already beaten Kevin Cogan so it's probably going to be an international opponent."

Two decent former amateurs are set to make their professional debuts on the upcoming card and Wilton has been sharing the ring with one as part of ongoing preparations.

“I’ve sparred 30-odd rounds with Paul Kayes and he’s looking sharp in readiness for his professional debut. Brian Cusack is raring to go as well. We’re getting all the posters ready at the moment; it’s going to be a good show.”

The final message goes to 4-0 Kieran Farrell.

“If Farrell can get down in weight then I’m more than happy to accommodate him at eight stone,” said Wilton.

CASEY CONTINUES CLIMB – 10TH APRIL

It was a mixed night for Irish boxers in Canada on Thursday April 8 as Limerick puncher Willie Casey splattered the unbeaten record of touted local Tyson Cave, while Michael Kelly lost his first bout as a professional.

Dropping the flashy prospect twice, Casey battered Cave's body until the referee called a halt in the eighth and final round.

"The third-round knockdown I scored gave me the confidence to push on and I pressured him from then on and stopped him gaining any sort of rhythm in the fight," an understandably delighted Casey told Irish-boxing.com.

The contest was initially slated for six rounds but Willie and trainer Phil Sutcliffe happily agreed to a late switch to eight, feeling the 28-year-old southpaw would benefit from a longer distance.

"When you're fighting a slick mover, sometimes you need these extra rounds to work them down," Willie reasoned.

"We wanted an eight-rounder all along even though it was originally down for six. It worked in my favour although I was still confident of stopping him over six rounds. The stoppage guaranteed my win because you never know how the judges are seeing it.

"There are still a few things we need to work on of course but overall it was a great experience. I had only seen brief video clips of Tyson before this fight. He was fast like we expected and had good movement; it was hard to get him into the corner as he was pretty slick."

Talk of a crack at the Irish title will inevitably gather pace now that Willie has now completed the stipulated eight-round distance.

"I'm eligible for the Irish title but I think we'll maybe have another eight-rounder first," he calmly admitted. "I definitely want to fight on the May 29 DolPhil show in Dublin."

"I'm over-the-moon with Willie's performance because Cave was a bit tougher than we thought he would be," added Phil Sutcliffe.

“We have the Irish title in mind but I want to get a couple of fights in before that. Don O’Leary is working on the next fight already and we’re still running a show on May 29 but possibly in another venue other than the City West. We’re checking out a place in Dublin that holds 1,000 people.”

While one half of the visiting team enjoyed a successful evening, Dundalk lightweight Michael Kelly suffered the first defeat of his stop-start career as 31-year-old Ontario native Buzz Grant outscored him over ten rounds.

Despite Grant being on a six-fight winning streak, that included a Canadian super-bantamweight title victory, Kelly felt he should have had too much for his 9-3 opponent.

“It just didn’t go right for me,” lamented Michael, “I didn’t turn up and Buzz Grant isn’t that great, I should have dropped him in two or three rounds. I got the full ten rounds under my belt but I never should have lost to the like of Grant.”

Despite the away assignment, Kelly had Belfast trainer John Breen working the corner as usual.

“Michael’s timing was off and Grant was a good mover,” agreed Breen, “every time we thought we’d cut him down he was off again. Training had gone fine; he was prepared for ten rounds.

“I enjoyed coming out to Canada,” continued Breen, “and it’s important to get the lads some work. Michael needs to be fighting more often – a couple of fights in a year are not enough, he needs more activity.”

Kelly concurred, “I want to stay active and it was good to have a familiar face in my corner. I would certainly take a rematch if it was on offer.”

SPIKE ITCHING FOR RING RETURN – 15TH APRIL

Irish middleweight champion Gary 'Spike' O'Sullivan is itching to get back into the ring and extend his unbeaten record. The Cork native, trained and managed by Paschal Collins, won his belt in December 2009 with a points verdict over veteran Ciaran Healy, but the puncher has yet to feature in 2010.

"Without doubt it's a very frustrating time for me at the moment," admitted Gary.

"I'd like to be in the ring more often and Paschal said there was the possibility of a few fights coming up but nothing has been confirmed as yet."

O'Sullivan has not been letting inactivity affect his fitness. "I'm chipping away in the gym keeping in shape," he said, "I haven't been sparring lately because Paschal doesn't want any wear and tear, so I don't spar unless I'm preparing for a fight."

"There's a chance I could still be linking up with Frank Warren and fighting at Upton Park on May 15; Kevin Mitchell is fighting Michael Katsidis [for the Interim WBO lightweight title] and it would be a great card to get on to."

Following nine straight wins Gary met Belfast's Healy in Cork to contest the vacant domestic middleweight strap. O'Sullivan had problems containing the strength and work rate of Healy (who competed at super-middleweight in his most recent bout) but managed to land enough of his lauded power shots to claim a 98-94 victory.

As well as claiming his first major title, Gary also realised that the 11-stone limit was more suited to him than middleweight.

"Ciaran Healy was tough and a bit bigger than me; I think I'll stay at light-middleweight from now on. I'm still Irish middleweight champion though so I have options."

"I'm happy enough with my career so far, I've been fairly successful," added O'Sullivan, "it's been literally ten out of ten."

DARREN CORBETT: "HERBIE'S GOT NOWHERE TO HIDE" – 18TH APRIL

“**Y**ou’re turning your back on me while I punch!” screams Darren Corbett, shaking his right arm out as brother Ryan circles the ring strapped in a body protector.

“You try taking those punches,” Ryan shouts back, winking to me as I photograph the dispute from a safe distance at ringside.

Behind the jovial approach, there’s a serious side to the training regime at North Belfast’s Sacred Heart gym. He may be nearing 38 and returning after a long bout of inactivity but Corbett appears to be punching as hard as ever.

“I look a bit heavier at the moment with all this gear on but I’m taking it off to do pads,” says Darren, whipping off two jumpers. “I’m in good shape and raring to go.”

This Friday Corbett gets a second crack at the cruiserweight Prizefighter crown following an unsuccessful campaign last time that saw him fall to eventual winner O’vill McKenzie. After defeating Micky Steeds in the opener, Darren blames an accident he suffered on the night as the reason behind an out of character display.

“I wasn’t hurt against McKenzie but when I was walking to the ring I fell over and the blood was running out of my leg,” he reveals. “I lost concentration and took a couple of good shots.”

“I see this as a second chance and if I can win Prizefighter then I would love to get back in with [current British and Commonwealth champion] Rob Norton.”

Corbett holds a win over Norton, albeit in 1997, which looks good on paper now that Rob is once again achieving at domestic level. A fight poster from their previous meeting sits on the far wall at the Sacred Heart club.

“Rob had a bit more hair then,” laughs Corbett.

“I’ve always loved boxing,” he continues. “I took four years out [2004-2008] of the sport because I wasn’t happy with the contract that

Barry Hearn was offering. I never fell out with Hearn though, he's a nice guy."

Just as well, because it's Hearn's Matchroom outfit that run the hugely successful Prizefighter series – an event that is made for the likes of Corbett, who wowed Belfast crowds in the 1990s with his flamboyant nature and chilling power.

"There are some great memories from looking back at my record; especially the Irish title fights against Ray Kane, Noel Magee and Nigel Rafferty. I just wanted to fight back in those days," sighs Darren. "Money wasn't an issue. I have four kids and another on the way, so it is definitely an issue now."

Starting out as a heavyweight, Corbett took the unlikely route of moving down the divisions as his career took off. Early weight fluctuations saw him move from 15st 11lb to 17st 12lb in the space of a month.

"I'm not really happy with the way my career's gone," he admits. "I regret not listening to people's advice and during the early stages of my career I never trained properly for a fight. Once I won the Irish title I started to put more work in."

"The toughest guy I ever fought was Hector Sanjurjo [Corbett won a majority decision] in Connecticut, they called him 'The Bulldog' and he was solid."

Corbett mixed with the better domestic fighters of his era including Bruce Scott, Neil Simpson, Rob Norton and Chris Okoh.

"Chris Okoh was a great fighter, unbeaten too, but I stopped him in three," he remembers. "I beat Neil Simpson [split decision, December 1999] in front of his home crowd in Coventry and I felt a wee bit drained after dropping down in weight."

It wasn't long before the corner-cutting came back to bite Corbett when he faced fellow puncher Bruce Scott in Belfast with British and Commonwealth honours on the line.

"Bruce Scott was a big banger," remembers Darren. "Gerry Storey and me split following that fight because Gerry was letting me do whatever I wanted in the gym. I was winning the Scott fight but Jimmy Tibbs pushed him on to pressure me until my fitness let me down. I need to be pushed hard in the gym."

Hard gym workouts were an alien concept to a young Corbett as punch power repeatedly bailed him out.

"Throughout my amateur career I was drinking 20 pints a night, knocking people out in the Ulster Seniors but losing a lot of time

through lack of dedication,” he tells me candidly. “That’s life though and I’ve learned from those mistakes.”

Corbett believes that a Prizefighter victory could see the glory days return to Northern Ireland, saying, “Even now I can shift tickets. There was nobody selling tickets here and Barry Hearn put me on one of his Ulster Hall shows; I sold a load and it went on from there.”

Corbett finishes his evening’s workout by jogging the circumference of the gym, in and out of the corridors and up the steep steel stairs. “I’m nearly 38 now,” he pants, “retirement is creeping up every day. I don’t fear any of the Prizefighter competitors and I’m sure they don’t fear me. I have a baby daughter on the way – she’s my motivation.”

“He’s putting in the work this time and last time he didn’t,” adds brother, and pads victim, Ryan.

“We’ve got a great chance. Ask all of the people he’s knocked out just how hard Darren punches – he hits extremely hard. We’ve been working on upper body strength and conditioning, lots of fitness work, short bursts of punches and whoever meets Darren in the first round is in for a tough time. His speed is underrated.

“Herbie Hide’s a former world champion and even if the rest are scared of him Darren’s certainly not. If we get Herbie at any stage then we’ll be in his face for three rounds non-stop.”

As Ryan Corbett collects the equipment together before shut-down, Darren shouts a final message through the door: “Tell Herbie there’s nowhere to hide!”



PATRICK HYLAND KEEN ON EU CRACK – 21ST APRIL

Unbeaten Tallaght prospect Patrick Hyland has been nominated for a crack at the EU featherweight title.

Veteran campaigner Esham Pickering's name has also been thrown into the hat and it is hoped the two will do battle in early summer, at a Dublin venue.

"When we got the call Patrick accepted straight away and the EU title is a good stepping stone for us," said father/trainer Paddy Hyland.

"People say that Pickering is past his sell-by date and even though he got stopped last time by [European champion] Oleg Yefimovich, Eddie has sparred with Yefimovich and I think the boy's a bit special."

Pickering's best days are undoubtedly behind him, but the 33-year-old was a smooth operator in his heyday, holding British, Commonwealth and European honours at various points of his career. He has lost three of his last four contests but all in good company and extended puncher Paul Appleby the full 12 rounds in 2008.

"We'll be hoping to bring the fight to Dublin and purse bids are on April 26 so we'll wait and see," confirmed Paddy.

"There are still a few things to be discussed but we think it's a very winnable fight for Patrick."

Paddy also ran the rule on his other sons, Eddie and Paul, with exciting times lying ahead for the Hyland clan.

"There was a possibility of Eddie fighting the European super-featherweight champion Leva Kirakosyan at short notice," he said.

"Eddie accepted the fight but the champion himself refused because of lack of notice which is understandable. It would have been a career-defining fight for Eddie but the amount of time to prepare wasn't ideal for a title of that stature.

"Eddie will fight anybody; it wouldn't have been a walk in the park for Kirakosyan. That's the second time Eddie has accepted a crack at that belt. The last time was about a year ago [a proposed bout

with then-champion Sergei Gulyakevich]. Kirakosyan knocked out Scott Lawton recently and we would have taken the same approach against a strong, hard hitting opponent.”

Paul, meanwhile, has a trickier assignment on his hands in the form of ex-WBC title challenger Simone Maludrottu. The rugged Italian has been mandated as Paul’s next challenger for the EU super-bantamweight belt. Irish fans will recall Maludrottu ending the illustrious career of Damaen Kelly, firstly with a highly controversial points win in Andersonstown, and then with a resounding stoppage in Italy.

Paul knows he can hold his own against the best in Europe after sparring former French Euro champ Malik Bouziane as the Parisian prepared for a world title crack.

“Paulie was fantastic against Bouziane in Paris,” lauded Hyland.

“Bouziane was stripping himself down in weight to challenge for the super-flyweight world title, which ended in a draw [on April 9 against Simphiwe Nongqayi].

“The height of the guy was immense, he should be fighting at super-bantamweight or higher still. After watching Paulie sparring him I told Pat Ryan I’d love that fight, at any weight. Young Jamie Conlan was over sparring Bouziane as well – Conlan is clever enough and it was a good experience for him. Bouziane’s work rate is non-stop and Paulie dealt with him. The French coaches were impressed with Paul’s ability.”

The plan they are working to is right on schedule and the big fights are now starting to come as the Hylands’ talent shines through. “We’re getting the fights now and doing things the hard way. At European level and beyond there are no easy fights and we’ve stuck it through for the last three and a half years since I brought the lads back [from London] and we’re knocking on the door.”

POWER PUNCHER GREENE GOES PRO – 23RD APRIL

Lurgan hopeful Ryan Greene is ready to cash in his career as a shop owner and start punching for professional pay. The 26-year-old makes his debut in Belfast's Holiday Inn on May 8 in the latest instalment of Alan Wilton's ever-popular small hall events.

"I'm training flat-out at the moment in preparation," proclaimed Greene.

In slightly unorthodox fashion Greene is self-trained and whips himself into fighting condition in a purpose built gym at the back of his house.

"I used to box at 75kg as an amateur and I'm turning pro at light-middleweight," he explained. "I've been sparring [fellow debutant] Brian Cusack to get myself sharpened up.

"I boxed for the Dockers club as an amateur and won an Ulster title, boxed for Ireland and travelled to Iceland, Denmark and Sweden. My style is more suited to the pro game as I'm an aggressive fighter and the computer boxing didn't really suit me, my approach is more action based, from a southpaw stance."

Greene is relishing a chance to get involved in Ireland's busy light-middleweight scene but admits that only the big players are earning the sort of money that would allow him to quit his growing retail business.

"I'll still be running the shop even though I'm turning pro because there's not enough money in the game to sustain a professional career on its own. Away from boxing I go to the cinema with my fiancée and I like to go out on a Saturday night even though I don't drink."

Despite a moderately successful stint in the unpaid code Ryan soon realised that his style had taken him as far as he could go.

"I took a break from the amateurs last year after realising that I wasn't going to make it much further and it was an ambition to turn

professional at some stage. I didn't think that I would be able to win an Irish title as an amateur because of the scoring system, the Dublin guys box really well and are adapted to the computer scoring.

"A couple of months ago I was looking to turn pro but didn't know who to go with and I met up with Alio and we agreed that I could cut my hours at the shop and it suits me to train this way rather than go into a professional gym. We're taking things slowly at the start and I don't know how far I can go – boxing is a hard sport.

"I want to do well as a pro and I'd love to win an Irish title and then take it from there."



CONLAN IN AT THE DEEP END – 23RD APRIL

In 1998 ever-popular Damaen Kelly won the Commonwealth flyweight belt in only his eighth contest. It is no secret that the lower weight fighters get moved on a little quicker than most due to the sparseness of their talent pool compared to the heavier boys.

Another West Belfast favourite, 23-year-old Jamie Conlan, is on course to emulate Kelly's achievements and snare domestic titles for his own keeping. If all goes to plan, Conlan will be in line to challenge for the Irish flyweight title in only his third bout.

"I'm hoping to get an opponent for the Irish title on June 4 or June 11, whenever Paul McCloskey defends his European title," revealed Jamie.

"Some names have been mentioned but whoever it is I'm looking forward to fighting for that belt. I'm training hard for whomever and worrying about what *I'm* going to do on the night, not my opponent.

"If Kieran Farrell can get into the mix then that would be good too. He boxed my young brother and if we fought I think it would be a good scrap."

Conlan recently enjoyed a trip to France, alongside Paul Hyland, sparring Malik Bouziane and Jamie held his own in esteemed company.

"I was out sparring Bouziane for a week and it wasn't as big of a step-up as I thought it would be," said Conlan.

"Bouziane didn't have a punch at all and we were using 12oz gloves in sparring but he has a very high work rate and is a good 12-round fighter, you would have to work hard to beat him. They were impressed that I was a flyweight nobody had heard of and yet I came over to give him a tough time – overall Bouziane was a really nice guy.

"The sparring has slowed down a bit lately," he added, "and I've been doing pads with John Breen, although I would usually spar Andy Murray and my brother Michael when things are in full swing."

Jamie is fast becoming accustomed to the longer distances, not that he had much choice before his last contest in Dublin's National Stadium.

"It surprised me too when there was a knock on my dressing room door telling me it was going to be an eight-rounder! It did play on my mind a little bit and hampered my performance but I'll be ready next time.

"I'm working on fitness all the time to cope with the longer distances because last time I wasn't totally ready for more rounds, it was a strange feeling."

The exact date for Paul McCloskey's proposed fight with rugged Italian Giuseppe Lauri has yet to be confirmed, but this Belfast native is keen to secure a slot on the undercard.

"There are two dates being mentioned for the McCloskey bill at the moment but either way, I've been training flat out in preparation. John was talking about me getting on the Lindsay bill in Belfast and hopefully I can get on to more of Brian Peters' shows as well."

After pummelling the resistance out of journeyman Itsko Veselinov in the Stadium, Conlan proved that he can remain patient and grind down a stubborn survivor if required.

"Veselinov didn't like the body shots but he needed the win and showed a bit of resilience that I didn't think he had. I enjoyed the night but I could have performed better and will do next time.

"If I can't get an Irish title shot then I'm hoping for a six or eight-rounder. The training is going really well at the moment and I would like a run out to test myself over the longer distances."

Jamie admits that he is open to fight any Irish rival for the title and hopes the big clashes can be made.

"If I can get together with Luke Wilton, Kieran Farrell or whoever then we could fight each other two or three times, it would be great for Irish boxing. There's no animosity, we can shake hands after the fight.

"The flyweights are getting good coverage at the moment which is great."

As Conlan follows in the footsteps of Damaen Kelly, West Belfast could soon have another flyweight hero to enjoy.

EASTERN PROMISES FROM HEAVYWEIGHT CHANTURIA – 29TH APRIL

Take two local trainers, a Cork businessman, BBBofC matchmaker and one ambitious Georgian heavyweight. Such an eclectic mix may seem strange in anywhere other than the hectic world of Irish professional boxing.

The heavyweight in question is 31-year-old Vladimir Chanturia, a 12-1 (8 KOs) prospect straight out of the Ukraine and ready to base himself in Belfast.

“This is Vladimir’s second time in Belfast, the first was in 2001 for the World Championship tournament and he’s delighted to be back here,” Gary Hyde enthused about his new signing, pictured below.

“Zaur Antia, the Irish amateur boxing coach, is a friend of Vladimir’s and he told me of his abilities and said he just needed a good manager.

“I’ve never been so excited about a fighter.”

High praise, considering Hyde once held the multiple signatures of Cuban trio Alexei Acosta, Mike Perez and Luis Garcia, and currently counts red hot prospect Guillermo Rigondeaux amongst his stable.

“He’ll be based in Belfast,” continued Gary, “but we are looking to move him about. Having a valid visa for the United States means we can take training camps over there.

“We want two fights in May to get him back on the radar and I think within a matter of months he can be ready for anyone. He’s got great enthusiasm and is preparing for everything.”

Vladimir comes with quite an amateur reputation, having claimed a bronze medal at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. Even more impressively the 'V-Train' outpointed former WBA heavyweight champion Ruslan Chagaev when the Uzbekistan native was arguably at his amateur peak. A quarter-final reverse to another future

professional champion, WBO ruler Sultan Ibragimov, saw Chanturia turn professional. The move to the paid code was in name only, as his training stayed strictly amateur.

“He has all the foundations to be a top professional but the style needs to be tweaked because he is still a little amateurish,” explained Tony Dunlop, who will be overseeing the fitness regime alongside former Martin Rogan trainer Paul McCullagh.

“We want to get him to improve the punch leverage and shorten his shots while taking side steps – Paul McCullagh is a master at this. He can do nothing but improve and I see Vlad as a fresh 31-year-old who’s taken no punishment. He punches very hard, trust me, I’ve felt that knockout power on the pads.”

The laconic Chanturia exudes charm and speaks enough broken English to put his points across.

“I’m aggressive, I like to come forward and get inside to throw the hard shots,” he said. “Belfast is a great city and I have a good trainer and manager here; I aim to be a world champion.”

The immediate plan is to travel down to Dublin for some sparring work before preparing for his May 8 debut in the Holiday Inn on Alan Wilton’s next show. Vladimir made sure we understood the circumstances surrounding his sole professional loss, to Vladimir Lazebnik.

“My loss was a very bad decision and it was on the opponent’s home show. I knocked him down twice but still lost the fight and after that I left Ukraine. I said it would be my last fight there after being hard done too.”

“He’s a personality with loads of charisma,” interceded Hyde. “Vladimir has a wife and three kids at home and once success comes along we will bring his family over. He has a Belfast visa so can come and go. He’s already sending money back home – what a great character.

“He’s ready for the big time, no record padding; I reckon a fight in the US in June could be on the cards and then back to Belfast.”

Quite where Vladimir fits in on the domestic scene remains to be seen and Belfast appears to be little more than a solid base for his career progression. Polish journeyman Tomasz Zaprzalka will provide the first test, which will likely be a sharpening-up exercise.

“I thought when I saw him at 12-1 he was the finished article,” added Paul McCullagh.

“He has got that far already and I can see things we need to improve on which means there is a lot more to come – it takes time,” Paul added.

The best way to gauge Vladimir’s potential will be next Saturday at the Holiday Inn where the fans will be able to catch their first glimpse of ‘The Midnight Train from Georgia.’

JAMIE: "I'VE GOT THE POWER" – 29TH APRIL

Light-heavyweight contender Jamie Power has admitted that winning the vacant Irish title on May 15 in front of a passionate home crowd would make him the proudest man in Limerick. The 29-year-old meets John Waldron for the national crown on a packed Brian Peters promotion that sees Andy Lee headlining at the city's University Arena.

"I'm very much ready and I wish the fight was tomorrow," an excited Power exclaimed.

"I've got a nutritionist involved for this fight so the weight should be spot on and I'm full of energy. I'm prepared for one, two or ten hard rounds, whatever it turns out to be."

Power now sports a 7-1 (4 KOs) record, with the sole loss coming courtesy of Michael Sweeney's talented fists last September. While Power has learned from that loss he refuses to discuss the prospect of a rematch, focusing firmly on Waldron's threat. The two were pencilled in to meet in Tallaght last July but the contest never materialised.

"The fight didn't happen before, for whatever reason, but that's okay because it's my dream to win an Irish title in front of my home crowd in Limerick so things have worked out well to get me this opportunity.

"I have a lot of respect for John, we've sparred before and he's a tough guy. We have a very good game plan for this fight and I'm sure John will have one too so we'll find out who has the better plan on the night."

Power has been doing plenty of sparring and taking half minute breaks in between the practice rounds, rather than the stipulated minute, to improve his stamina.

"My fitness trainer thinks that these little things will count on fight night," explained Jamie.

“I’ve been sparring with an Intermediate heavyweight champion plus the McDonagh boys up in Mullingar, getting good tough rounds.”

Away from the spotlight Power enjoys relaxing with his wife and children, watching television and winding down from the rigours of professional boxing.

“I work full-time as well as boxing because the bills have got to be paid,” he added, before giving more detail on his previous trip to New York to mix with the big boys.

“I was in the Bronx in New York in 2004 and boxed in the Golden Gloves and sparred the likes of Lou Del Valle which was a great experience for me. It was tough being the only white guy in the gym and the attitude was “put up or shut up” among the other boys.

“I was due to go back out to the States about a year ago only the fight got pulled, but I would definitely go back to fight again if the chance came up.

“Oisín Fagan said that despite all his fights in America the highlight of his career was winning the Irish title and hopefully all will go well for me so I can become a champion as well.”

Power is the sort of blue collar fighter that typifies the spirit of professional boxing. He has left no stone unturned in his modest quest to become domestic king at light-heavyweight.

“I’ll be the first ever Limerick-born man to win the title so it would make me very proud,” beamed Power before adding, tongue in cheek, “Andy Lee wasn’t actually born in Limerick but he can take the European title anyway, all I want is this Irish belt!”

Shamrock Shorts: Lurgan’s Stephen Haughian sees his US debut fall through but instead bags himself a Celtic title fight on June 11.....Tommy Egan’s proposed Dublin bill, featuring Neil Sinclair and James Moore, is cancelled.....British featherweight king Martin Lindsay is reportedly just one win away from a shot at the IBF featherweight championship of the world after securing an eliminator.....Andy Murray is targeting a European title shot before the end of the year.

DISAPPOINTMENT FOR CORBETT IN PRIZEFIGHTER - 1ST MAY

Darren Corbett bowed out of the Prizefighter tournament in contentious circumstances. Following a routine points win over John Anthony in the quarter-final Corbett was due to meet Herbie Hide in his next contest.

But after sustaining a cut in his opener with Wayne Brooks, Herbie dramatically withdrew from the tournament leaving a coin-toss to decide who Corbett would face in the semi-final. Durable journeyman Nick Okoth won the toss and Darren was forced to re-adjust at short notice.

Okoth used his freshness to outhustle Corbett early on, but the Belfastman landed some meaty hooks and forced Nick to hold on following a solid right hand. Darren never stopped chugging forward despite tiring late on in the round. The crowd voiced their disapproval at Okoth's unanimous 29-28 victory but SKY TV commentators felt the Battersea veteran who calls himself 'The Ox' had done enough to deserve his moment in the spotlight.

It had all started so well for 'Raging Bull' Corbett, when he outlasted Doncaster danger man John Anthony in the third quarter-final of the evening.

Darren weighed in at a bulky 14st 6lb but started sharply, bull-rushing Anthony with rapid hooks and plenty of enthusiasm. Warned for rabbit punching in the opening session the Sacred Heart man began searching for the type of punches that devastated the likes of Ray Kane in Belfast, as the bout quickly descended into a maul.

TV analyst Glenn McCrory thought the 37-year-old North Belfast native was blowing by the end of the second-round as Anthony sent the waistline wobbling with a crunching body blow. Corbett's brother Ryan informed us before the tournament that Darren's hand speed was underrated and it seemed to surprise the pedestrian Anthony as Corbett's extra quality told. Corbett shook his man with a right hand

in the final round and claimed an academic 30-27 win on all three scorecards.

Admitting he felt rusty and a little tired in his first fight since the last cruiserweight Prizefighter, the savvy veteran threw an impressive 142 shots in the bout and clearly outworked his rugged opponent. An all-action showdown with Hide was planned for the next phase, but the former WBO world champion pulled out backstage and the rest was history.

Newcastle stylist Jon-Lewis Dickinson looked like a smooth operator as he boxed his way to the title and stopped brave substitute Okoth with a classy display, which saw Nick's record fall to 9-28-5.

It was the first time a reserve had been called upon to take part in the event, but that statistic will matter little to a disappointed Corbett who must surely be once again considering retirement.

PADDY MCDONAGH SET FOR HEALY BOUT – 2ND MAY

Paddy McDonagh's fledgling career hits a steep incline on May 15 when the Mullingar rookie tackles former Irish champion Ciaran Healy on the Andy Lee-Mamadou Thiam undercard. 18-year-old McDonagh (who fights alongside brother JJ) has had only two contests so far in the professional ring but his team view the Healy bout as a firm learning experience for the southpaw.

"We want to thank Ciaran Healy for giving us this opportunity," commented manager Tom Ward.

"Healy's fought the likes of Andy Lee, James DeGale and Jamie Moore over a long career - we can't compete with that level of experience."

They certainly cannot. I was ringside for Irish-boxing.com in the Holiday Inn as recently as November 2009 when the youngster made his paid debut, outlasting Grigor Sarohanian in the show-opener. We described McDonagh as "strong and game, forcing his man back with a steady jab."

He followed that win up with a unanimous four-round verdict over Poland's Mariusz Radziszewski in Cork. Ciaran Healy, however, promises to be an entirely different prospect to that 0-4 journeyman.

"It's a tough match for only my third professional contest," agreed McDonagh, who has been preparing by sparring Jamie Power.

"I enjoyed my spar with Power, who is a cracking boxer," he added, "and I feel that Jamie's bout with John Waldron is a 50-50 fight, I'm not going to pick a winner!"

"I've been doing pads, bags and plenty of sparring to prepare for Ciaran Healy; to be meeting someone like him is good experience for me, especially over six rounds. I generally feel that my style suits the professional game more than the amateurs."

Paddy and JJ both gained great experience at the turn of the year when acting as sparring partners for Brian Magee as the Belfastman fine tuned his skills prior to a successful European title effort in

Denmark. Paddy enjoys his day-to-day training regime and thrives on keeping active.

“I was pretty nervous before my debut but I settled down and got the win,” he said. “Me and JJ had our first two fights with Gary Hyde who got us started and now Tom Ward is my manager.

“I’m not going to look at anything other than Healy at the moment, he is my sole focus. I’m only 18 years old so there’s plenty of time for me.”

Tom Ward was honest with his views of the task McDonagh faces, “Paddy is a little nervous but we know what he can do and we’re not necessarily expecting to win it,” he said.

“If we could just get on a winning run though,” Ward continued, “maybe we could aim for a crack at an Irish title at some point. Ciaran Healy went a very close ten rounds with Anthony Fitzgerald in his last fight and with more experience under our belts we can target Fitzgerald, but a long way down the line.

“We have links with John Duddy’s former manager Eddie McLoughlin so that is something we can pursue. You will definitely see Paddy on a card in America at some point.”

So long as the super-middleweight staves off the ring rust, he could prove to be an interesting addition to the domestic mix. For now, Ciaran Healy remains a very real threat to his unbeaten record and the chance to make it three wins out of three.

“This is a tough fight and you could call it a lose-lose situation for us but we’re confident of pulling it off,” concluded Tom Ward.

WILTON WINS HOLIDAY INN HEADLINER – 10TH MAY

East Belfast flyweight Luke Wilton made the most of his first major bill-topper on Saturday May 8, smashing Sofia veteran Sali Mustafov in the opening session of a scheduled eight-rounder. 21-year-old Luke is now eligible for the Irish title and is also chasing British honours, targeting the winner of the forthcoming Ashley Sexton-Shinny Bayaar British title fight on May 14th.

Wilton (8st) enjoyed a rapturous reception from a packed house on this Belfast Promotions card in the Holiday Inn. Pushing out a purposeful jab from the first bell, Luke shipped a right hand as he sought to make an immediate statement. A bewildered Mustafov circled the ring in search of respite from the trademark crowding style of the now 7-2-1 hometown hero.

He could run but the ring offered no hiding place as Wilton landed a combination that sent Sali sprawling into the neutral corner, desperately pawing at the rope to help drag his frame off the canvas. Mustafov's legs were weak and even though the 0-5 veteran managed to haul himself vertical, the referee's decision to call a halt was entirely justified.

"I've been working on my power and doing plenty of strength work in training to improve my punching and I can see it paying off," said Luke at the post-fight press conference.

"I'm strong at flyweight and my improved head movement is down to Paul McCullagh who was drilling it into my ears before the fight to keep my head down, duck and roll, move about and punch, then get out of the way.

"It was a brilliant atmosphere and as soon as the next fight comes I'll take it. I'd love to headline again as soon as possible. I really enjoyed topping the bill."

The fervent crowd eruption that welcomed Lurgan debutant Ryan Greene into the ring was a result of the 25-year-old having sold a bucket load of tickets for this show. We were reliably informed prior to his first

paid contest that Greene was a devastating hitter as an amateur and the fired up southpaw came out throwing bombs from the start.

His opponent, Ryan Clark from Waddington, Lincolnshire, was caught in the eye of the storm, trying urgently to cover up and fiddle his way through the onslaught. Greene capped a frenzied opener by landing a looping left hand that knocked Clark (11st 5lb 4oz) through the ropes and onto the BBBofC board inspectors at ringside. Amazingly, not only did Clark clamber back into the ring, but also appeared unhurt and ready to resume warfare.

The away man was spitting blood into his bucket in between rounds but was incredibly game throughout and threw back plenty of defiance. There were ‘afters’ when the second-round bell sounded, but both men eventually touched gloves and when Greene (11st 8lb 2oz) started blowing hard in the third (an even round) I wondered whether he may have emptied his tank.

Instead, the big punching ticket seller showed a further dimension to his game and started outboxing Clark off the back foot, using lateral movement to confuse his tough foe. 20-year-old Clark –who had ‘never back down’ emblazoned on his shorts- was warned for talking in the fourth, but this was an honest scrap between two hungry fighters.

Ryan Greene’s facial damage gave testimony to the intensity of his debut fight and certainly announced him as an exciting new prospect on the Irish circuit. I scored the bout 40-36 in Greene’s favour (one round even with an extra point for Greene’s first-round knockdown), while ref McCullagh had it much tighter at 38-37.

Cocksure Clark (now 1-10-2 but never been stopped) meets another debutant, Galway’s Alan Donnellan, in Limerick on May 15th – I hope Donnellan is well prepared.

“My next opponent won’t hit like train fists Greene anyway!” joked Clark after the fight.

“I’d never been put down before in my life and he hit me with some bangers. He shocked me but I nodded to myself and carried on going. I’ve had 12 fights and it’s his debut so fair play to him he’s done well.”

Greene enjoyed the fans’ reception and paid homage to trainer Damien Denny. “I met Damien Denny and his brother Frank who’ve pushed me on that bit further and taken me to a different level,” he stated.

“I’ve always had a big following, even when I fought in the Dockers [amateur club] I sold tickets for the shows no problem.

“When Clark went through the ropes I thought “happy days” he’s away now, but he survived and I just rushed in a bit too soon and felt out of breath, getting the nerves out of the way.”

2000 Olympic bronze medallist Vladimir Chanturia (who beat Ruslan Chagaev en-route to that accolade) is now managed by Gary Hyde and based in Belfast under trainers Tony Dunlop and Paul McCullagh Snr. He dispensed with Budapest’s Sandor Forgacs in the opening round of his Belfast debut.

Weighing in at 18st 11lb 6oz Vladimir looked chunky but focused as referee for the evening Paul McCullagh Jnr called the men in for final instructions. Forgacs looked to use his southpaw stance to confuse Chanturia and narrow the clear weight disparity (Sandor scaled 15st 6lb 4oz).

The Hungarian visitor landed a couple of meaty shots as Chanturia stalked with jabs and right hands. An uppercut, followed by a fairly innocuous flurry of punches, resulted in Forgacs suddenly dropping to one knee and taking a count. He rose and appeared set to continue only to see referee McCullagh call it off somewhat prematurely. The crowd was surprised and Forgacs offered a meek protest, but after such an early collapse it was difficult to see him lasting too much longer.

The time was recorded as 1-13 of the opener with the official verdict being that Forgacs was unable to continue. Vladimir seemed pleased with his night’s work, gesturing to ringside and staking his claim as a future world champion. That remains to be seen, but 'The Midnight Train from Georgia' got the job done on this occasion.

In a middleweight four-threes Lincoln import Rick Boulter appeared a little unfortunate to be on the wrong end of a 39-37 points reverse to Bangor’s Phil Townley. Rugged Townley lost his debut to Joe Rea in the Odyssey last November but rebounded here with his first pro victory in a hotly contested affair between novice pros.

Southpaw Boulter (11st 7lb 4oz) also lost his debut (in the York Hall via stoppage) but started swiftly, using a sharp jab and fast left hand to keep Townley at bay before the home fighter warmed up with some left hooks of his own. 30-year-old Rick had a more solid look about him, using straight shots down the pipe to discourage Townley (11st 7lb 10oz) whose shots were thrown from wide angles.

I had Boulter winning two of the first three rounds (with one even) leaving Phil needing a big last round to try and pull it out of the fire. He was more aggressive and pushed Boulter hard in the final

session to take the round, but not the fight, on my card. Referee Paul McCullagh raised Townley's hand much to the chagrin of the away fighter and his corner man Carl Greaves, who protested the decision.

Boulter later expressed his disappointment with the verdict.

"I thought I was robbed and people in the crowd said I'd won, but I would have taken a draw at least," he said.

"That's two losses as a pro now; Townley was just a swinger and I don't know how the ref gave him the decision. I haven't been training recently but I thought I boxed to plan tonight."

Downpatrick beanpole Paul Kayes, a regular sparring hand for headliner Wilton, entered into the professional boxing world with a points win over plucky Frenchman Norredine Dahou. 22-year-old Dahou came in with a 3-1 record and a winning mentality but soon discovered that the swift jab of Kayes would be a problem.

Paul hooked well off his jab and showed plenty of movement but still carried his stance a little upright as he attempted to hone his style from the unpaid ranks.

"I've found the transition from amateur to professional tough but okay so far," Kayes said at the press conference. "I didn't know what to expect but I enjoyed it and I'm hoping to be back out as soon as possible. Whatever comes along I'll take it."

After a slow start Dahou showed plenty of aggression for the remainder of the bout and put a flagging Kayes on the back foot in the last session. To his credit, Paul battled through the fitness barrier and found a second wind to pull him through for a 39-37 win.

The victor also had a word for his club mate and headliner Luke Wilton. "Wilton's good and tough and hits very hard, his power has improved a lot recently," he revealed.

Former Immaculata clubman Brian Cusack could prove to be an interesting addition to the light-heavyweight ranks after posting a 39-37 victory over Doncaster's James Tucker. Cusack remained in control throughout, working over his survival-minded opponent with right hands and a steady lead left.

Tucker turned southpaw in an attempt to turn the tide but James has long since adopted 'opponent' status and allowed well supported Cusack, who was cut under the right eye, to cruise home for his first pro win in the opening bout.

The final debutant of the evening, Gary Hyde's super-featherweight hope Paddy McGarrity, won a nondescript four-rounder against Wiltshire's negative Dan Carr. McGarrity (9st 5lb 12oz)

moved forward but was often dragged into a maul by Carr (9st 9lb) who cynically held at every opportunity, even leading with the left hand just to drag Paddy in for a clutch and wrestle.

McGarrity's gum shield was knocked out in the third-round (it couldn't have been by a punch!) and this was viewed as the highlight of a fight long since consigned to the scrap heap. In his defence, Paddy was trying to make a fight of it but failed to use a commanding jab and was continuously bogged down by Carr who had taken to using both arms to bear hug his way to the final bell. Referee McCullagh scored all rounds to the home fighter at 40-36.

DENNY'S PROSPECT GREENE AND KEEN – 11TH MAY

Midway through Ryan Greene's professional debut on May 8, against Lincolnshire's Ryan Clark, Belfast's Holiday Inn venue was suddenly plunged into darkness. Referee Paul McCullagh scrambled across the ring to separate the combatants until order was restored, as a scattering of boos echoed around at the untimely interruption. Lurgan ticket seller Greene had been busy pleasing his legion of fans, trying to smash the resilient Clark into submission.

As it turns out, an unassuming punter had accidentally knocked the light switch and normal service was quickly resumed. Given Greene's fearsome reputation as a puncher in the amateur ranks, the 'Lights Out' moniker could soon stick as he embarks on a pro career.

"The amateur scene didn't really suit my style so I took a year out to see what I wanted to do," explained the 25-year-old. "I always thought the pro game would suit me better; it was just about getting the belief in myself and finding the commitment to go on further."

Ryan works by day running a string of family-owned shops and is mostly self-trained at home in his purpose-built gym. He has, however, recently linked up with Damien Denny as he seeks to sharpen the skills. Denny fought out of the Hawkins brothers' Holy Trinity gym in West Belfast and campaigned from 1987-1995 as a professional, amassing an 18-4 record.

"This was a small hall show but put him on a big bill and he'll sell even more tickets again," Denny claimed backstage after Greene's debut win.

"Ryan weighed a bit over today [11st 8lbs] after 10 days' off with a rib injury but he's a light-middleweight not a middleweight. I'm glad that Clark got through the ropes and carried on. What would we have learned if Ryan hit him after 60 seconds and it was all over? It would have looked good on the record but this was a learning fight.

“Ryan self-trains but I take him on the pads in the evenings. We were sparring Brian Cusack, who’s a light-heavyweight that has sparred plenty of top amateurs, and Brian said that nobody hit him as hard as Ryan.”

Greene is unsure when we can next catch a glimpse of his all-action style, but would enjoy a slot on the big Paul McCloskey bill on June 11 in Belfast’s King’s Hall.

“I’ve had two fights in two years [one amateur] and I’m hoping to get back in as soon as [promoter] Alan Wilton finds another fight for me,” Greene said.

“I was thinking about the four-round distance tonight so I decided to box a bit towards the end of the fight. I was surprised by Clark’s resilience because I hit him with some good punches and he stood up to them – he’s very strong and had never been stopped or put down before.”

“I was surprised at how well my fitness held up,” Greene continued. “Coming into the fourth-round I was breathing okay and felt good. I had hit him with so many good shots and realised that he wasn’t going anywhere so I decided to be smart and box a bit more. I didn’t want to go for broke.”

Denny sees plenty of potential: “The only thing against him is his age but his punching power is superb.”

“I’m seeing how the boxing goes at the moment,” Ryan added modestly, “but I want to push myself as hard as I can and aim for an Irish title in the future.”

DONNELLAN EXCITED BY PROFESSIONAL DEBUT – 11TH MAY

Galway light-middleweight Alan Donnellan realises his life's ambition on Saturday May 15 when he enters the squared circle for the first time as a professional pugilist. The engaging 23-year-old meets Lincoln rough house Ryan Clark on Andy Lee's Limerick University headliner.

"It's everybody's dream to go pro and be in training all the time," Alan confirmed.

"There was no decision to be made as it had always been my ambition and when the opportunity finally arrived I just grabbed it with both hands."

Donnellan's debut opponent, Ryan Clark, showed his capabilities in Belfast last weekend when offering a spirited effort in his defeat to big punching Ryan Greene. Alan, meanwhile, could turn out to be another interesting addition to the already top-heavy Irish light-middleweight scene.

"Essentially I want to take it slow, in fact, some guys take boxing fight-by-fight but I want to take it round-by-round," he said. "I want to be as technically sound and physical as I can be in each and every round. I'd like to think of being a fighter with intelligent aggression. I'm not strictly a brawler or a technician either.

"As an amateur I came back from a broken shoulder and won titles at a tournament which includes Gardai, soldiers and universities so I got that three times in a row at senior level. I boxed in England and America but for all the highlights nothing is as exciting as turning pro."

The Galwegian originally boxed for the Olympic club in his native city, but is now based at Limerick's St Francis gym and trains under the watchful eye of Kenneth Moore. Finbarr O'Brien is also on board, but has had his hands full recently preparing Jamie Power for his clash with John Waldron.

“I’m training with Kenneth Moore and I’ve been sparring with a variety of guys and various styles,” Donnellan stated.

“My sparring work with light-heavyweight Jamie Power has been great. I’m pretty lucky to have been training a lot with the UL sports science team and I’m sponsored by River Whole foods, so I think I’ll be in good shape.

“I do all the normal stuff like bags, pads, skipping and runs but as well as all that I’ve been doing a lot of strength and conditioning work, getting help from guys who work with the Munster team.

“I went out to Sheffield and did some work at the boxing centre with Howard Rainey and that’s where I got my pro style from, after boxing as a typical Irish amateur up until then. My movement, balance and other things improved following that experience.”

Alan is no slouch outside of the ring either, holding an honours degree in quantity surveying, but admits that he is fully prepared to give the sport his full attention.

“I work outside of boxing but I want to give it my best shot and I have been dedicating all of my time to it recently.

“My first fight will be tough but expect excitement,” Donnellan concluded.

ANDY LEE VS MAMADOU THIAM: BIG FIGHT PREVIEW – 14TH MAY

Andy Lee returns to Limerick on Saturday May 15 as the local hero shapes up for an assault on major titles. Dangerous French puncher **Mamadou Thiam** provides the opposition and southpaw Lee will need to be 100 per cent focused as he aims to defuse the banger.

Thiam (originally from Senegal) has enjoyed a high quality career, meeting the likes of Felix Trinidad, Santiago Samaniego and Sergey Dzinziruk along the way to amassing a 46-8 record. The fact that 43 of Mamadou's wins have come by knockout and seven of his eight losses by stoppage, indicate a vulnerable puncher - which means he or Lee could end up tasting the canvas on fight night.

Thiam's manager, Croatian Mirko Skoko, only sees one winner in Limerick. "Mamadou is one of the biggest punchers in boxing and his record backs that up," he stated.

"For Mamadou it doesn't matter if the fight is in Paris or in Lee's home town because when his big punches land there will be no need for the judges."

Thiam is equally as enthusiastic: "Of course I am predicting a knockout, that is what I do for a living," said the former European champion.

"Some people sell cars, some people build houses, some people drive buses, I knock people out. I suppose I'm like a dentist because we both take teeth out for a living!"

Lee overcame a tricky final two rounds in his last fight, with Affif Belghecham, after dominating the negative visitor for the previous eight. The 25-year-old no doubt holds the skills to outbox Thiam and contain the rugged Frenchman as 'Mama' attempts to land the money shot.

"If Andy can get past Thiam then I believe that his next fight should be for the European title and I'd be very confident of bringing

that fight to Limerick,” revealed promoter Brian Peters, when discussing current Euro king Darren Barker.

The European title would be a realistic next step for Andy and with Barker’s promoter Mick Hennessy no longer enjoying regular TV exposure it is conceivable that the clash may take place in Limerick.

For now, Lee cannot afford to overlook the threat posed by Thiam -who has won his last four bouts by knockout - or title dreams would be out of the window. I believe Lee can use his jab and movement to keep Thiam at bay, before setting him up for the big punches as the fight nears its conclusion. Lee can beat the resistance out of Mamadou for a late stoppage, but must stay clear of Thiam’s heavy arsenal.

LIMERICK UNDERCARD PREVIEW – 14TH MAY

I**an Tims'** withdrawal from a 10-round Irish title clash with **Michael Sweeney** this Saturday signalled the cancellation of an intriguing grudge match between two solid domestic operators. Sweeney does still get to feature, against Belfast's **Tommy Tolan** over four-threes, and should win handily against a fighter who has been inactive for the best part of five years.

Stepping up in significance is the **Jamie Power-John Waldron** fight which sees both men contesting the vacant Irish title at light-heavyweight. Power has had slightly more ring time than Waldron and possesses an all-action style.

Waldron is more of a systematic boxer and if he can withstand the early barrage this could get interesting.

Power's strength and conditioning should be up to scratch for this scrap. "Training has gone well," Jamie explained, "and I'm working with a nutritionist who has me eating lots of rabbit food and as a result I'm right on the weight!

"I'm ready to go, in fact I wish the fight was this weekend because I just can't wait to get in there and fight for that Irish title.

"The fact that the fight's in Limerick and for the Irish title makes it all the more special," Power added.

"I've fought in the States as an amateur, in The O2 in Dublin on a big world title card but to win the Irish title in front of my family and friends in Limerick would undoubtedly be the highlight of my career."

This is likely to be a close affair with both men having their moments, but Power can come on strong late to snatch the belt on points and fulfill his hometown title dream.

Fresh from his defeat of Oisín Fagan in the National Stadium **Andy Murray** gets another run-out, this time over six rounds. 29-year-old **Amir Unsworth**, an Englishman sporting a respectable 10-2-1 record, provides the stern opposition. Unsworth's two defeats

both came over ten rounds and he has built himself a solid reputation on the undercard scene.

Talented Cavan man Murray should have too many skills and the tip is for him to outbox Unsworth over a rough and tumble six sessions.

Cuban heavyweight **Mike Perez** and his compatriot **Luis Garcia** both feature on this card. **Coleman Barrett** is off and, remarkably, Perez may now fight Barrett's proposed opponent, **Edgar Kalnars**, as well as his own scheduled foe, **Tomas Mrazek**.

"He's an incredible raw talent and he wants to start fulfilling his potential by shaking up the heavyweight division, and pulling off this feat on Saturday night will certainly cause a stir," promoter Brian Peters added, when confirming the amazing proposal.

Garcia meanwhile faces **Alexander Sipos** over eight three-minute rounds. Sipos has lost his last seven contests but did push Andy Lee hard in Dublin, when they met in a 10-rounder. Garcia may also feature live on RTE television.

18-year-old **Paddy McDonagh** gets an interesting assignment at super-middleweight when he tackles former Irish light-middleweight king **Ciaran Healy** over six rounds. McDonagh has skills and has been getting great sparring, but despite being the fresher man he could find himself outworked by the more experienced Healy.

Alan Donnellan makes his pro debut at light-middleweight, taking on **Ryan Clark** over four-threes. Katie Taylor is off the card after suffering a nose injury.

THIAM NO MATCH FOR ANDY LEE IN LIMERICK - 16TH MAY

You can only beat what's in front of you, as the old saying goes. Andy Lee certainly did that as the Limerick middleweight dominated Frenchman Mamadou Thiam for a second-round retirement on Saturday May 15 in the city's University Arena. Promoter Brian Peters put on another excellent show in the latest of his popular Yanjing Fight Night series.

Mamadou came in with a puncher's reputation but had trouble keeping his feet (slipping to the canvas three times) and used the ropes to hold him up. Lee, with Emmanuel Steward in his corner, used his purposeful southpaw jab to open up Mamadou and dropped in some meaty left hands to keep his man 'honest'.

Thiam limped back to his corner at the end of the second session and shook his head to the corner team. Croatian Mirko Skoko called over Emile Tiedt who accepted the retirement and sent the home crowd into raptures. European middleweight king Darren Barker will hopefully be next, later in the year in Limerick.

Cuba's Luis Garcia got some valuable RTE airtime but took a while to warm up against Alexander Sipos of Germany. The talented super-middleweight (who scaled 12st 4lb 8oz for this one) dropped the first round on my card to the bull rushing Sipos but took the remaining five with his jab and fast hands wearing down the Munich man.

Sipos (12st 4lb 5oz) went into a shell early in the second and rarely re-appeared, happy to survive the six rounds. Referee Micky Vann totalled 60-54 while I had it slightly narrower, but the right man got the verdict. Garcia has been inactive and will now hope to stay busy if he is to fulfil his undoubted potential.

Light-heavyweight duo Jamie Power and John Waldron produced a fantastic scrap as both men vied for the vacant Irish title. Ballyhaunis's Waldron offered a career-best boxing performance to break local man Power's heart and deservedly take the title after ten hard fought rounds.

Waldron (12st 5lb 9oz) had offered signs that he was a good boxer in the past, but arguably a little one paced. On this night, his jab was superb and stopped Jamie (12st 7lb 2oz) setting his feet to land the big shots. John landed flush as early as the second round and had Power's legs wobbling before Jamie went down from a knockdown in the fourth and rose sporting a cut to his left ear.

Blood spewed down his back but the brave Limerick native kept plugging away, landing solitary body blows as Waldron's accurate jab landed repeatedly. Power was dropped again the fifth from a right behind the ear and cut over the right eye in the ninth. He dragged up a massive effort in the final round but John stayed firm and was remarkably fresh in posting a 97-91 win on David Irving's scorecard. I totalled 99-89 in Waldron's favour, giving Power only the sixth-round.

Former EU lightweight king Andy Murray kept busy with a win over England's Amir Unsworth. The bout was warming up nicely when Amir (9st 11lb 9oz) sustained a cut under the left eye which clearly bothered him. Trainer Carl Greaves immediately set about working on it but the blood flow did not stay stemmed for long.

Some sharp uppercuts and right hands later and referee Micky Vann invited the doctor in for a check up. He didn't like what he saw and stopped it at the end of the second. Murray is highly ranked by the EBU and hopefully can now snare a major title shot.

18-year-old super-middleweight Paddy McDonagh took a big step-up for his third paid outing, when seeing off the stubborn challenge of Ciaran Healy over six-threes. Smooth southpaw McDonagh was just that bit sharper and often beat Healy to the punch as the Belfastman rumbled forward.

The variation and pace was all good from Paddy (12st 0lb 6oz), who looked in much trimmer shape and more comfortable than last time I had seen him (admittedly on his debut last November). One highlight came in the fifth-round when Healy (11st 13lb 1oz) let out a huge burp in centre ring, prompting laughter and a touch of the gloves from McDonagh.

The feeling at ringside was that Paddy had put out his right shoulder, when throwing a big hook in the final session, but he seemed to recover and took his chance on a big undercard.

Mayo's Michael Sweeney was supposed to meet Ian Tims in a cruiserweight title affair but when Tims withdrew –and subsequent

opponents turned it down- Belfast's Tommy Tolan stepped in for a four-rounder.

Sweeney (12st 11lb 8oz) used his jab to keep the shorter Tolan (12st 10lb 6oz) at bay and a sweet right hand-left hook combination had him down in the second. But rugged Tommy, who had been inactive for five years before this bout, overcame fatigue and a swelled left eye to see out the distance. The 40-35 scorecard was academic on Emile Tiedt's notepad.

In the first of two bouts on the same night, Mike Perez (16st 3lb 4oz) landed his first meaningful flurry and Latvian journeyman Edgar Kalnars (15st 4lb 2oz) was down on his knees. More pressure and the away man was out of there, at 0-48 of the first-round. Innovative promoter Brian Peters may have to get him three opponents next time, but at least his second foe **Tomas Mrazek** offered stiffer resistance.

Mrazek soaked up strong right hooks to the body and showed resolute toughness until a cut developed under his right eye. It seemed innocuous enough and Mrazek's corner man (who thought it was a head butt) was incensed when the referee decided to involve the doctor and then call it off at 1-48. A rather strange ending but Perez entered the history books none the less.

In the swing bout, Galway debutant Alan Donnellan had his hands full at light-middleweight with Lincoln livewire Ryan Clark, over four-threes. Clark's nose bled from the first round yet he repeatedly found a home for the right hand as Donnellan's head remained a little static. Alan boxed his way into the contest and claimed a 39-38 victory on Micky Vann's card – I had it a draw at 38-38.

MCCLOSKEY'S READY FOR THE BIG BOYS AT LIGHT-WELTERWEIGHT – 15TH MAY

European light-welterweight champion Paul McCloskey returns to the ring on June 11 following a lengthy absence from the ring. Paul claimed the title in Magherafelt last November, beating Spaniard Daniel Rasilla in nine rounds. The Dungiven southpaw is now looking to move past a period of injury and frustration when he defends his crown against Italian Giuseppe Lauri in Belfast's King's Hall.

"It's good to be getting back into the swing of things, it's been a while since I had my last fight and Magherafelt was a memorable night for me," admitted McCloskey.

"I've been in the gym for a solid 10 weeks, things are going well and you just have to read Lauri's record to see that he's a tough opponent. I'm training really hard and can't wait to put on a good performance in the legendary King's Hall."

McCloskey views the experienced Lauri as a very real threat to his own world title ambitions.

"Obviously I could have fought someone 13th or 14th in the European rankings but all I'm focused on is getting into the best possible shape, mentally and physically, and on the night I'll be ready to do the business. I've seen him fight and I know how tough he will be.

"I believe I'm ready for the big boys on the world scene and I'll keep preparing by fighting quality tough opponents like Lauri. I'm in the rankings and hold plenty of merit from previous achievements."

Veteran coach John Breen believes Paul's style would cause problems for the best in the world and names like Tim Bradley, Amir Khan and Devon Alexander were mentioned during the McCloskey-Lauri Belfast press conference.

"I believe McCloskey beats Tim Bradley," opined Breen, "I think we'll see the best of him when we get a world-class opponent in the ring.

"I've watched a few tapes of Lauri and he's fantastic at doing dirty things and getting the other guy checked for it. He's a smart kid who's been around a long time and this is a good step-up for Paul, fighting his No. 1 mandatory challenger and not just somebody we've picked up."

The Belfast trainer also revealed that McCloskey's back injury has completely cleared up and sees a fighter raring to go after an unforeseen layoff.

"He's training very hard and I rate Giuseppe Lauri as a world-class fighter because the only people to beat him have been world-class themselves," said Breen.

McCloskey is still rankled by the fact that Souleymane MBaye wasn't the man in the opposite corner when he claimed the European title last year, but Paul believes that the Magherafelt victory gave him plenty of reason to believe that he belongs at the higher level. "I'm at European level now but I need to do the business on June 11," he said.

"I'm going to watch the DVDs to see what the Italian is all about. Lauri's got power, a good jab, uses the head quite well but my attributes are better than his and I want to impose my will on him.

"He has a reputation as a rough customer but I've been in John's gym five years now and there have been plenty of rough customers in there too. The sparring has been tougher than any fight I've had so far in the ring. Lauri is clever, crafty and knows all the inside tricks, complains to the referee and holds on. My fitness and conditioning are good so it's up me to watch out for those tricks."

The last time 30-year-old McCloskey fought in the King's Hall was on the John Duddy-Howard Eastman card in December 2007, when he smashed Tontcho Tontchev in four one-sided rounds. Returning as the headliner in front of a passionate crowd excites Paul.

"I also had my debut in the King's Hall," he added, "and if you look at the past champions and great fights that have been there it definitely will be a special night. To be in the history books will be special for me. It's all about winning the fights but people seem to enjoy my shows and like the way that I box as well."

Breen had the final word: "I haven't seen the best of Paul McCloskey yet and I've been training him since he turned professional.

"The better the opponent Paul faces then the better he will box and I'm looking forward to a great night on June 11," concluded Breen.

HAUGHIAN WORKING ON MIND TECHNOLOGY FOR CELTIC SHOT – 15TH MAY

Lurgan welterweight Stephen Haughian is upbeat about ending an eight-month ring hiatus with a shot at the vacant Celtic title. Experienced southpaw Kevin McIntyre, a former British champion, is the man opposing Haughian on June 11 on the Paul McCloskey-Giuseppe Lauri undercard.

Stephen was last seen struggling to a six-round draw with Estonian journeyman Albert Starikov on Bernard Dunne's unsuccessful world title defence in Dublin last September. Mooted fights with John O'Donnell and Ted Bami, as well as a proposed US debut in March, failed to materialise leaving the 25-year-old a frustrated domestic operator.

"It's a long awaited return and a stepping stone for me as Kevin McIntyre is a good operator who's been around the block," said the 18-1-1 (8 KOs) Haughian.

"I'm 25 years old and have been training with John Breen since I was 15. So now's the time for things to happen, starting with this opportunity for the Celtic title. I want to progress from there."

Aside from the draw, the only other blemish on Stephen's record was a 12-round loss to Italian Giammario Grassellini for the IBF Intercontinental welterweight title in a fight he appeared to have won. That, back in 2007, was Haughian's last appearance at the King's Hall, until now. Any ghosts from the defeat were eliminated, however, in 2008 at Castlebar when Haughian turned the trick on Grassellini over eight rounds.

"I still feel that I won my first fight with Grassellini," said an aggrieved Haughian, "but that's boxing for you and I avenged that defeat – it's looking up for me again because anybody who wins the Celtic title usually gets a shot at the British.

“I’m working hard with Paul McCloskey, getting good quality southpaw sparring and also doing some strength and conditioning with Mike McGurn, who worked with Bernard Dunne on his road to world title success,” he added.

“I’ve been working on mind technology in Armagh, with Stephen McGeown doing fire walks, which is instrumental in my progress, because there’s no point entering the ring if your head isn’t right.”

32-year-old McIntyre is now 27-7 (9 KOs) and a solid competitor at domestic level. He will also view this title as a way of grabbing another crack at the British strap he won, and defended successfully against Kevin Anderson, before Kell Brook ruthlessly removed it from him in one brutal round.

Kevin does have previous Celtic welterweight title form though, having beaten Tony Doherty for this same belt in 2007. He got his British shot in the next bout, again emphasising the importance of this bout for Haughian.

“There was talk of me fighting Willie Thompson or Chris O’Brien [for the Irish welterweight title Stephen still holds] and if those fights come off, they come off. But if I win the Celtic title I will be in line for the British title so things are looking up.

“I’m named after Gallowglass, an ancient warrior that only left the battlefield if he was victorious. So I will be going into battle with that mentality - I see it as a matter of history repeating itself on June 11.”

COLIN LYNES: "NO ONE PUSHED ME AS HARD AS MCCLOSKEY" – 15TH MAY

Paul McCloskey has enlisted the help of a former ring adversary while the Dungiven southpaw gears up towards his maiden European title defence on June 11. Colin Lynes, a former European title holder himself, has been pushing McCloskey through his paces in John Breen's Belfast base. The Hornchurch man feels Paul's preparations are right on cue.

"Paul's where he should be at the moment," said Lynes, "he might be a bit frustrated with what he's doing at times but he doesn't want to be at the top of his game because he has another week or so to peak. If he leaves the ring feeling less than 100 per cent happy with what he's done then that's good, that's how it should be at this stage."

Colin has been around the scene since 1998 and knows plenty about his European counterparts, including McCloskey's opponent Giuseppe Lauri.

"I've been in the game a long time and I've studied Giuseppe Lauri many times and I've always come up with the same answer to what he does in the ring," he said. "I've been doing the same things in sparring. Make no mistake I'm not just here for Paul but I'm also here for myself and doing what I need to do, which is suiting Paul as well. I want to push on in my own career and rather than staying out of each others' pockets I think more fighters should go and get experience like this."

Lynes hit a career purple patch in late 2007-early 2008, beating Barry Morrison, Young Mutley and Juho Tolppola before dropping a close decision to Gianluca Branco in Italy. In December 2008 he faced McCloskey in defence of his 10 stone British strap and was retired in nine rounds after a career-best performance from the razor sharp Irishman.

"I wasn't at the top of my game when I fought Paul and he was very sharp and elusive that night, it brought the best out of him," lamented Colin.

“Because we’re only sparring at the moment, that nervous edge isn’t there that would be if it were the real thing, or if Paul was in there chasing a belt like he was when we fought. He’s going to sharpen up and he will do next week.”

Lynes sees McCloskey defending successfully at European level before moving up in class to challenge for a world crown.

“There’s no reason why Paul can’t go further than European title level. His team believe he can, he believes it and I’ve sparred with him and no one has pushed me as hard in sparring. If I can move on to the next level then there’s no reason why Paul can’t,” stated Lynes.

“Paul will definitely still be European champion on June 11,” he concluded. “If he does what he can do then there’s no reason why he doesn’t get rid of Lauri on fight night.”

WALDRON FEELS JUST CHAMPION – 19TH MAY

At the age of 35 and with only six professional fights under his belt, Ballyhaunis light-heavyweight John Waldron defied the odds and defeated Jamie Power for the vacant Irish title.

Waldron's display of smart boxing saw him use all of the right tools to dominate his Limerick opponent and post a 97-91 victory on the referee's scorecard.

Speaking backstage, just minutes after his proudest moment, an emotional Waldron revealed the painful fact that his late father was unable to share in victory.

"My father, James Michael, was at my last fight, here in Limerick last November but he passed away two and a half months ago," said John.

"I know he was here in my corner tonight and he went to every one of my fights right back from amateur, but unfortunately he didn't get to see this one."

Indeed, anyone connected with Waldron would have been impressed at the way he controlled the ring with a sharp jab, swift movement and powerful right hand, dropping Power twice en-route to victory. The improvements shown in the now 5-2 fighter's style are further testament to the skills of Phil Sutcliffe and his Crumlin boxing team.

"Training in Crumlin with Phil and the boys is fantastic for me," added Waldron. "Jamie's a strong lad but I'm a strong lad too, my record doesn't do me justice."

Losing his debut to Ciaran Healy and dropping a controversial disqualification loss to Danny Couzens in Galway left Waldron sporting a less than impressive 1-2 record after three bouts. Winning three on the bounce, with two via stoppage, propelled John into the title shot with Power, and his moment to shine.

Waldron continues, "I caught Jamie with some good shots but I still didn't want to rush in after hurting him because that's when he's

most dangerous. After I caught him in the middle rounds he got me and I told myself not to be stupid. If the knockout came then I would have taken it, but the game plan was not to go looking for it.

“Every round was like a new fight for me. My jab worked well, so did the right uppercut; he has a big right hand so I was wary of getting caught. A win’s a win, I’m right in the mix and the belt comes home with me.”

Fans will now be eager to see Waldron back in action, with a first title defence against Michael Sweeney a possibility.

“I don’t mind who is next but I hurt my right knuckle in one of the rounds and with a bit of rest I’ll get back in there,” he stated.

JJ MCDONAGH RETURNS IN JUNE – 19TH MAY

While brother Paddy was busy staving off the threat of Ciaran Healy inside the Limerick ring last weekend, JJ McDonagh offered his sibling plenty of vocal support from outside the ropes.

The Mullingar southpaws are building themselves up nicely on the big fight undercards and JJ expects to be active again in June at the King's Hall.

"I have a slot on the June 11 Paul McCloskey show, although no opponent has been named yet," McDonagh confirmed.

"I'm expecting it to be a four-rounder as my last one was over four as well."

Despite the super-middleweight's first two contests having been scheduled for four rounds, neither went anywhere near that distance, ending in a perfect pair of one-round wins. Jevgenijs Kiselevs was dropped twice by the 6'2" prospect in Belfast's Holiday Inn last November and Mario Lupp tasted the same medicine in Dublin's National Stadium earlier this year.

Classy 24-year-old JJ has been enjoying some excellent sparring with the likes of Michael Sweeney, Jamie Power and John Waldron, plus plenty of work with Luis Garcia who he describes as "a very good, clever boxer".

Both McDonagh brothers are training with Tom Ward and Tony Conroy. Coventry's Conroy campaigned at light-welterweight from 1999-2003, winning the Midlands Area title in his last bout before calling it a day at 10-2 (4 KOs).

JJ also had some words of advice for his 18-year-old brother: "Paddy boxed well tonight (versus Healy) but got a bit weaker towards the end of the fight. He didn't look to be doing as well in the last couple of rounds after catching Ciaran with the big right hooks.

“On the plus side, Paddy has been very fit coming up to this fight, doing eight-round spars along with plenty of pad work.

“Healy boxed well too though,” JJ commented.

CARL FRAMPTON READY FOR KING'S HALL DEBUT – 20TH MAY

Barry McGuigan's super-bantamweight protégé Carl Frampton will realise a professional dream on Saturday June 11 when he appears in Belfast's King's Hall on the Paul McCloskey European title undercard.

"I've dreamed of fighting in the King's Hall since I was a kid and for me being a Belfast boy it is going to be a great night," stated the exciting North Belfast prospect. "It's going to bring out the best in me so I can't wait to get it on."

23-year-old Frampton is down to box English livewire Ian Bailey and is looking to improve on his 5-0 (3 KOs) record as a professional. Bailey holds a 5-4 slate but is no journeyman and represents a solid step-up for the hometown fighter.

Three years older at 26, Bailey, who boxes out of Slough, snapped the unbeaten record of Steve Barnes and has pushed prospects Kris Hughes and Ryan Walsh to points decisions.

Carl also recognises the constant comparisons drawn between himself and manager McGuigan.

"Me and Barry boxed around the same weight, so there's a definite connection there," he explained.

"Barry had so many great nights in the King's Hall and I want to be winning titles there and defending them in Belfast. The plan is to go for a Celtic or Irish title before moving on for a crack at the British in 2011 and hopefully that can be in the King's Hall."

Veteran coach Gerry Storey, who handles Frampton in his Holy Family base, was also on hand to offer his words of advice.

"I'm absolutely delighted that all the boys are back in action at the King's Hall," commented Storey, "and as far as I'm concerned, with regards to Carl, of all the fighters I've looked after he is one of the best."

“He’s going to be the next star of Belfast, bringing the crowds back into the King’s Hall and this is just the way to school him, by putting him on in a supporting role on a big card.

“I have no doubt that this guy will go all the way to the top,” opined Gerry.



CASEY THE SURPRISE PACKAGE FOR PRIZEFIGHTER – 22ND MAY

Even though Belfast veteran Wayne McCullough has withdrawn from the Prizefighter tournament on May 29, there will still be Irish interest after Limerick southpaw Willie Casey got the call as his replacement. 28-year-old Casey may not be well known on the mainland, but fans in Ireland are already familiar with his all-action, aggressive style which is bound to suit the intensive Prizefighter format.

“My style is made for the crowds,” enthused Casey, shortly after receiving confirmation of his place.

“My name was mentioned as a possible reserve so I had it in the back of my mind that I could get in there. I’m always ticking over in training and keeping in shape so making the weight won’t be a problem.

“I’m a big fan of Prizefighter and of Sky TV’s *Friday Fight Night* as well, I watch it every week and know some of my fellow competitors from it,” added Willie.

Casey is trained by Phil Sutcliffe, one of Ireland’s top coaches, who appeared in the 1997 Daniel Day-Lewis movie *The Boxer*. Sutcliffe has a reputation for improving novice pros. Two of his charges, Anthony Fitzgerald and John Waldron, rose from average career starts to recently become Irish champions.

“This is a great opportunity for Willie and I think he can take it,” said Sutcliffe.

“He works very hard in the gym, hits with a lot of power and even though he usually starts slowly and builds up into a fight, I feel his natural aggression can cause problems for the other guys. We know all about Esham Pickering, he has a great reputation but some of the other guys have only had five or six bouts like Willie.”

Indeed, Casey is only 5-0 (4 KOs) but 'Big Bang' travelled to Canada in his last fight to drop 10-0 local prospect Tyson Cave four times on the way to an eighth-round knockout victory.

“The Canada win really put my name out there,” added Willie, “and gave me a platform to push on with my career. I’m going to treat my first Prizefighter fight like my last one and just go at it for each round like it’s the final. I trust in my fitness.

“The Irish have done well in this tournament and I plan to continue that streak on Saturday night,” concluded Casey.

SYKES RETAINS TITLE AGAINST BRAVE O'HARA – 29TH MAY

Belfast super-featherweight Kevin O'Hara was unable to bring the British title home on Friday night, going down on points to defending champion Gary Sykes at the Huddersfield Leisure Centre.

O'Hara made a sharp start, landing some eye catching right hands over Sykes' low left hand and beat the unsettled Dewsbury man to the punch. Sykes adjusted his footwork in the fourth and drew first blood when a head clash opened up a nick around O'Hara's right eye.

In the seventh-round the SKY commentary team suggested O'Hara had been hurt by a right hand to the body and the torso attacks from Sykes were coming more frequently as the local man found his rhythm. 'Sweet Pea' took a respite in the tenth as John Breen cut away some loose taping on his glove, but by now the fight was slipping away from the 28-year-old Irishman.

O'Hara found a good right uppercut in the 11th-round but the points deficit was mounting and by this stage he needed a big knockout to salvage the fight. He sustained a second cut, over the left eye, to add to his woes as John Breen read the riot act in the red corner, calling for a big effort in the last. Kevin gave his all but came up short on the night leaving a delighted Sykes to claim the spoils.

One judge gave it to Gary by a score of 119-109 while the other two had it 118-111.

"I could have looked a lot better than that but I had a niggle from the eighth-round," said Sykes post-fight.

"O'Hara was tough at the beginning but I got into my rhythm and I could have showed a lot more than that."

O'Hara, who suffered the fourth title defeat of his career, drops to 17-6 while his conqueror marches on undefeated in 16 bouts.

PRIZEFIGHTER GLORY FOR 'BIG BANG' CASEY – 30TH MAY

Limerick's Willie Casey announced his arrival on the big stage, winning the Prizefighter super-bantamweight tournament in York Hall, Bethnal Green on Saturday night.

Casey never let up from the opening bell of his quarter-final right through to the final, as he outlasted late substitute Paul McElhinney to bring the crown back to Ireland.

Willie had been due to meet Swansea's Ricky Owen in the final but Owen suffered a cut in his semi-final with Jamie Arthur and was forced out by the doctor. In stepped Glaswegian McElhinney, unbeaten in four pro contests and presented with a huge opportunity to try and snatch glory.

Despite a promising opener, the Scotsman sustained a bloody nose in the second and was slowly ground down by the marauding southpaw. 'Big Bang' claimed his victory unanimously on the judges' scorecards and capped the biggest win of his boxing career to date, emulating Belfast's Martin Rogan who arrived from nowhere to win the first Prizefighter over two years ago.

A passionate Casey took plenty of vocal support over to England and revelled in the fact that he is now right in the thick of the title mix.

"I'm proud for my coaches, my family, Brian Peters Promotions and everybody involved with me, I'm delighted with my performance," Casey enthused.

"He [McElhinney] was a good, tough lad and obviously fresher than me. It was all about winning the trophy and getting up there with the big names."

Willie had already gone toe-to-toe with highly-fancied Josh Wale in the semi-finals, showing non-stop aggression in the face of Wale's smarter boxing. Josh was still nursing a cut from his previous fight with Esham Pickering and some well timed left hands from Willie sliced it back open.

The decision was split but the right man got the verdict and deservedly cruised into the final.

Willie had started the night off well with a stoppage win over former amateur star Mark Moran in his quarter-final.

Casey had promised beforehand that he would be treating every contest like his last and we were not disappointed as the Limerick man raced out the blocks, smashing Moran with heavy hooks.

After a hectic first two rounds, Moran went down from exhaustion in the third when a combination with a classy right uppercut, sapped his energy. Mark rose and tried bravely to continue but Willie was too strong and pummelled away mercilessly before Ian John-Lewis jumped in and rescued the Liverpool man.

In what was arguably the best Prizefighter since its inception, tournament favourite Ricky Owen and Redcar battler Gavin Reid served up a cracking quarter-final. Dropped in the second-round Owen roared back and snared a close decision to progress.

Ricky's win over Jamie Arthur (who had bettered Robbie Turley in his first bout) seemed to have set up a mouthwatering final with Casey, but the cut ultimately put paid to that enticing prospect.

Belfast's Carl Frampton seated at ringside, beside mentor Barry McGuigan, was no doubt an interested spectator watching some potential future opponents.

The UK fans are now aware of what we already knew – that Willie Casey is an aggressive, exciting banger with a style made for the Prizefighter format. The engaging 28-year-old can now look forward to even bigger nights.

Shamrock Shorts: Belfast boxing historian Barry Flynn continues his series of projects to keep alive the city's proud boxing history.....Ulster duo of Phil Townley and Brian Cusack experience mixed fortunes in English bouts. Cusack remains unbeaten after a shock knockout win over Emmanuell Oshinronde while Townley drops a points verdict to Jamie Boness.....Derry legend Charlie Nash backs Paul McCloskey to successfully defend his European crown against Giuseppe Lauri.....Another pride of Derry, middleweight John Duddy, edges towards a world title shot but must first get past Julio Cesar Chavez..... Meanwhile, fellow US-based Irishman, James Moore, drops a decision to Pawel Wolak in New York.

ANDY MURRAY ALSO FEATURES ON KING'S HALL BILL – 3RD JUNE

While Paul McCloskey prepared for his European light-welterweight title defence on June 11 by trading blows with Colin Lynes, EU lightweight king Andy Murray quietly shadowboxed in the corner of Breen's gym. The unassuming 27-year-old has a six-round slot on the undercard as he steadily pushes towards a crack at his namesake, European champion John Murray.

"John Murray fought well against Gary Buckland," said the interested spectator, "he looked strong and in general it was a good fight to watch. Gary really took it to him but Murray stayed composed and gradually broke Buckland down."

Andy was last seen in ring action in Limerick last month, when contesting a six-rounder with Amir Unsworth. The bout was just heating up when Unsworth suffered a bad cut and the action was prematurely halted, in Murray's favour.

"The Amir Unsworth fight was warming up nicely when he got cut and it would have been a nice fight for both of us had it lasted," stated Murray. "I wanted more rounds and think I was gaining control but the cut was nasty and there's nothing I could do."

"I'm expecting another six-rounder in the King's Hall, the hard work has been done in the gym as always and I want a good test. Spending eight weeks in the gym for a 20 second blowout is no good, you need to be tested in there and my record's getting better all the time as I move up in levels. I've got my head down and I'll keep moving towards that European title fight, which will hopefully take place at some stage."

After a cracked collarbone forced Andy into a spell of inactivity in 2009, the Cavan man returned in December last year to defeat Ecuadorian roughhouse Alex Bone over six hotly disputed rounds. He then proved how far above domestic level he has now become, when battering Oisín Fagan into defeat at Dublin's National Stadium in February this year.

Amir Unsworth looked to be the perfect test for Murray, until the cut had its say, and Andy wants another durable, live challenger in his next outing.

“I need to be tested and move on in levels now,” he agreed, “there's a lot more pride in [UK] opponents as they come and give it a go and don't just roll over, hopefully I can get an opponent on June 11 who doesn't lie down.”

A regular performer on Ireland's RTE station, Murray hopes that a good showing can appeal to mainland audiences as well.

“My goal is always to impress and SKY TV is televising this show so a good performance could get me some airtime and get people talking about me. Then it could snowball and draw the John Murray fight a little closer,” Andy concluded.

CROSSOVER STAR FRAMPTON TO FULFILL KING'S HALL DREAM – 9TH JUNE

Just watching Carl Frampton glide around the ring, slamming his fists into the pads with impressive variety, proves Barry McGuigan's glowing endorsement of his prospect's abilities are more than just the usual boxing hyperbole. Frampton realises one of his sporting ambitions on June 11, by appearing in the same King's Hall venue that his mentor and manager lit up so many times during his own career.

"I've been looking forward to it for a while now, ever since I heard there was a chance that Paul McCloskey would be boxing in the King's Hall," said a clearly excited Frampton. "Being from Belfast I knew I could get on the bill and after 10 weeks' preparation I'm feeling as fit as ever."

McGuigan has taken Carl over to England for some intense workouts with Ian Napa, Choi Tseveenpurev, Mickey Coveney and Bradley Evans and agrees that his charge is in the best shape of his life after sparring 30 rounds in 10 days.

"Every time I watch this kid in the gym he gets better and better," said Barry, suited and booted at a specially arranged workout earlier this week.

"It's not just about being able to bang hard in this game and Carl brings quality, power and intelligence to the ring. Gerry Storey's doing a dynamite job and he thrives on speed, making Carl elusive and hard to hit. We have speed and explosiveness in abundance."

Frampton faces the toughest test of his fledgling five-fight career when Slough battler Ian Bailey appears in the away corner, intent on providing the same sort of shock he managed last year against unbeaten prospect Steve Barnes.

McGuigan continues, "Ian Bailey is 5-4 as a pro, has only been stopped once, from a hand injury, and he just went six rounds with

Ryan Walsh. He tries to march forward and walk you down. This guy comes to fight, showing lots of aggression and we could end up seeing a fight of the night.

“We won’t see Frampton at his best until people come and try against him because when they start a fight with him he just breaks out and shows his class. Bailey is absolutely no journeyman, he’s well prepared and in shape after being named as a substitute in Prizefighter.

“Bailey’s team believed they could beat Steve Barnes and they did, so they will be coming here thinking the same thing about Carl,” added Barry.

Frampton was ringside at the recent Prizefighter tournament to watch Willie Casey – a man he beat as an amateur – upset the odds and win the coveted trophy.

“I’ve sparred Willie loads of times,” stated Carl. “We’re good friends and we boxed each other in a show at the Crusaders club so if that fight came around it wouldn’t worry me too much.”

“We were cheering Willie on from ringside,” McGuigan added, “and it showed how hot the super-bantamweight division is right now in Ireland [Paul Hyland holds the domestic strap] but I believe we have the best of the lot.

“We are looking at a few of the fighters who were involved in Prizefighter and hoping to get out again in the autumn and light up the scene. We get great gym work at the moment and when the time comes we will set up camp and bring in even better sparring partners.”

Sharing the ring with the likes of Ian Napa, Jason Booth and Alexei Acosta will do Frampton’s confidence no harm at all and he enjoyed a good education from upset king Choi Tseveenpurev.

“Choi is such a feared boxer in Britain, nobody will touch him and he has a great record,” said Carl. “He’s the hardest puncher I was ever in with but he never stung me and I gave him as good as I got.”

“Let’s get this right,” interjected McGuigan, “Choi is very clever, a switch-hitter and a lot quicker than you think but Carl dominated him. The whole gym stopped and gathered round the ring to watch them sparring which, as an ex-pro, is great to see.

“It’s difficult not to get excited and with the potential clash of styles [versus Ian Bailey], you are in for a treat on Friday night.

“We are looking to run our own shows, starting possibly in the autumn. It’s vague but we will be putting something together,” stated Barry, who holds a promoter and manager’s license for the north and south of Ireland.

Veteran coach Gerry Storey, whose Holy Family gym provides Frampton's Belfast base, was rubbing his hands together (aided no doubt by the power of Carl's shots) about his youngster's potential.

"If we get the Belfast support behind Carl then he's going all the way," said Gerry.

"This guy is the best we've had since Barry McGuigan, Carl is in the same league, a great puncher and listener, dedicated trainer, with no fear for any opponent."

MCCLOSKEY SMASHES LAURI TO RETAIN EURO BELT – 12TH JUNE

Paul McCloskey retained his European light-welterweight title in emphatic style on Friday night, blasting veteran **Giuseppe Lauri** to defeat in the 11th-round of their King's Hall clash.

The 30-year-old detonated a superb right hook to remove the plucky Italian from his senses, forcing French referee Robin Dolpierre to dispense with the academic count and call a halt to proceedings. Rather than using his classy southpaw skills and slashing hooks, McCloskey elected to stand in the trenches and trade for long periods with the rugged visitor, resulting in breaches of the rules from both parties.

Speaking in the changing rooms after a bruising encounter, the Dungiven man relived the finishing blow: "I've knocked out boys before," he said, "but that was a great punch. I caught him right and his head hit the floor with a crack."

Indeed it did and as the medical team strapped oxygen to the stricken Lauri, there was a fleeting concern for his wellbeing at ringside before the 34-year-old rose sheepishly and licked his wounds in the away corner.

"I got dragged into a fight," continued Paul. "I'm delighted to still be European champion and John [Breen] said that when I boxed I was brilliant. I can fight a bit though and I wouldn't blame the crowd but I did get dragged in. I didn't fight the right fight tonight but I got the job done."

It started out as a mixed bag for the champion, commanding centre ring to fire off his trademark combinations as Lauri plugged away in the southpaw stance. A left hand behind the ear dropped Giuseppe in the second round but the referee saw it as a slip, before McCloskey suffered a small cut to the eyebrow after an ugly maul.

The bout swung back and forth as Paul took over in the fourth but conceded the fifth-round with Lauri landing more meaningful leather.

The two exchanged a heated glare at the end of more than one session with tempers threatening to boil over.

McCloskey showed he was no shrinking violet, standing up to a man with an array of tattoos across his neck and skull. The crowd encouraged their man along as a nasty welt started to appear under his left eye and Lauri pulled him further into the trenches.

McCloskey had a point deducted in the 10th-round for an apparent headbutt and it would have been interesting to see how the judges were scoring matters. As it happened, the score totals were irrelevant as ‘Dudey’ unleashed the all-important finisher and sent the Belfast crowd into raptures.

Talk will again resurface of a fight between the Euro king and multiple belt holders in the red hot light-welterweight division. Could a world title shot be on the horizon?

“That’s the plan, it’s definitely my dream,” McCloskey stated.

“Amir Khan’s always in my sights and so are the other title holders.”

HAUGHIAN'S CELTIC TITLE PAIN – 12TH JUNE

Stephen Haughian suffered title heartache as he dropped a 10-round decision to experienced Scottish southpaw Kevin McIntyre for the Celtic welterweight belt, in the chief support bout at the King's Hall.

Indeed, the venue has proved to be an unhappy hunting ground for the Lurgan man who suffered his only other professional loss there, going down controversially on points to Giammario Grassellini in 2007. While that loss was narrow, this time there was little to argue about as former British champion McIntyre offered Stephen a harsh welcome to the next level.

Haughian's aggressive start was counteracted by McIntyre's smooth boxing, circling the ring using the southpaw jab and straight left hand to full effect. The Irishman had plenty of vocal support in the arena and despite opening a cut over Kevin's left eye he was coming off second best by the middle rounds.

A sustained body attack could have slowed the slick Scotsman but McIntyre was finding it easy to slip off the ropes whenever Haughian trapped him. Stephen seemed to be getting a little closer in the eighth and put up a gallant effort in the final round, hurting McIntyre with right hands and piling on the pressure.

Unfortunately it had come too late and the away man took the spoils with scores of 93-98 (Richie Davies), 94-97 (John Keane) and 93-97 (Howard Foster).

The loss is by no means the end of the road for Haughian but does come as a step back, especially considering his recent spell of inactivity and frustration at getting ring action. McIntyre will now push himself into contention for a shot at the British title he stunningly lost last year in one-round to Kell Brook.

Popular West Belfast battler **Ciaran Healy** ended a five-fight winless streak when snapping the undefeated slate of **Harry Matthews**. Healy, with Bernard Dunne's conditioning coach Alec

Doherty as part of his corner team, was good value for his win as the 35-year-old stalked and pressured his opponent.

Judging by this showing it was difficult to determine how Matthews had amassed such a statistically pleasing record (9-0 going in); despite being in decent shape the visitor was running out of steam as early as the third-round.

Matthews was wide open to the right hand and Healy found no trouble landing it repeatedly as he outworked the prospect. Referee Richie Davies saw the same as the rest of us, handing the well supported Ciaran a 58-56 win.

Following his win over Alex Sipos in Limerick last month, Cuban **Luis Garcia** continued to shed the ring rust with a fourth-round knockout of Welshman **Nathan King**.

Garcia was businesslike from the off, winging in punches on his survival-minded opponent who had recently pushed former Olympic medallist and unbeaten professional Tony Jeffries close. Luis, with Lee Beard joining Nicholas Cruz in his corner, was always in control yet it wasn't until the fourth-round that he hurt the away man and the end quickly arrived.

A sweet left-right combination sent King sprawling across the canvas and the stunned journeyman rose unsteadily, just about convincing Paul McCullagh that he was ready to resume hostilities. Moments later he was caught up in the ropes and tasting more of Garcia's finest when McCullagh interceded, to no complaints from King or his corner.

Garcia's compatriot Alexei Acosta is due to step-up in levels on the upcoming Cork show and Mike Perez is also scheduled to appear. Wherever the trio end up in the fight game, it is good to see them all active and finally pushing towards title opportunities.

In the depths of the undercard former WBA light-welterweight champion **Gavin Rees** stopped ex-Commonwealth title challenger **Sam Amoako** in three rounds while unbeaten Scottish southpaw **Kris Carslaw** outscored **Ben Deghani** over four rounds.

Former Prizefighter participant **Gary McArthur** moved to 15-1 when York's **Graham Fearn** was halted in the second-round of their scheduled four-threes.

TALENTED TRIO IMPRESS KING'S HALL CROWD – 12TH JUNE

Barry McGuigan told us earlier this week that the six-round scrap between his charge **Carl Frampton** and Slough's **Ian Bailey** could be fight of the night. Bailey was never allowed in for long enough to make it that way, as Frampton battered his way to stake a claim as performer of the night.

The Tigers Bay native powered to 6-0 as a professional, moving through the full repertoire of shots, moves and skills, much to the defiance of his resilient challenger. Ripped to the body, Carl danced around the ring, left hand bobbing beside his waist, stylistically similar to former Irish hero Bernard Dunne.

The right hand thudded off Bailey's head with sickening regularity, making Ian afraid to throw for fear of the return fire. Turning southpaw briefly and flicking the head back and forth to avoid the shots, Frampton looked like a man moving swiftly towards title class.

McGuigan was waxing lyrical backstage. "I was delighted and the crowd was great, that just reinforces my opinion of Carl's abilities," Barry lauded.

"Carl has great head movement, his defence is a little leaky at times, but those are all learning things which can be improved. He has the total package and the learning experience was great tonight.

"You need to learn that you can't knock everyone out and that happened to me when I fought Peter Eubank, it taught me to use my head and use my boxing skills to win a fight.

"The money is always in the last shot of a classy combination and those things come with time and are learned during top quality sparring," said McGuigan.

"It was a big reception tonight and I will be promoting in the autumn in Belfast."

Andy Murray is due out in Cork on June 26 and the Cavan lightweight limbered up for that assignment by pounding **Jon Baguley** into a second-round stoppage defeat.

Murray rolled inside to slot his shots through the guard of tough guy Baguley, who soaked up plenty of leather from Kevin O'Hara in the Odyssey last November. While he lasted the six-round distance on that occasion he could not reach that landmark this time, wilting from a fervent body assault until ref Paul McCullagh called time at 2-41 of the second stanza.

Murray was upbeat post-fight: "I was told before to work on the body, I landed one in the first-round and I've got a durable opponent out of the way.

"I stayed tight, he didn't open up too much which allowed me to get close and I'm quite fit and able to throw a lot of punches. Like any young fighter, I like to stay busy and I'm loving every minute of it; the regular fights mean I'm developing into a good pro and working hard in the gym," he commented.

"We'll see what happens with John Murray but Andy is ranked highly by the EBU and we just need a bit more seasoning before that fight," added promoter Brian Peters.

"Whether it's John Murray or not in the opposite corner, Andy will be fighting for the European title come the end of the year," confirmed Peters.

Flyweight hope **Jamie Conlan** had to wait for his chance to impress, going on last for the walk-out bout, but managed to knock the wind out of **Delroy Spencer's** sails without fully denting the journeyman's resolve.

Conlan used his rangy jab and overhand rights to keep Del 'honest' and it wasn't until the final session that some well placed body shots started to get the Walsall man blowing a little harder. Spencer doesn't win too many these days but gives prospects a good workout over the four-round distance. 23-year-old Conlan is now seeking a step-up in class, with Usman Ahmed's name getting a mention.

"I hoped I could hit with him a good bodyshot and he would go," smiled Jamie as he exited the ring.

"I wasn't frustrated about getting on last; I'm as laid back as they come and was gloved up waiting for the bill to catch up. Delroy knows all the tricks and I've learned a bit in there tonight. John Breen was impressed so I'm happy," added Conlan.

“I GOT DRAGGED INTO A FIGHT,” ADMITS MCCLOSKEY – 12TH JUNE

I doubt **Paul McCloskey** has ever landed a sweeter punch in his life. In the 11th-round of his maiden European title defence at Belfast’s King’s Hall, the 30-year-old light-welterweight uncorked a scintillating right hook to deposit **Giuseppe Lauri** firmly to the canvas.

As the referee tolled out the academic count and Lauri’s overpassionate corner team stormed the ring in frustration, McCloskey threw himself to the canvas in relief.

“I wanted to make a hole in the ring floor,” he joked post-fight.

The Italian was every bit as rough and ready as we had expected with the only surprise being that McCloskey seemed willing to accommodate his rough house style and dish back plenty of his own. The fight did not descend into an ugly maul and remained a gruelling, yet enjoyable, spectacle throughout. This was due in most part to McCloskey’s decision to neglect the smooth boxing style that had led him to Euro glory and face the Italian head on in trench warfare.

Paul was always ahead despite Lauri’s best efforts to keep the fight within touching distance and a point deduction for McCloskey in the 10th-round had little bearing on the scorecards – had they been needed. Lauri is no mug, only the best stop him and few as emphatically as the Dungiven man. The 35-year-old tried to get under McCloskey’s skin pre-fight and the champion was in no mood for forgetting. More than once the two stood in centre ring, eyeball to eyeball as the bell signalled the end of a session.

The Derryman has captured the imagination of the Belfast fight fraternity, as was attested to by the healthy and vociferous crowd that turned out on Friday night. Now sporting a 21-0 (11 KOs) record, McCloskey is chasing world honours, with all light-welterweight belt holders in his sight.

“He [Lauri] was rough with the head and cut me from a headbutt. When I cut him it was from a punch,” Paul explained.

“I’ve knocked out boys before but that was a great punch. I caught him right and his head hit the floor with a crack. I got dragged into a fight but I’m delighted to still be European champion,” he added.

LINDSAY OUT UNTIL SEPTEMBER – 15TH JUNE

Belfast fans will have to wait until the new season to see British featherweight champion Martin Lindsay defend his title, according to promoter Frank Maloney.

“He will defend his British title in September, no opponent or venue confirmed yet,” said Maloney.

“Things will all go quiet over the summer but we’ll just wait for the September dates and then put him out again.”

‘Mac Man’ Lindsay recently had his name linked with once-beaten Australian hope Billy Dib and the proposition that Lindsay could square off with Dib in an IBF title eliminator. Dib’s subsequent withdrawal has put paid to that idea and now Martin will tread an alternative path to world glory.

“We’re going to look at going the European route first,” explained Maloney.

“Billy Dib pulled out and taking into account dates and availability we decided to pull our man out,” he continued. “We would have gone through with it if Dib was the opponent but we don’t know too much about the other fighter we were offered and to go in blind would be a little bit dangerous at the moment.”

24-year-old Dib is 27-1 (losing only in a WBO world title fight against champion Steven Luevano) and would have represented a solid, yet winnable, step-up in class for the talented Belfastman.

It had been rumoured that Lindsay could appear on the July 2 Jamie McDonnell-Rodrigo Bracco undercard in Doncaster. That card features Luke Wilton, as the flyweight edges himself closer to a title tilt of his own.

“There’s no opponent confirmed for Luke at the moment but the idea is to steer him towards a British title crack,” said Maloney.

UNDEFEATED: CORK BILL PREVIEW AND PREDICTIONS – 24TH JUNE

Brian Peters Promotions move to Cork on Saturday June 26 for the next Yanjing Fight Night, with an eclectic mix of talent sharing a six-fight card at the Neptune Sports Arena. The show will contain a French connection with two journeymen travelling over the water to provide opposition for a couple of local prospects featuring in six-rounders.

Winner of the Prizefighter super-bantamweight tournament **Willie Casey** is looking to capitalise on his new found fame when the Limerick man meets **Faycal Messaoudene** over six-threes. The away fighter boasts only four wins to his credit and has lost six of his last seven, including a fifth-round KO to Scott Quigg which is the only stoppage loss from fifteen defeats.

"I know I still have a lot to learn in the pro ranks but I'm willing to fight anyone," said Casey. "The bigger the name and the bigger the reputation the bigger the challenge for me and I'm in this game to see how far I can go."

Casey would do well to halt his rugged opponent and a points win is the likely outcome.

Unbeaten Cork light-middleweight **Gary O'Sullivan** has found ring time hard to come by recently and will be making his first outing of 2010, against **Sylvain Touzet**. Gary holds the Irish title at middleweight but explained earlier this year that he prefers to campaign at the more natural 11 stone limit.

Touted as a puncher in his early career, 'Spike' travelled the 10-round distance against Ciaran Healy to claim the national belt last December and could find himself frustrated by the grizzled 37-year-old Touzet who has mixed in good company throughout an eight-year career. O'Sullivan should win on points regardless.

Lightweight **Andy Murray** has been kept busy recently and the Cavan man will be looking to follow on from an impressive win over Jon Baguley in Belfast when he faces **Laszlo Balogh** of Hungary.

Balogh's record is statistically more pleasing than the aforementioned away men, as he sports a 7-2-1 slate and the 21-year-old should bring some youthful enthusiasm to the Neptune Arena.

More telling is the fact he has been stopped in both of his losses, including last time out in five rounds by John O'Donnell. Murray is unconcerned, continuing to focus on a European title crack at namesake John.

"I feel I'm ready for a European title shot now but I realise I might have to be patient so it's great to be as busy as I am right now," said Andy.

"For any pro I think that fighting regularly is the key to improving and progressing up the ranks. It keeps you in routine and it keeps you focused because you know once you have one fight out of the way there is another coming up just around the corner so it keeps you sharp," he added.

Murray is maturing into a class act and can halt Balogh by the middle stages of this scheduled eight-rounder.

No Cork bill would be complete without an appearance from at least one of the three Cubans and this bill will feature every member of the trio, all in action against solid levels of opposition over eight rounds.

Super-bantamweight **Alexei Acosta** gets a tasty assignment against **Jose Saez**, heavyweight **Mike Perez** tackles reasonable American **Jason Barnett** and **Luis Garcia** meets fellow super-middleweight **Demetrius Davis**.

Acosta has removed all ten of his professional opponents thus far and will be looking for an eleventh win, over Argentine Saez who contested eight rounds with Steve Molitor in his last-but-one outing. He can hold his own in good company but usually gets stopped. Alexei can join the group by removing Saez in the early rounds.

Florida-based heavyweight Barnett meanwhile will face Mike Perez while enjoying a rich vein of form, coming off the back of two knockout wins including one against once-touted John Poore. This will be the first time he has travelled outside of America for a bout and unbeaten Perez, who made history in Limerick last month with two wins in one night, is likely to be in an unforgiving mood. If Barnett can survive the early onslaught he can conceivably last the distance, but that is a big if.

Finally, Luis Garcia returns off the back of a solid stoppage win over Nathan King in the King's Hall earlier in June. Garcia is looking

to shed the rust that has weighed him down after a year-long hiatus from the ring. American Demetrius Davis is now aged 40 and coming to the end of a career that has seen him mix with the likes of Bryant Brannon, Eric Lucas and Omar Sheika. He pulled off a shock in Germany just weeks ago when 12-0 Arthur Hein retired with an injury to hand Davis his first win in seven bouts.

Despite this upturn in fortunes he is not expected to test Garcia for too long before the Cuban lands the big shots and removes his man well before the end of the contest.

DUDDY DEFEATED BY MEXICAN CHAVEZ – 26TH JUNE

John Duddy's world title hopes were dashed on Saturday June 26 as the Derryman dropped a unanimous points decision to undefeated Mexican Julio Cesar Chavez Jnr. The three scorecards differed widely at 120-108, 117-111 and 116-112 with each rewarding Duddy for his levels of aggression accordingly. This was the second defeat of the 31-year-old's career -the other being a surprise points reverse to Billy Lyell- and Duddy was unable to get his punches off sufficiently to halt the momentum of the sprightly Chavez Jnr.

The son of Mexico's legendary multi-weight world champion of the same name was rocked by John in the sixth-round but it was a sporadic success for the Irish warrior who was clinging on towards the end of the bout. Duddy falls to 29-2 (18 KOs) and will perhaps consider relocating back home and seeking money spinning clashes with domestic rivals Andy Lee or Matthew Macklin.

UNDEFEATED: CLEAN SWEEP IN CORK – 27TH JUNE

Fans at Brian Peters' 'Undeclared' bill at the Neptune Stadium, Cork on Saturday June 26 were treated to a clean sweep of wins for the home fighters.

Fresh from his career-best performance in the Prizefighter tournament, super-bantamweight **Willie Casey** extended his winning run to 9-0 (6 KOs) with a fifth-round knockout of France's **Faycal Messaoudene**.

Quality lightweight **Andy Murray** shuffled to 21-0 (12 KOs) when the Cavan man dismissed Hungarian **Laszlo Robert Balogh** in the third-round.

Super-bantamweight puncher **Alexei Acosta** was forced to readjust at short notice when Jose Saez withdrew from their scheduled clash, leaving hapless Romanian **Daniel Enache** to enter the fray. The win was academic as Acosta moved his record to 11-0 (11 KOs) with a first-round stoppage over the 0-9 journeyman.

Super-middleweight **Luis Garcia** 8-0 (6 KOs) stopped American veteran **Demetrius Davis**, 20-22-5 (8 KOs) in the third-round.

Popular Cork middleweight **Gary O'Sullivan** improved to 11-0 (7 KOs) with a fourth-round stoppage of another Frenchman, **Sylvain Touzet**.

Heavyweight **Mike Perez** extended his slate to 11-0 (9 KOs) when **Jason Barnett** failed to make it out of the first-round.

Shamrock Shorts: Brian Magee's first European title defence will not be against British champion Paul Smith.....Jamie Kavanagh returns to the Nokia Club at the end of the month in a bid to continue his unbeaten streak.....Matthew Macklin will forgo an IBF title tilt to take part in a Darren Barker grudge match.

NEW FACES: BRIAN CUSACK – 1ST JULY

Belfast light-heavyweight Brian Cusack's impressive away win on May 29 was in danger of slipping through the net. But Irish-boxing.com recently caught up with the former Immaculata pupil to discuss his surprise knockout of touted debutant Emmanuell Oshinronde in Bedford.

"They clearly brought me over to get beaten," Brian laughed. "The Boxing News [magazine] said it was an upset because nobody expected me to go over and win the fight."

Shipped over as an opponent and expected to provide nothing more than a reasonable test for Oshinronde, Brian failed to read the script and starched his opponent in the third-round.

"The fight went really well for me and I was probably behind in the first two rounds but I came back and stopped him. He was meant to be up and coming, it was in his home town and they were talking about him getting ready to do good things.

"Apparently he'd just come back from sparring in America," Brian added.

Fans who attended Belfast Promotions' last fight night installment in the Holiday Inn would do well to remember the show opening performance from a debuting Cusack. The man co-trained by Paul McCullagh and Tony Dunlop outpointed slippery veteran James Tucker on that night.

"James Tucker was hard enough to hit," Cusack continued, "but it was a handy fight for my debut and I didn't get troubled in any way by him. Tucker fought on the same bill as me in Bedford and actually won his fight [first win in five recent attempts], beating a guy called Danny Goode who was 12-3 which was a good win for him and makes my win over James look even better."

Cusack had been absent from the ring for a lengthy period before deciding to ditch the vest and headguard and return - this time in the paid ranks.

“I hadn’t boxed in about five years when I fought in the Holiday Inn and was back and forward a bit during that time. I won the Ulster Juniors and County Antrim tournaments as an amateur, boxing out of the Immaculata club.

“I was doing a bit of training with Tony and Paul and amateur boxing just didn’t appeal to me anymore. If you weren’t going to get into the national squad then there wasn’t really much point in doing it. The pro style suits me better.”

Cusack is certainly a promising addition to the domestic circle and if he keeps upsetting the form book, as he did in Bedford, it won’t be too long before the stylist is knocking on the door of Irish title honours.

“I would be aiming for Irish titles within the next year or so, after getting another few fights under my belt,” said Brian.

“I want to keep busy and hopefully I’ll get a few fights in September or October time. I’m training in Belfast every day with Paul McCullagh and already working towards my next bout.”

NEW FACES: DARREN CRUISE – 18TH JULY

Featuring as one of two debutants on DolPhil's August 7 show in Dublin, Roscommon super-middleweight Darren Cruise is aiming to make a splash in the professional game and fast track himself to an Irish title shot.

"I wouldn't be in this game if I didn't think I could go the top. First of all I have to get an Irish title shot before I get any further," explained the confident 20-year-old who mixed with the likes of Kenny Egan in the amateurs.

"I've been boxing since I was seven, that's 13 years training and I'm ready for the next step in my career. I'm always watching professional boxing on the telly and for the last three or four years I've been seriously thinking about making the switch."

Coach Phil Sutcliffe has offered Darren the chance to realise his dreams and he now travels up to Dublin from Roscommon on a regular basis to train alongside the growing pack of stars in Sutcliffe's Crumlin gym. Cruise also ticks over in his amateur club in Roscommon.

"I had a good amateur career," he continued. "Winning seven Connacht titles, which in England would be the equivalent of winning a county title, and four all-Ireland titles, boxing for the national team on 14 or 15 occasions – overall I am happy with my time as an amateur."

"I don't just have one way of fighting; I can change my style to suit the opponent. I can box or fight and do whatever it takes to win, I set-up as orthodox."

Darren feels his approach is more suited to the pro game and adds that in the past people have compared his style to Roy Jones.

"I have a weekend job working as a doorman in a nightclub but I will be boxing on a full-time basis and during the week it's all about the training," he enthused.

“I’m hoping that a big following will come up to Dublin for the fight and lots of people have told me that they’re going to my debut. I had a big fan base as an amateur so hopefully they will keep following me as a professional.”

In his first paid contest Cruise is scheduled to face slippery Englishman James Tucker, the Doncaster veteran who extended Belfast prospect Brian Cusack on his debut in May. Cruise and Cusack could conceivably clash at some point in the future, but for now Darren is taking aim at the super-middleweight talent in Ireland.

“I don’t think there is anybody in the country that can beat me at my weight,” he said, “so hopefully in four or five fights I can get a crack at the Irish title and then move on from there.”

FRAMPTON HEADLINES THE DAWN OF MCGUIGAN'S NEW ERA – 25TH JULY

Just walking around the Ulster Hall evokes happy memories for Barry McGuigan. He graced the compact arena on 11 occasions during an eight-year professional career and now the former WBA featherweight champion returns to his old stomping ground as a promoter. McGuigan's super-bantamweight protégé Carl Frampton will top the bill in a six-fight deal with Setanta Ireland, scheduled to run over a one-year period. Recent Prizefighter champion Willie Casey was also on the top table as manager/trainer Phil Sutcliffe added his weight to the McGuigan project.

Frampton will top the bill on September 18 while Casey and a supporting cast of Irish talent, yet to be announced, make up the undercard. Names like Jamie Conlan, the Hyland brothers and Ryan Greene were all being mentioned when Barry headed a press conference to announce his latest venture and relive memories of the famous Belfast boxing setting.

"In my opinion the Ulster Hall is the most atmospheric venue in the business," McGuigan enthused. "The Belfast fans are discerning and love their boxing, they know who can fight and who can't and I know they're going to love Carl Frampton and Willie Casey on September 18. The York Hall in Bethnal Green is a great venue but in the Ulster Hall the balcony seats come out further and hang into the ring – every single one is a ringside seat.

"We want to progress swiftly but with the crowd growing with us. The Belfast crowds are brilliant and they latch on to a good fighter, they won't be fed nonsense. There is a rich tradition of fighters endearing themselves to the people – we want to build stars."

The Ulster Hall has not been used for pro boxing since April 2009 when Martin Lindsay and Paul Appleby engaged in British title warfare in front of a hostile crowd. Belfast City Council are now

letting the fight game return and Frampton's coach Gerry Storey thinks it could not have happened soon enough.

"I'm delighted that boxing is coming back to the Ulster Hall and it feels like turning back the clock with Barry being involved once again," said Gerry.

"It's great to be back in a proper Belfast venue and let's get all the fighters from around Ireland on to the shows. The whole country can get behind these lads and give them the same level of support that we gave Barry all those years ago."

McGuigan immediately quashed talk that having Frampton topping a bill in only his sixth outing was a touch premature, citing the fact that he himself topped a show in Belfast in his fourth contest. Rugged Belgian Jean-Marc Renard dropped Barry in the seventh-round of a scheduled eight on that night in 1981, with the 'Clones Cyclone' defeating his man by a single point.

"We want to move on pretty quickly and I can let Carl off the leash fairly soon," reasoned McGuigan. "The Celtic and Irish titles are on our scope and once he starts fighting over 10 rounds then the British title will enter our radar.

"He's improving all the time, getting more versatile and you get nowhere in this game if you're one-dimensional. Carl can adapt in the middle of a fight if need be and when it happens in the future you will see that he has the unique package."

A man of few words, the amiable 23-year-old Frampton, from the Tigers Bay district of North Belfast, cannot wait to start topping Belfast shows and says that the pressure does not faze him.

"There's always a wee bit of pressure," said Carl, "but that inspires me and Barry really believes in my ability so the plan is to win a world title, not just British or European, but a proper world title. If I didn't believe I could reach that level then I would have stayed amateur and tried to get to the Olympics. Everything is on track and this is a great opportunity for me.

"My performance in the King's Hall was okay [outscored Ian Bailey last time out] but topping the bill in Belfast is a dream come true – I want to showcase my talent to the public."

With two unbeaten same-weight prospects sitting at the table, the idea must surely be to match them up at some point.

"I see a fight between Frampton and Casey as a distinct possibility somewhere down the road," admitted McGuigan. "Phil and I will be working together to keep these boys busy and active. The

time is not right at the moment for a fight, we have to build them up and make them champions.”

Irish fans are already salivating over a potential fight between the two and with both surely destined to win titles of some description the long road starts in the Ulster Hall on September 18.

CASEY AND FRAMPTON ON COLLISION COURSE – 26TH JULY

Carl Frampton and Willie Casey appear to be on an inevitable collision course with both exciting super-bantamweight prospects appearing on the same Belfast card.

Limerick star Casey claimed Prizefighter glory recently and placed himself right into the title mix. The 28-year-old hopes to step closer to a European title tilt when he meets Italian Emiliano Salvini in Dublin's City West on August 7. But while Frampton received the plaudits, as his inaugural headliner was announced, Casey's trainer Phil Sutcliffe warned that the Belfast hot-shot would first have to get past his man before he rises to the very top.

"Before Carl moves on he has to get past Willie Casey first," smiled Sutcliffe.

"Both guys are chasing the same dream and Carl is an excellent fighter, I've been watching him since he was a baby. I've taken Willie for only two years and even though I've never done the pads with Carl I know that Willie can hit every bit as hard and I've seen Carl spar my own boy [Phil Jnr] so I know he can bang.

"What we have here is two very good bangers. Carl's a little bit more technical than Willie but Casey is still learning and developing and didn't have the privilege of the High Performance team but he has the privilege of training in Crumlin gym. So if the two meet each other along the way, I would say "keep your hands up" to Carl."

McGuigan also sees a clash in the pipeline. "I see a fight between Frampton and Casey as a distinct possibility somewhere down the road," said Barry.

"Phil and I will be working together to keep these boys busy and active. The time is not right at the moment for a fight, we have to build them up and make then champions.

"They fought as amateurs and it would be great to see them box each other as professionals. Any boxing aficionado would pay to see a

fight between these two. When both men have won titles the time will be right.”

Barry also reiterated his belief that Carl can match, or even supersede, his own professional achievements which included a WBA featherweight crown.

“I see so much of myself in him and even more still,” he admitted.

“Carl appeals to all sides of the community and he is a beacon for hope and represents the shared future of a modern Northern Ireland. He has punching power, cunning, the ability to box or fight, come off the back foot and be aggressive.”

Shamrock Shorts: Irish super-middleweight champion Anthony Fitzgerald is busy calling out Cork puncher Gary O’Sullivan.....Rising prospect Dean Byrne has bagged himself a homecoming slot on DolPhil’s August 7 show.....Six boxers agree to appear on a charity night to raise money for Fanconi Hope.....Irish cruiserweight Declan Trainor gets his pro career off to a flier down under, stopping Aussie Jamie Bogovic in the first-round.....Usman Ahmed’s late withdrawal shatters Luke Wilton’s hopes of rematch revenge in Doncaster.

KELLY FACES GAVIN IN BIRMINGHAM – 5TH AUGUST

Dundalk boxer Michael Kelly has bagged himself a place on Frank Warren's Magnificent 7 card at the LG Arena, Birmingham on September 18.

The 35-year-old faces unbeaten red-hot prospect Frankie Gavin for the vacant Irish light-welterweight title as both men vie for their first piece of professional silverware. Kelly's sole pro defeat (he also has a draw on the slate) came in his last fight – a points loss in Canada to local man Buzz Grant. 'Funtime' Frankie has taken advantage of his Irish roots to earn him a chance at the belt.

"My parents are from Ireland so I will be very proud if I can lift this title," Gavin revealed through a press release.

"I've won all but one of my fights by stoppage, and I will be looking to finish off Kelly early. I'm sure he is going to come and give it a go and I'd love it if he did because I am at my best when opponents look to be aggressive."

Indeed, 24-year-old Gavin has won six of his seven bouts inside the distance with only Galway man Peter McDonagh taking him the long route. But the former amateur star will have to be wary of Kelly, a former quality amateur himself, who will be put through his paces by experienced trainer John Breen.

"I can't wait for this fight," said an unperturbed Gavin.

"I feel that I'm ready to challenge for a title and this fight against Kelly has really got my juices flowing."

WILLIE 'BIG BANG' CASEY BEATS ITALIAN IN DUBLIN – 7TH AUGUST

It's pre-season and most promotional outfits are winding down for the moment. DolPhil Promotions however ran a successful card with a mammoth ten bouts on Saturday August 7th underlining their growing commitment to domestic boxing. Dublin's City West hotel provided an impressive setting for the show and a healthy crowd –with plenty of support for all the local combatants- enjoyed the evening's entertainment.

Heading the card was Irish boxing's man of the moment **Willie Casey**, the 28-year-old super-bantamweight who is riding the crest of a wave following his Prizefighter win. Victim on this occasion was Italian **Emiliano Salvini**, a rugged survivor now sporting a sketchy 13-12-1 record, only stopped twice. The fact that he wasn't halted here was a credit to his dogged resilience and Casey opting to tactically box for spells of the fight as he prepared himself for the 12-round assignments that are getting closer with each contest.

Willie shot out of the blocks as usual, peppering Salvini with southpaw jabs, slashing hooks and some classy uppercuts. His willingness to engage occasionally left the chin exposed and Salvini slotted home a couple of speedy ripostes to give the Limerick man something to think about. The pattern of the fight was set from the early stages. Casey bulldozed forward, pushing the Italian on to the back foot, Salvini's counters becoming less and less as the fight wore on and he began trading on heart and spirit alone.

The body was an obvious target in the fourth round and a tiring Salvini was walking on to the bombs. An impressive variety and more mature performance from Casey is testament to the skills of Phil Sutcliffe's Crumlin boxing team and when a right uppercut in the fifth had Salvini all at sea, some observers called for Emile Tiedt to intervene. He let it continue and an exhausted Emiliano held on until loose tape on Casey's gloves offered him a brief final round respite.

The referee totalled a shutout 80-72 scorecard, which in the scheme of things was academic, but I was glad to see Salvini claim a moral victory in hearing the final bell. It was the least his efforts deserved.

“I did enough to win each round, I saw the finish but didn’t go after it,” Casey gasped in the dressing room. “I had to be careful because he was coming back with shots after I caught him. My coaches Phil, Bra, Joe and Jimmy told me what was working well so I just needed to keep boxing smart.

“In boxing you’re always going to get hit and it’s all about how you react to the punches and recover. I showed good fitness in there and when he got to me I recovered.”

Willie, whose next bout will be in Belfast next month, is eyeing the winner of the Kiko Martinez-Arsen Martirosyan bout in Dublin next month, but Dubliner Paul Hyland, who also has his sights set on the winner, may have something to say about that.



FITZGERALD AND BYRNE CLAIM VICTORIES— 7TH AUGUST

Irish super-middleweight champion **Anthony Fitzgerald** treated himself to a six-round beating of Belfast's **Phil Townley** as part of the deep DolPhil undercard. It was a testament to Townley's durability that he lasted the distance and despite possessing limited ability Phil took his lumps and kept on coming.

The man called 'Irish Pride' began hammering Townley's torso from the get-go, showing his continuing improvement and increased attacking arsenal. It became a one-sided affair as early as the second-round with Fitz digging in his right hook to the body with serious intent. A cut on the hairline and a grimace on the face showed the torture Townley was enduring and ref Paul McCullagh could have justified calling it off at any point from the fifth-round.

It was a good workout for Fitzgerald and Townley deserves credit for lasting the distance against all the odds. Domestic rival Ciaran Healy, who Fitzgerald narrowly outpointed for his title in February, was scathing of this fight taking place and insisted he should have been in the opposite corner for a rematch opportunity. That fight could yet happen down the line but Anthony already has his next appearance booked – a rubber match with Robbie Long on September 11 which promises to be a cracker.

Returning to his homeland after competing abroad thus far in his career, former quality amateur **Dean Byrne** teamed up with his Crumlin boxing team to deliver a knockout performance. Latvian **Konstantins Sakara** was never likely to offer anything more than stubborn resistance and it was no great surprise when the compact, talented Byrne smashed Sakara's body to pieces in the fourth-round.

Sakara was as rugged as Byrne was classy, trying to get into the fight but finding his efforts met by a constant stream of jabs and combinations. The away man's nose bled from the second round as the methodical Byrne broke him down gradually. The Latvian was wilting by the third with Dean smothering his work a little; it became untidy, but the end was nigh.

In what turned out to be the final round of a scheduled six, Byrne caught Sakara with a hook to the body and he crumpled in the corner. It looked like the visitor wanted to go home there and then but referee Emile Tiedt coaxed him into continuing. It was futile and seconds later a carbon copy body punch had him over again and Tiedt signalled the end. Quite how far Byrne can go remains to be seen, but pre-fight press releases linked him with Andy Murray and if he keeps improving that could make for a tasty domestic showdown.

Charismatic Dublin welterweight **Gavin Prunty** leaves quite an impression on the fight crowd, with his flashy demeanour, rope-jumping escapades and impressively ripped torso. The now 3-1 novice can fight a bit too but had to contend with a man equally adept at showboating in the ring – East Ham’s ubiquitous survivor **Johnny Greaves**.

Greaves kidded Prunty all the way through but the home fighter showed good patience and plenty of authority in his punches as he tried to pin down the fleeing southpaw. Johnny suffered a cut to the scalp while Prunty’s nose bled in the last round. Gavin showed good basics and an improved repertoire as he took a fairly comfortable 40-36 verdict on Paul McCullagh’s card.

Finbarr ‘The Rock’ Eade delighted his vociferous following with a first-round knockout of hapless journeyman **Nikolajs Jasenko**. Eade only had one professional contest to his name before this outing and is fast approaching his twilight years. He never let Jasenko off the hook from the opening bell, peppering him with hooks and rapid fire assaults until Emile Tiedt halted matters at 2-10 of the opener. Veteran Finbarr will have to get more active if he is to make an impact at title level.

Galway middleweight **Alan Donnellan** also enjoyed his second outing as a pro, outpointing **Lester Walsh** over four rounds. Alan took a 40-38 verdict on Tiedt’s scorecard but a draw would not have been unfair to game Walsh who found a home for his right hand on more than one occasion. The same thing happened when Donnellan debuted in Limerick against Walsh’s stablemate Ryan Clark in May, meaning Alan will have to tighten up defensively.

Donnellan did, however, show moments of class throughout the bout and slotted a tasty uppercut in between the guard on occasions. He was blowing hard by the second round though (never a good sign) and his hands dropped low enough to invite Walsh in to land his shots. Trainer Carl Greaves manned Lester’s corner but was unable to inspire his man to victory in a good show-opening scrap.

WOE FOR WALDRON BUT IRELAND'S STAR LADY WINS - 7TH AUGUST

It all went wrong on the night for the well supported 'Ballyhaunis Express', **John Waldron**, as the reigning Irish light-heavyweight king crashed to an unexpected sixth-round defeat to **Andrejs Barabanovs**. The 31-year-old Latvian entered with a reasonable 4-1 (3 KOs) record yet was expected to provide nothing more than a stiff workout for John. The visitor's southpaw stance wreaked havoc as Waldron failed to adjust and found himself struggling badly by the midway point of this scheduled six-rounder. He shipped a couple of sharp counters in the second session and was wobbled, emerging with a cut left ear.

Despite showing slight improvements and a better jab at times Waldron just wasn't at the races. A well placed bodyshot went in and John crumpled to the canvas in the last round and rose disconsolately with a nosebleed and damaged pride. The John Waldron that bettered Jamie Power for the national belt earlier this year was sadly missing and Barabanovs slotted a replica body punch into Waldron's gut and he fell again – Emile Tiedt called time at 1-59 with Waldron presumably well behind on points. He falls to 5-3 as a professional and a fight with Michael Sweeney is now out of the window.

When women's boxing in Ireland is mentioned, one name usually springs immediately to mind. Tonight though was not about Katie Taylor (who was actually off in Hungary winning an EU gold medal) but another Irish female boxer, turning professional. Super-bantamweight **Christina McMahon**, a personal fitness trainer from Carrickmacross was the girl in question and she certainly showed signs that this was no gimmick.

I had slight reservations beforehand about what to expect, having endured some dire female offerings on television in the past. Far from the horror show I had anticipated, McMahon was a tidy boxer, with neat skills and the ability to step aside and pick the shots better than some of her male counterparts. Unfortunately opponent on the night, **Ineta Lieknina**, was decidedly average and from the early stages –her

face reddening and bruised- looked like a girl who no longer wanted to be there. Covering up on the ropes the Bulgarian was almost inviting referee Emile Tiedt to step in and save her, but it wasn't until the third round of this scheduled four-twos that Tiedt pulled Lieknina out of the fight. Ms. McMahon said afterwards that she wanted to improve her fitness, stay busy and was looking forward to fighting on a regular basis. I certainly wouldn't object to that.

When asked before the fight to describe his style, debutant **Darren Cruise** said that as an amateur people had likened him to Roy Jones. No pressure there then. As he feinted and shimmied around the ring I sort of understood what he meant and I'm sure opponent on the night **James Tucker** has come across more than a few pretenders in his career on the road.

Cruise was flashy, moved well and picked the occasional punch with real quality. Tucker used the second round to implement a body assault of his own but was often missing his shots, while displaying more ambition than we are used to seeing from him. Cruise could probably slim down from super-middleweight to middleweight and he was tiring a little by the last session. In May, Belfast's Brian Cusack fought Tucker on his debut and a Cruise vs. Cusack bout could be a tasty domestic scrap somewhere in the near future provided both remain on the winning track. Belfast referee Paul McCullagh gave Cruise the fight by a 39-37 margin.

Tucked away as the closing bout of the evening, one half of the **McDonagh** twins, **JJ**, saw his unbeaten record ripped in tatters as Belfastman **Tommy Tolan** brutally knocked him out in the third-round. Southpaw JJ had used his slick moves to dictate the very early going but Tolan was right back in it in the second session and started to take over when a 1-2 combination laid McDonagh heavily on his back at 1-28 of the round. Referee McCullagh immediately dispensed with the count and the medical team rushed into the ring.

It was the type of chilling finish you rarely see and as McDonagh attempted to stretch his neck up – eyes rolling in the head - it made for worrying moments. Luckily he made it vertical and groggily slouched to a corner stool with the help of trainer Tom Ward. It was a harsh blow for his career prospects but that was the least of anybody's worries at the time. Unheralded Tolan has been AWOL for a few years and returned in Limerick earlier this year losing to Michael Sweeney on points at cruiserweight. He looked in much better shape at super-middleweight and could yet force his way into the title mix.

WILLIE CASEY AIMS BIG BANG AT BIG BANGER KIKO MARTINEZ – 9TH AUGUST

Irish super-bantamweight Willie Casey is taking aim at hard-hitting Spaniard Kiko Martinez and believes a shot at the European title is within sight. All the speculation is of course dependant on Kiko defeating Arsen Martirosyan for the EBU belt on Brian Peters' September 11 bill in Dublin's National Stadium. Speaking after an eight-round domination of tough Italian Emiliano Salvini in the capital's City West venue, Casey outlined his plans for a shot at Martinez.

"If Kiko or the French fellow [Martirosyan, born in Armenia] wins in September then I'm going after them – I want that European title," stated Willie. "They can have no excuses; I'm highly ranked in Europe now so they can't avoid me."

Casey also spoke about a potential showdown with domestic rival Paul Hyland and explained why he believes he is now at the top of the super-bantamweight pile in both Ireland and the UK.

"I took on higher ranked opponents in the Prizefighter tournament and feel that I'm now at the top of the pecking order of all super-bantamweights. I have no disrespect towards Paulie Hyland but I think he should step aside and let me and Kiko fight for the title and then if I beat Kiko, me and Paulie can have an all-Irish battle.

"If I got a shot and lost then Paulie can have his turn, he's a good boxer and deserves a chance so if I go first and lose, let him fight next."

The fights are now running thick and fast for Willie who appears on the September 18 Belfast show, headlined by Carl Frampton (who was seated ringside alongside Gerry Storey at the City West show). The Limerick native always takes a hefty travelling contingent with him wherever he fights and his likeable personality guarantees a warm

reception from any home crowd. Casey believes this will be no different in Belfast.

“I got great support from Northern [Irish] fans over at the Prizefighter tournament and I’m just looking forward to every fight now, no matter where it takes place,” the 28-year-old added.

In Casey’s City West headliner, Italian Salvini stood up to some heavy pressure, particularly in the later rounds, to last the distance with the marauding Irish southpaw. Willie joined the spectators in their admiration for Salvini’s resistance:

“He was a very experienced guy, extremely tough and even though I thought I could have rushed in and finished him but I relaxed myself and boxed instead. I caught him with a lot of big bangs and he still survived. I didn’t need to blow myself out; give him credit he caught me with a few good cracks and we really went at each other at the end.

“I treat every fighter like they are world-class regardless of their record. I have a great understanding with DolPhil Promotions and everything is working out. There are no excuses now, I’m moving up the rankings and people will have to fight me,” concluded 'Big Bang'.

FRAMPTON FACES VORONIN – 10TH AUGUST

Carl Frampton will face former three-time European title challenger Yuriy Voronin on September 18 in Belfast's Ulster Hall.

Frampton crossed swords with former amateur rival David Oliver Joyce in Midland ABC on Tuesday, as the two enjoyed a sparring session reminiscent of the Irish senior final they contested in 2009. Carl also revealed that he has no qualms about facing such an experienced campaigner in only his seventh professional bout.

"He's a good experienced customer with plenty of ringcraft and no there's no doubt this is a big step-up for me," stated Frampton.

"Some people may look at it being only my seventh fight but I feel ready and even admit there is a wee bit of pressure on me to perform and the nerves will kick in as the fight night approaches.

"I got fantastic support in the King's Hall on the Paul McCloskey undercard and I'm looking to prove that I'm worthy of topping a bill in an historic venue like the Ulster Hall. The balcony hanging over the ring and the enclosed feeling means the atmosphere will be great and a bit intimidating for Voronin too," Carl added.

Voronin comes to Belfast with bags of international experience and 18 knockouts to his credit from 27 wins. The tough Ukrainian rocked Bernard Dunne before losing a close decision in 2005 and pushed future WBO champion Nicky Cook to the wire in 2006. During a successful 12-year career Yuri has ventured out of the Ukraine 20 times to ten different countries so is unlikely to be overly phased about fighting in Frampton's home city.

"Voronin is a dangerous fighter but I believe this is a risk worth taking," said promoter Barry McGuigan. "Remember that he pushed Joe Murray extremely hard in Dagenham recently so still has plenty to offer and the last thing a fighter loses is his punch.

"We want opponents to push Frampton hard as well, because I believe that we will see the best of him when put under pressure. I've

seen Carl's massive potential many times in the gym while preparing for previous fights. He handles top fighters in sparring all the time."

DEAN BYRNE REFLECTS ON HIS LATEST WIN – 11TH AUGUST

Dean Byrne returned home to Dublin on August 7 and made it 13 wins in a row, overpowering Konstantins Sakara in four rounds at the City West Hotel. Now under the stewardship of Freddie Roach, a delighted Byrne had former amateur trainer Phil Sutcliffe in his corner and revelled in his first professional fight in Ireland.

“I was happy with my performance and I’ll get on the phone to my manager Steven Feder and see if I can get another fight over here,” Dean revealed post-fight.

The 25-year-old began his career in Australia in 2006, winning his first six bouts before contesting his next six in America, while based at the Wild Card gym in Los Angeles.

“Freddie just told me to do my job and he’ll see me when I get back,” continued 'Irish Lightning'.

“I’m not going back to the States until October because I’m going over to England to do a bit of work in the TKO gym with Johnny Eames. I’ll be knocking on doors now for more fights and I’ve had a year off but it will be different from now on.”

Opponent on the night, 27-year-old Sakara from Latvia, was coming in off the back of a good away win in France and had been the distance with the likes of Mihaita Mutu, Oisin Fagan and Patrick Bogere. He was game and fought bravely until Byrne discovered his unguarded ribcage.

“He was really awkward and kept dropping his hands,” explained Byrne, “swinging wildly and I just saw in the fourth-round that his body was open. I watched Andy Lee recently stop his opponent [James Cook] with a body shot so I just wanted to finish my opponent the same way. As soon as he got up after the knockdown I saw the opening again and threw the same shot – he was gone then.”

Dean’s first paid appearance in Ireland has made the Crumlin man hungry for more: “If Brian Peters was willing to put me on his

shows then I would definitely be interested in fighting here and with the support I bring with me I couldn't see why he wouldn't want me on them."

Byrne also rates Phil Sutcliffe as the man who can help him achieve his world title ambitions.

"Phil has been my coach since I was about 10 years old and he's been telling me since I was a kid that I would be a world champion one day. He has all the shots and is just as good a trainer as Freddie Roach. He's a great man to have in the corner and I have no problem working with him from now on.

"Overall I'm happy with the performance and happy with the corner team," Byrne said.



BOXING BELLE - 15TH AUGUST

Christina McMahon turned professional on DolPhil Promotions' August 7 show and the likeable personal trainer from Carrickmacross impressed the crowd in her debut victory over Ineta Lieknina. Speaking post-fight, the fledgling super-bantamweight was pleased, yet critical, of her overall performance.

"I'm happy with my first professional fight but it's also nice to see what's ahead of me," she admitted.

"I would like to get fitter and must generally improve because I cannot afford to stay at the standard you saw tonight. It was the first stepping stone to where I want to be and it gives me more hunger to go back and train harder because I want to become quicker and stronger."

Now she has tasted professional boxing the lady who travelled over to Belgrade to win a world kickboxing championship in 2007 wants to stay active and brush up on her skills.

"I want to fight again as soon as possible," Christina confirmed, "keep them rolling! In fact, every few months would be great. I have changed my style recently and that was the first time I got to try it out [versus Lieknina] and there's no doubt about it, I like the Phil Sutcliffe way of fighting.

"Turning southpaw is something I've always done, I don't know whether it's a good or bad habit but it worked tonight."

It worked well as McMahon was able to dominate centre ring and push her opponent back with spiteful combinations, although admittedly Lieknina offered little in the way of return fire.

"I wasn't necessarily looking for the knockout, I went for good boxing, scoring with my punches and throwing the shots as I saw them, picking the punches without wasting much. The atmosphere at home would be quite the same as tonight but when I go kickboxing I fight for Ireland and often travel away from home. I have a lot of family and I sold plenty of tickets for tonight," she added.

“I’d like to climb the ladder in the pro game and get as many fights under my belt and prove to my new team at Crumlin that I can box and I have faith in their coaching and they trust in me.”

The leisure centre manager did not envisage herself becoming a champion at kickboxing and will approach her boxing career with the same philosophy of hard work and a bit of luck.

“Honestly, when I started kickboxing I didn’t see myself as a world champion in the making; I just took every step at a time and moved up the levels one point at a time.

“I enjoyed the experience and I’m delighted for the crowd and my team who took me on and put in a lot of work,” McMahon concluded.

HAUGHIAN RETURNS AGAINST DEE MITCHELL – 21ST AUGUST

Irish welterweight champion Stephen Haughian is looking to bounce back from title heartache with a victory over Birmingham's Dee Mitchell. The Lurgan welterweight dropped a 10-round points decision to slippery Scotsman Kevin McIntyre at the King's Hall in June for the Celtic crown but believes staying active will be the key to getting back into the title mix.

"It's good to get back out again after the McIntyre fight and hopefully I can stay a bit busier from now on," admitted the 25-year-old, who meets Mitchell over six rounds. "I'm working hard in John Breen's gym to get back on form and I just didn't feel sharp enough in my last bout, probably due to being out of the ring for so long. I've been doing some good work back at home as well as travelling to Belfast to train with John and getting good sparring as usual. With the likes of Paul McCloskey, Willie Thompson and Michael McLaughlin in the gym I am always guaranteed good sparring."

Haughian is desperate to recapture the same level of performance that saw him claim the Irish title in February 2009 when he stopped Cork veteran Billy Walsh in three rounds. Standing in his way this time is 33-year-old Mitchell who holds a 9-8 record and has been in with good names like Prince Arron, Jack Arnfield and Pat McAleese during a four-year career. He was scheduled to meet Henry Coyle in Castlebar two years ago but the fight fell through at the last minute.

"Dee has mixed mostly at light-middleweight and is coming down to welterweight so is likely to be strong," added Haughian. "I believe he is a bit of a switch-hitter too so the quality southpaw sparring I'm getting will be an advantage. Mitchell is a dangerous opponent, he holds a win over Martin Concepcion, and I'll have to be focused. A good win can get the ball rolling again and hopefully I can stay active."

Haughian is expecting his first competitive start at the Bedford Street venue to be a memorable one.

“I’m expecting a good following to come down from Lurgan and the atmosphere will be good. I was supposed to make my professional debut in the Ulster Hall but I ended up boxing Paul McCloskey in an exhibition that night, so it will be a good experience for me fighting there for real.”

MICHAEL KELLY: "I CAN BEAT FRANKIE GAVIN" – 24TH AUGUST

Not too many mainstream boxing fans have even heard of Michael Kelly, let alone give him much a chance of an unlikely victory over Frankie Gavin on September 18.

Speaking as he enters week six of intense preparations, the Dundalk native is quietly confident of upsetting the applegate and handing the much hyped Englishman his first professional loss.

"People keep asking me if I'm going to win but I'm not taking this fight for money or any other reason, I think I will win," stated Kelly.

"If I box as well as I know I can then I'll beat Frankie Gavin. He's under the pressure not me; he's the star home fighter with his crowd, looking to impress and if he tries to put on a show and get into a fight then that will suit me even better. In their eyes [Gavin's team] I am there to be beaten. They see that I have a good amateur pedigree and view me as a stepping stone, with the Irish title as a good belt for him to win on the way to a world title."

Since turning pro in 2004 Kelly has amassed an 8-1-1 (2 KOs) slate, blighted by lengthy spells away from the ring.

"I'm sure Gavin will be viewing me as an inactive boxer who's getting old. Giving me plenty of notice for this fight is a big mistake for them though, because with eight week's preparation I believe I can beat anybody. Inactivity and problems outside of the ring have hurt my career. I'm hoping to get a few things sorted out which has affected my boxing and when that comes to an end, if I get a result against Gavin and get back on track, then I'll move on up. Time is ticking on, I know that, but I still have a few years left in the game."

At 35 years old moving up from lightweight to light-welterweight will also benefit Kelly and the weight making process will no doubt be aided by his training regime in John Breen's Belfast gym, which is always kept on the slightly warm side.

“The weight is great,” added Michael, “making lightweight wasn’t too easy and moving up to light-welterweight suits me fine. I’ve been sparring Michael McLaughlin, Willie Thompson and I’m starting to spar Paul McCloskey this week. I’ll have 150 rounds of sparring done by fight night.

“Frankie Gavin and Paul McCloskey would have similar styles although I believe McCloskey would be harder to hit than Gavin. I won’t get any better sparring than these guys. I’m even going in with flyweight Jamie Conlan – the more different styles the better for me.”

Kelly still laments his sole professional loss, a 10-round points reverse to unheralded Canadian Buzz Grant. Not only did Michael have to struggle down to lightweight before flying abroad, but there were some other, more unusual, aspects of the trip he had to contend with.

“I weighed in at 11 o’clock in the morning and was in the ring at 7 o’clock that night,” he explained.

“I had to travel over to Canada, then make lightweight and then after that they do same-day weigh-ins over there. I was only training for two and a half weeks before that fight, a bit of padwork and then time on the bags. The fellow I was fighting (Buzz Grant) was no good and I maybe took it a bit lightly anyway.

“What’s done is done I suppose and I know in myself that if I fought Grant again then I’d train hard and expect to stop him in four or five rounds. He was super fit but I killed myself making weight and I’d fight him again if I got the chance, no problem.”

Putting Buzz to one side the only thing on Michael’s mind at the moment is 7-0 (6 KOs) superkid Frankie Gavin, the precocious Brummie southpaw standing in the way of Irish title glory on the Magnificent 7 card.

“Things have been mentioned for after the Gavin fight if I give a good performance but I’m not even considering anything else at the moment; the Irish title and Frankie Gavin is all that I’m looking at,” revealed Kelly.

“I always said that I wanted to win an Irish title, no matter what weight I fight at. Who knows, it could be a good stepping stone for me on September 18.”

'STORM' SWEENEY GETS WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO'S HELP – 24TH AUGUST

Ballinrobe light-heavyweight Michael Sweeney has bagged himself a shot at the EU title on October 8. The 27-year-old is preparing with some quality sparring against none other than Wladimir Klitschko.

Basing himself in Austria, Michael expects Emanuel Steward to take up his corner in France when he tackles defending champion Nadjib Mohammadi for the lesser European strap.

"I'm working hard in Austria at Wladimir's camp and Emanuel is going to train me for this one – make no mistake, this is a big fight for me," explained Michael.

"I want to be up there with the top boys and I know I can make it big, especially now that I have the legendary Emanuel Steward training me, with the help of former world title challenger Sean Mannion in my corner. I am willing to take on any top UK fighter after I win this one."

As usual Sweeney is highly confident of his chances, even though the only two blemishes on his 11-fight record (a stoppage loss and a draw) have come when fighting on away territory, in Mexico and America respectively. 25-year-old Mohammadi holds a statistically impressive 22-1 (11 KOs) record which on closer inspection reveals a mixture of faded names and grizzled journeymen.

"He [Mohammadi] thinks I'm a joke but his plans are about to go up in smoke, 'The Storm' is heading to the South of France to win," added Sweeney.

"I'm going to be a different fighter to what you've ever seen before. I'm doing this for my late granddad Dave Sweeney and my cousin Mike 'Tyson' Sweeney who passed away this year as they were the backbone of my career. I was very close to Dave and not a day goes by that I don't think of him."

Having already shared sparring sessions with Arthur Abraham, as well as some decent names in America, the Mayo man had no qualms mixing it with the deceptively mobile Klitschko.

“I’ve had a few rounds of sparring with Wladimir already for speed work and he is very strong and a great mover for a heavyweight. He’s going to be in good condition for the Samuel Peter rematch I can assure you.

“Working with Emanuel Steward is top-class; he knows how to train fighters properly and believes he can take me to the top of the light-heavyweight pile.”

Sweeney has already proven himself to be at the top of the pile domestically and recently saw a proposed matchup with John Waldron go out of the window when Waldron was stopped in a Dublin non-title affair earlier this month.

There are no climactic issues either with exchanging the lush Irish countryside for the snowy backdrop of the Alps. “Austria is not too cold and in fact I find it perfect for my training camp; everything you want is here under one roof,” Michael concluded.

MAGEE EYES THE WORLD, BUT ARAMIAN IS NEXT – 25TH AUGUST

Brian Peters' next big fight night is entitled 'Battle for Europe' with two European title scraps sharing top billing. If Belfast southpaw Brian Magee successfully negotiates a potentially tricky European super-middleweight title defence against Roman Aramian, he could soon be trading in his EBU crown for a crack at a world title, with WBA ruler Dmitri Sartison now firmly in his sights.

"It would be amazing to get a world title fight and it's nice to be mentioned in the same breath as world champions," agreed the WBA's No.1 contender, pictured in training below.

"At the moment all I have on my mind is Aramian but I'm feeling great so fingers crossed everything's on course and as it should be," said Magee. "It would have been nice to have got out sooner but I don't make the dates, I just have to be ready when fight time comes around. Preparation has been moving along well so I should be 100 per cent ready."

There has never been a European title fight staged in the famous National Stadium venue in Dublin's South Circular Road, but that will change on September 11 when Magee and Aramian join super-bantams Kiko Martinez and Arsen Martirosyan in the limelight.

"I love fighting in Dublin; I have plenty of experience from fighting there as an amateur and I've always got great support from their fanbase," continued Brian. "I don't know much about Aramian, he's been in with a couple of top fighters and given them a hard night so he can beat anybody when on form. It's a hard first defence and especially with so much potentially sitting on the line for after the fight.

"I'm hoping to replicate the Denmark performance [knocking out Mads Larsen in seven rounds for the title] and get it right on the night," Magee revealed. "Without a doubt it was a fine win for me, all the hard work I put in came to fruition on that night and I was

bubbling with pride not just for myself but for my whole team as well.”

The main part of that new team is Panamanian trainer Bernardo Checa, a former super-bantamweight contender who provided added excitement to Magee’s recent media workout with his amusing sideline in magic tricks! Bernardo believes that Brian will be ready for world title fights once he gets past his awkward Armenian opponent.

“I know there was a lot of talk about a Paul Smith fight and it never came off but we were ready for it, we’re ready for anybody in the division. Right now we are targeting Dmitri Sartison and it is very much a winnable fight for Brian,” commented Checa.

“I would have preferred Brian to have been more active and at 35 years old there’s not a load of time left. We need to get in there, do the job and make the most of what we’ve got then get out of boxing. According to the plan, he’s fighting Aramian and then the next one will be the big one, the world title fight. It could hopefully be before the end of the year.

“At this level every fight is tough and Aramian is a strong guy who likes to come forward - he obviously wants to be in Brian’s position. We are looking forward to fighting in the National Stadium and have got good sparring from Daniel Cadman who has a similar style to Aramian in that he likes to move forward and throw plenty of shots so it’s great preparation for us.”

Daniel Cadman, a former Prizefighter entrant, has travelled over from Essex to replicate Aramian’s style to aid the champion’s preparations. Daniel admitted that Magee is faster than he thought and whips in some tasty hooks to the body.

Brian is equally as pleased with his hired help: “Daniel Cadman has been a good sparring partner and I’ve had a variety of opponents coming in fresh to test me and I’m not leaving anything for granted, I’m being tested.”

Checa summed up the mood in the training camp: “We were over the moon with the win in Denmark, I’ve been back in boxing after a while away and we’re not doing too badly together at the moment. I’m very happy and Brian’s improving every day – we are really looking forward to this next fight.”



LINDSAY STAYS BUSY WITH KIILU TEST - 31ST AUGUST

Belfast featherweight **Martin Lindsay** is looking to stave off a spell of inactivity with an eight-round assignment against David Kiilu on September 11. The bout will take place on the undercard of Jason Booth's IBF super-bantamweight title challenge against Steve Molitor in Sunderland.

"It is frustrating but there is not much I can do about it," Lindsay explained. "I am marking time in my next fight on the Booth undercard, but that's just the way it is. Training is going well and I am looking forward to it. It is always good to be busy and the more time you spend in the ring the better."

Lindsay is expected to face the winner of the September 4 clash between unbeaten Scouser Stephen Smith and experienced Scotsman John Simpson. Ideally, the 28-year-old would like to be pushing on towards bigger things as he is arguably now at the peak of his talents.

"The Commonwealth belt is not in my plans," continued Martin, "I would like to go for a European title and then we will see what happens. The main thing is to be busy and keep winning the fights I get."

Promoter Frank Maloney must surely be looking at chipping in to Lindsay's impressive fan base and organising some big nights in Belfast. It is conceivable that Martin would be a King's Hall bill topper, but for now 37-year-old African Kiilu, who holds a 33-10-2 slate, is next in the firing line.

Shamrock Shorts: Former Irish lightweight champion Peter 'The Connemara Kid' McDonagh wants to square off with Dean Byrne..... Jim Rock protégé Brendan Fitzpatrick will make his debut on September 11 in Dublin.....European light-welterweight champion Paul McCloskey will make the second defence of his crown against Scotland's Barry Morrison in Letterkenny on October 2.

MAGEE BEATS ARAMIAN: NOW FOR THE WORLD TITLE – 12TH SEPTEMBER

You would have forgiven **Brian Magee** if he had reservations about travelling to Dublin for a title fight.

After all, the last time the 35-year-old Lisburn man made the trip to the capital he fought to a contentious draw against Portsmouth's Tony Oakey for the British crown. That fight - at the old Point Depot (now the O2 Arena) - was up at light-heavyweight but down at his natural super-middleweight division, the classy southpaw is a different animal. Armenian challenger **Roman Aramian** found this out on Saturday, September 11 when Magee successfully defended his European title with an eight-round domination of his stubborn foe.

Brian raced out of the blocks in round one with businesslike southpaw jabs and his trademark right hooks to the body, a combination which worked perfectly for the duration of the fight. Aramian had a reputation as a rugged customer having gone the distance with some credible opposition during his career, but as the rounds flew by it looked increasingly unlikely he would last the course in this contest.

Magee's peppering punches always culminated in a solid final blow and Aramian was getting rocked on the ropes as early as the fourth-round, struggling to cope with the quality coming his way. The lead left was landing so frequently by the eighth session that Italian referee Luigi Muratore was starting to hover and it was amazing that the challenger sported no facial bruising. In the break between the eighth and ninth rounds, the third man signalled to Aramian's corner that he would be halting the onslaught if their man did not start producing significantly better work.

His warning was academic, as no sooner had Muratore walked away Magee's cornerman Bernardo Checa was leaping into the ring with joy as Aramian slouched off his stool holding his right arm. Apparently he had injured it, John Rooney informed the press afterwards, but his head and torso would undoubtedly be sorer in the morning.

Since stopping Stevie McGuire for the British crown last year, Brian enjoyed a superb away win in Denmark in January and is going from strength to strength. His headlining act, televised live on RTE2, was punch-perfect and topped off a typically strong Brian Peters card.

The judges were unused although all three had Magee in an unassailable lead: Roger Tilleman (80-72), Leszek Jankowiak (80-70) and Daniel Van de Wiele (80-70). The National Stadium victory means that the man managed by Pat Magee (no relation) is now in prime contention for a crack at WBA champion Dmitri Sartison.

"I would love the WBA shot to be in Belfast, or Dublin because you saw the reception I got tonight," stated Magee post-fight, unable to hide his delight. "To be honest I haven't watched too much of Sartison but no world champion is poor, they don't give those belts away.

"Roman Aramian was even tougher than I expected tonight and he always felt he had a chance to catch me, which kept me on edge and I had to stay alert and take nothing for granted. I had to pace it because he was throwing a few swingers out there and I didn't want to punch myself out."

Brian also paid testament to the work of his corner team, particularly trainer Bernardo Checa who can clearly produce pieces of magic both inside and outside of the ring.

"Bernardo's skills are going hand in hand with Alec Doherty's conditioning work and after all the training it's paid off. The guy lived up to his reputation as a tough guy and I hit him with bombs, clean shots to the head and it seemed like the only thing I was hurting was my own hands. Bernardo assured me that if I kept the pressure on he would crumble and he called it right.

"Some people said he would be easy but I was expecting a tough night's work from him and I had to dig in, use a bit of steel and steady myself, using my experience and listening to Bernardo's tactics in between rounds."

The strong possibility of having to travel to Germany to fight Sartison does not concern the 35-year-old and he even has a few suggestions to help smooth negotiations.

"I don't worry about travelling to Germany— have gloves and bag will travel, is my motto. I'll have to put a few extra zeroes on to the Euros for that though!

"Overall I'm very pleased with a great team performance," concluded Magee.

DUBLIN UNDERCARD REPORTS – 12TH SEPTEMBER

In the National Stadium's 'Battle for Europe' co-feature, two international fighters shared the ring to contest the EBU super-bantamweight crown.

24-year-old **Kiko Martinez** may not hail from either the UK or Ireland but the hard punching Spaniard is familiar to both sets of fight fans. Having starched Irish hero Bernard Dunne in one round back in 2007, Kiko dropped two points decisions to Rendall Munroe for the same belt (in 2008 and 2009), while fitting a non-title win in between against Lante Addy in Tallaght's Basketball Arena. Martinez continued his love affair with the Emerald Isle by beating **Arsen Martirosyan** over 12 rounds.

There was a warm reception for Martinez who also enjoyed encouragement from his away supporters. The heavy handed Spaniard boxed more than usual and showed an increased repertoire to keep the tough Martirosyan at bay. Cuts were aplenty as both suffered nicks on the scalp with the Frenchman sporting a badly blooded nose from as early as the fourth-round. What held the Armenian native back was his distinct lack of power, because when he caught Martinez clean (which was more often than expected) he failed to move 'La Sensacion' or cause him to be wary of bulldozing in. Martirosyan had late success with the right hook but was rocked a couple of times when Kiko chose not to box clever. He was solid, if unspectacular, and he did little to deter the growing queue of challengers gathering behind him.

Judges Roger Tilleman and Luigi Muratore totalled 118-110 and Leszek Jankowiak 116-112 all in Martinez's favour. Belgian Daniel Van de Wiele took control inside the ring.

One man with half an eye on main attraction Martinez is Tallaght slickster **Paul Hyland**. The EU super-bantamweight king used his full range of skills to confuse and bemuse American import **Robert DaLuz** over eight rounds. Well conditioned DaLuz played the role of pantomime villain, goading Hyland and playing to his sizeable

ringside following. Paulie peppered the visitor with trademark flurries while DaLuz busied himself by complaining to ref Emile Tiedt.

By the fifth-round Robert's rushes were the main cause for concern and Hyland used his jab and movement to negate the threat. The current Irish champion landed a solid jab-right hand-left hook combination to cement his eight-round victory, by a score total of 79-74, in what was a good workout.

Galway southpaw **Coleman Barrett** won his Irish heavyweight title at this venue back in February, outpointing Colin Kenna over ten rounds. Barrett was dropped heavily that night but boxed his way to a decision. He suffered no such trouble in this contest, a four-round formality over Latvia's **Remigijus Ziausys**.

Both men appeared small for the weight and even though podgy Barrett could conceivably make cruiserweight he does move well for a heavyweight and has the ability to give the big boys problems. Coleman hooked well off the southpaw jab in the early stages but suffered his now customary slip in concentration in the third round. Whether it is fatigue or a case of switching off, Barrett must curb this trait as Ziausys gained enough encouragement to land some right hands. 'Coley' staved off the away man's advances to take a 39-37 verdict on David Irving's slate.

A title defence against Belfast's returning star Martin Rogan has been spoken about and would appear a sensible move for both men; failing that, Barrett could feasibly mix it with Irish-based Cuban Mike Perez as an acid test to see just how far both men could go.

Finglas super-middleweight **Brendan Fitzpatrick** entered the ring to a rapturous reception and sent his sizeable following home, happy, with a second-round dismissal of Poland's **Mariusz Radziszewski**.

Fitzpatrick showed good skills and plenty of schooling from John Breen in his Belfast base, tucking in the rib crunchers to make sure Radziszewski's trip abroad was an uncomfortable one. Fitzpatrick had sustained a nosebleed somehow by the second but did not let it affect him as the left hook sunk home to send Mariusz to the canvas. He clambered vertical but shipped another burst of punches that sent him down and out at 2-18 of the session.

There is no doubt that pride was on the line when fellow Dubliners **Anthony Fitzgerald** and **Robbie Long** clashed for the former's super-middleweight belt.

These two warriors had already shared the ring twice before with one win a piece – it made for a natural rubber match. Take Long's year of inactivity, coupled with Fitzgerald's three fights during that time, and the result would have appeared a formality. In the end it was Anthony who prevailed by an extremely narrow 96-94 score in which opinion varied at ringside as to who had done enough for the win.

Anthony was reaching early on as Long flexed his left hook and jab, while eating some tasty rights from the champion. Fitz was uncharacteristically wild in the opening stages with Long building a lead with his slow and steady forward attack, led by a quality range finder. While this scrap did not contain the sheer toe-to-toe aggression of their previous two encounters, it was an absorbingly tactical affair and while never truly exploding, both men left with huge amounts of credit.

Anthony's jab and timing were coming into play in round six and Robbie was still stalking but not effectively landing as the champion's right hand thudded home repeatedly. Long had found a home for his body punches and despite visible tiredness rallied himself to land some big shots as Fitzgerald suddenly fatigued. Both men missed as the action rocked back and forth in the final stages before Fitzgerald discovered the missing accuracy to steal victory at the last and retain his title. These two are perfectly well matched and their styles made for another classic small hall battle.

The Cuban influence again featured strongly on this Dublin show. Two of the three Caribbean pugilists were on show, with super-bantamweight **Alexei Acosta** opposing **Oscar Chacin** and super-middleweight **Luis Garcia** tackling **Christian Cruz**.

Two fights ago Acosta bettered former Bernard Dunne victim Felix Machado and was set to face another ex-Dunne opponent in the form of Cristian Faccio. Unfortunately Faccio was unable to take part in a tasty looking encounter and Alexei found himself entertaining Chacin, a veteran Venezuelan who has mixed in good company, over eight rounds.

Acosta does tend to slap a little and switches off in fights, but generally used speed and flexibility to keep Chacin at bay. The import had gone ten rounds with former world champion Lorenzo Parra in his last contest and was more than just an average journeyman. Oscar sucked up Acosta's left hook to the body and gave back some leather via the right hand; as Alexei posed and feinted, Oscar looking like a man who had seen it all before.

Both men seemed to be enjoying the dance, smiling at each other in centre ring until round six when Acosta unloaded some regular combinations that had Chacin looking ragged. Referee David Irving was unhappy at the way the Venezuelan was taking a few on the ropes and promptly intervened. Chacin was outraged and wasted no time in storming from the ring. Once Acosta is really tested then we shall see how far he can go and the Faccio match is thankfully still on the cards.

One man who can go all the way is his 22-year-old compatriot Garcia. The super-middleweight has been lauded in Ireland and across the pond for his performances in the gym and sparring sessions. So far it had not transferred itself into competitive action but after a couple of ring rust shedding assignments Luis stepped up against rugged American Christian Cruz, a man who had lasted beyond ten rounds with both Jean Pascal and Lucian Bute.

The Sacramento man had no answer for the slashing body shots and thumping combinations that Garcia was repeatedly raining in on him. A bloody nose and battered torso had Cruz taking a glance for the exit from the second round of this scheduled eight. By the third he was down from more intense body work and despite rising bravely was battered to defeat at 1-59 of the round. Emile Tiedt was the third man and Garcia looked the real deal in this one.

Dublin welterweight **Gavin Prunty** is a flamboyant character who loves putting on a show. The top rope jumping and show boating aside Prunty can actually fight a bit, as Polish visitor **Arek Malek** found out in their show closing four-rounder. Lanky Prunty used his whipping hooks and awkward movement to pot shot his way to a decision win.

CLASSY CARL LIGHTS UP THE ULSTER HALL - 18TH SEPTEMBER

Barry McGuigan's debut promotion got off to a flying start at Belfast's Ulster Hall on Saturday September 18. Unbeaten super-bantamweight **Carl Frampton** headlined the show in a non-title eight-rounder and recorded a third-round stoppage victory over former three-time European title challenger **Yuriy Voronin**.

The Odessa native had bags of experience but was facing a hungry challenger intent on pleasing his Tigers Bay following and continuing the march into title contention. Frampton started off using his left jab and right hand to measure the southpaw and it wasn't long before the heavy artillery was landing, despite Voronin trying to work inside. Yuriy was badly hurt as early as the second-round; Frampton's combinations were drilling him around the ring, there was no respite and a short right hand put him down and nearly through the ropes. The away corner were busy reading the riot act but the writing was on the wall, how could Voronin survive? The answer was that he couldn't. He was being thrown across the ring like a rag doll, with punches reigning in through the gloves, from all angles it was becoming a domination. The time was announced as 2-43 of the third-round and Voronin appeared disgruntled at Kenny Pringle's intervention. There was no controversy, Frampton never let him off the hook and the power in his punches shook the rafters of the famous old venue.

In chief support **Jamie Conlan** had a four-threes assignment against Bulgarian **Hyusein Hyuseinov** and the Belfast flyweight was determined to impress his vocal following. The four-time Ulster amateur champion is becoming a rounded pro, volleying in the left hooks and right hands as Hyuseinov surveyed the area.

The Bulgarian offered the occasional spit of defiance but it was fast becoming one way traffic as Conlan peppered the body with tasty hooks and his classy right uppercut. Hyuseinov was unhappy when ref Paul McCullagh jumped in at 1-54 of the third-round but it was

becoming increasingly one-sided and the away man was announced officially as being in no position to continue.

Quality welterweight **Stephen Haughian** brought plenty of support from County Armagh, when the Irish champion squared off with Birmingham's **Dee Mitchell**.

Haughian immediately took centre ring and pushed out a sharp jab, working the body and looking composed. Mitchell was plodding forward, continuously caught under the spell of Haughian's lead left. The West Midlander landed with sporadic right hands but the Lurgan native was doing the better work overall and finding his own right an accurate weapon over Mitchell's low left.

Things heated up in the fifth-round as Mitchell landed a right hand-right uppercut combination to have Stephen holding on the ropes. Haughian regrouped in the sixth and used his snappy jab to seal a 59-55 win on Paul McCullagh's card.

Journeyman **Matt Scriven** doesn't get stopped too often and was expected to provide a stubborn test for Lurgan light-middleweight **Ryan Greene**. One thing to note is that Greene's power is the real deal. Scriven was dropped heavily in round four by a double right hook and used his ring smarts to last the pace, against heavy fire. Greene looked more composed than in his debut and picked the shots well to keep his man on the running track.

Scriven, from Nottingham, threw the occasional wild right hand to try and offset Ryan's rhythm but in the main it was the 26-year-old Greene in full control although he took a couple of left hands throughout the duration. Scriven was in pure survival mode and skipped his way to the finish, conceding a 60-53 verdict on referee Kenny Pringle's scorecard.

Coventry super-featherweight **Troy James** outscored Latvian survivor **Pavel Senkovs** 60-54 in the opening bout. Smooth mover James used his skills to keep the away man on his heels and Senkovs suffered a nosebleed in the third-round. Troy worked the body well and Pavel was sagging but too savvy to be stopped.

In the swing bout (that took place after the main event) Walsall light-heavyweight **Chris Keane** had the task of defeating plucky **Tayar Mehmed** in a four-threes test. Keane consistently tagged Mehmed's podgy belly, especially with the right hand. The Midlands stylist is neat and tidy and puts his punches together well, landing with authority. Mehmed did well to last the distance with Keane recording a shutout 40-36 victory.

MACKLIN RECLAIMS EURO CROWN & GAVIN LANDS FIRST BELT - 19TH SEPTEMBER

Three boxers with Irish connections were in action on Frank Warren's mammoth Magnificent 7 bill in Birmingham on September 18 and both enjoyed victories. **Matthew Macklin** reclaimed the European middleweight title with a win over **Shalva Jomardashvili**, while **Frankie Gavin** won his first title as a professional boxer by beating **Michael Kelly** for the Irish light-welterweight title.

Macklin's original opponent Darren Barker sustained an injury in the lead up to what could have been a domestic superfight. Negative Georgian Jomardashvili stepped in at short notice but barely offered anything to suggest he would upset the applecart. Macklin, trained by Freddie Roach, steadily pounded the body and worked his jab, attempting to prize open his opponent's shell. Following a torrid fifth-round, Shalva sat on his stool and declined to continue. Matthew needs a challenge and admitted as much afterwards, agreeing that these kind of fights would make him go stale.

Dundalk's Michael Kelly had talked a good fight before his 10-rounder with Frankie Gavin but the man trained in Belfast by John Breen failed to deliver as local hero Frankie had it all his own way. Kelly lasted until the end of the fifth-round when Kelly was stopped by referee Emile Tiedt.

MCGUIGAN EXCITED BY FUTURE PLANS – 19TH SEPTEMBER

Fresh from seeing his protégé complete a comprehensive victory over Yuriy Voronin, promoter Barry McGuigan is busy plotting a route to a title fight for Carl Frampton.

“I want to get Carl back in the ring quickly; we’re looking at a title fight soon,” confirmed Barry at the post-fight press conference.

“We’re already looking at various opportunities. It takes a long time to get these things [shows] going so I’m looking at the end of November/beginning of December for the next show. Carl is now a bill-topper so we need to carefully assess the next move.”

The 37-year-old Ukrainian visitor was brought over to provide a stern test for the North Belfast rookie but Frampton was in no mood for compromise and made sure his vociferous following went home buoyed by an emphatic headlining victory.

“We had to be wary of Voronin because he likes to catch punches and throw straight back,” continued McGuigan. “Carl’s speed and timing was brilliant tonight and we’re starting to see the fighter I watch in the gym.”

The 23-year-old Frampton, now 7-0 as a professional, enjoyed his first experience as the star attraction and is well prepared to deal with the inevitable hype that will now come his way.

“I’m level headed and I just have to get used to the hype that will no surround me,” he modestly admitted.

“That was the performance of my life and we know that Voronin is a tough operator so it took me a while to suss him out because he was a bit cagey. Once I got the range at the end I was nearly hitting him at will but I had to be careful because when I pushed him on the ropes he was throwing wild swings at me.

“The fans’ reception was amazing and I’m sure it put the frighteners on to Voronin from the start. The crowd were fantastic and it gives you such a buzz and a big lift. I didn’t want to let myself or the crowd down,” he said.

Before the fight Carl was being linked to Irish and Celtic title opportunities but he will also be keeping a close eye on the upcoming Kiko Martinez-Willie Casey European title contest in Limerick on November 6. A fight with southpaw Casey or Dubliner Paul Hyland could soon become a reality.

“I don’t want to blow my own trumpet but I believe I would beat Casey or [Paul] Hyland,” he stated confidently.

“If a fight came up with either of those boys I would snap it up with both hands. Both lads are good fighters, Casey’s come on a lot under Sutcliffe and he’s improved a lot. Hyland is a nice slick boxer who doesn’t punch too hard.

“I don’t want to forecast the result of Martinez-Casey but I’d be all in favour of Casey winning and I hope he comes out on top, I give him my support,” added Frampton.

Barry McGuigan was pleased with his debut promotion, which went out live on Setanta Ireland from 8pm.

“The atmosphere built itself into a crescendo tonight and we’re going to set the scene alive here, it really excites me,” he concluded.

WINS FOR HAUGHIAN AND CONLAN - 19TH SEPTEMBER

Two Irish prospects recorded solid wins on the Ulster Hall undercard and kept their careers moving forward. Jamie Conlan could find regular work hard to come by at his natural flyweight division but managed to stave off the threat of Bulgarian Hyusein Hyuseinov. Irish welterweight champion Stephen Haughian helped erase the memory of his Celtic title defeat to Kevin McIntyre by outpointing Dee Mitchell over six-threes.

“I see things I can work on, I want to improve and get better,” Conlan commented. “I don’t think I missed him with an uppercut tonight and it was nice switching from head to body.

“I was giving away a bit of weight tonight but I spar light-welterweight Michael Kelly in the gym so I don’t mind handling the bigger guys. I feel I’m sitting down more on my punches and I’ve been working on the uppercut and left hook to the body in training.”

Meanwhile, Haughian’s smooth moves and sharp counter punching had returned and Stephen admitted that a lack of activity and ring rust had hurt his progression before this latest outing.

“I felt a whole lot better tonight compared to the King’s Hall night,” said Stephen.

“John [Breen] and I have been getting back to basics and the snap was lacking last time after being absent for nine months. The punches were free flowing tonight and I’ve got six rounds in against a good, durable opponent.”

Promoter Barry McGuigan envisages title shots for both men in the near future.

“Jamie Conlan is not far off a title fight and Stephen Haughian has reaffirmed how good his potential is,” Barry reckoned. “He beat a tough, durable opponent [Dee Mitchell] and he’s right back in the mix now. I thought that Haughian’s body shots were fantastic tonight and he relit the flame of his career while giving away some natural weight.”

Shamrock Shorts: A new boxing exhibition, telling the story of some of Belfast's most accomplished boxers, was officially opened in Belfast City Hall, by Hollywood star Liam Neeson.....Limerick's Andy Lee improved his record to 23-1 (17 KOs) with a stoppage of American Michael Walker in Chicago on Friday night (Sept 17)..... Anthony Fitzgerald is chasing an EU title clash with hard-hitting Pole Grzegorz Proksa..... Ciaran Healy has revealed that he will fight any opponent for the Irish middleweight, super-middleweight or even light-heavyweight titles and is open to offers.....Irish duo Kevin McBride and Declan Timlin are both entered into the October 9 heavyweight Prizefighter tournament..... Dolphil Promotions announced the double signing of brothers Paddy and JJ McDonagh. "Our stable has grown from strength to strength, and these two fighters will certainly bring another dimension," said DolPhil's Daniel Halpin.....Scottish promoter Paul Graham captures the signatures of Willie Thompson and Brian Cusack and is also chasing Joe Rea.

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MCCLOSKEY TARGETS WORLD TITLES AFTER STOPPING MORRISON - 3RD OCTOBER

Boxing, brawling and a small dash of showboating were the three key ingredients to **Paul McCloskey's** second successful European light-welterweight title defence in Letterkenny on Saturday October 2. The Dungiven southpaw may have been dragged into a brawl in his last fight but the 31-year-old made use of all his technical advantages this time, systematically dissecting brave Scotsman **Barry Morrison** in seven increasingly one-sided rounds.

Some questioned Morrison's credibility as an EBU title challenger but the Motherwell resident proved a more than capable, if a little one dimensional, opponent. Hands low and showing all the elusive moves McCloskey set a precedent from the opening bell, slamming home his right lead and following up with sharp left hands. Morrison potshotted with right handed returns, waiting for his opportunity while trying to work Paul's style out, which many previous opponents have already found to be a futile exercise.

All the class was coming from McCloskey, feinting in and out of range and effectively working the body of the still dangerous Morrison. When Barry missed, which he did often, he was made to miss big, his wild swings flailing into the ring lights as McCloskey's upper body swayed in and out of touching distance. To underline his dominance in the first third of the fight, Paul planted a chopping right hook in the fifth-round and Morrison, after a couple of seconds trying to respond, sunk to the canvas by delayed reaction. It signalled the beginning of the end as the Derryman, who enjoyed a rousing rendition of Danny Boy before the fight, stepped up the process of breaking his man down.

Morrison's corner knew the end was near; sending him out for a big round in the sixth the former British light-welterweight title holder threw caution to the wind and began winding up some big punches.

Few connected but plenty of return fire caught him on the way in and the desperate, disheartened challenger walked on to McCloskey's perfectly picked flurries time and again.

Midway through the seventh-round another right hook caught Barry high on the head and he stumbled into the ropes, prompting referee Mark Green to call the fight off. The time was recorded as 1-28 of the round and the unused EBU judges were John Keane, Marcus McDonnell and Phil Edwards.

"Barry was a hard man but I didn't let him do any damage at all and if you stand in front of him then of course he'll hit you all night, you don't let boys hit you," said McCloskey post-fight.

"To be fair I didn't feel any real power in his shots, the way I was sparring I was trying to counter his right hand with a left to the body but I never really got any off and he was easier to hit to the head so I focused on that."

Paul believes he is now hitting the peaks and the preparations are pulling him through difficult moments: "In sparring all I was doing was boxing, no mixing just pure boxing," he said, "which is what I'm good at. To be honest he never hurt me and if he had done then I would tell you, but he's physically very strong. I covered up and never felt his shots at all."

While Paul marches on towards a world title shot it's back to the drawing board for Morrison who brought an extremely vocal and sizeable following over with him from Scotland, adding to an excellent atmosphere for the main event.

The 10-round chief support bout was expected to be an exciting scrap but proved a fairly frustrating encounter, with Cavan starlet **Andy Murray** extending his winning run to 22 with a points verdict over **Johnny Nolasco** of the Dominican Republic. A former quality amateur, Nolasco had only been bettered by the likes of Jason Litzau, Steve Luevano and Martin Honorio as a pro. His ring outings had been infrequent of late but the Phoenix-based fighter had never been stopped in 22 appearances and had removed eight opponents early during an 11-year career.

However, as trainer John Breen recently attested to, former EU king Murray is moving on to a different level. The 28-year-old is sitting down on his punches and letting the combinations flow with real spite. He is now hot on the heels of namesake John Murray who recently stopped Andrei Kudriavtsev in Wigan to retain the same European lightweight crown that Andy would love to get a crack at.

The main reason this one failed to ignite rested mostly with Nolasco's reluctance to engage and a propensity to lean in and tie up whenever Murray worked his way inside. Andy's probing jab set up much of his best work but the ex-Irish champion was fighting in the phone box for long spells and not using his superior skills and the spark he has shown in his last few contests. By the eighth-round Murray's right hands to the body were causing Nolasco a certain degree of discomfort and the import had stopped circling as effectively. His team, however, seemed happy with a wide points loss, which is what they suffered when Emile Tiedt's scorecard was read out as 100-91.

Cuban sensation **Luis Garcia** was given a tasty encounter, on paper at least, with Uruguayan **Jorge Rodriguez Oliveira** boasting a 20-1 slate, losing only to the experienced Francisco Mora. It will take more than the statistically pleasing Oliveira to halt the express train that super-middleweight Garcia is fast becoming.

Even though Luis was lethargic and seemingly disinterested for long spells of this encounter, he always had too much talent for Oliveira, who slipped to the canvas twice in the first session. Garcia never looked fussed by anything the Uruguayan had to offer, while his cool demeanour and languid style sometimes threatens to spill over into petulance. As early as the sixth-round, a visibly spent Oliveira started shipping a few and ref Emile Tiedt called time on the bout, leaving Garcia to swagger around the ring enjoying his latest victory. Even though his abundant natural ability is not in question, work rate does remain a concern and when his big chance finally arrives Luis could be the sort of character who fails to grasp it with both hands.

Another Caribbean mover who is doing well for himself is Garcia's compatriot **Alexei Acosta**. The 22-year-old had removed all previous 12 victims early and Uruguay's **Cristian Faccio** –five years his senior at 27- was the right sort of opponent to see if Acosta's power is indeed the real deal. Faccio contested the WBC bantamweight strap in 2008, going down in the second round to quality Japanese star Hozumi Hasegawa and was a familiar visitor to Irish soil having battled Bernard Dunne in Castlebar, one fight before Dunne achieved world title glory.

Despite his world level experience and ability to mix it with the elite, Faccio was no stranger to meeting the canvas and the good news here is that Acosta's potential is genuine, adding his name to the list of men who have bettered the Salto native. It was arguably the most impressive showing to date for Acosta who added real spite into his

shots, throwing Faccio around on occasions with the velocity, and regularity, of his assaults.

The whipping body shots had Cristian grimacing and under big pressure by the third-round. It was becoming clear that he was unlikely to last the full eight and in the third, despite still pitching a few right hands of his own, Faccio was being assaulted by a merciless Acosta who always retained control. Referee David Irving stopped the fight at 2-10 of round four in the interest of Faccio's safety (so announced Mike Goodall). The Uruguayan waved his arms suggesting it was premature but even his corner man shook the head and gave him a look to suggest that his charge was only going to suffer more punishment if it had continued.

Skilful southpaw **Coleman Barrett** is staying active and that's always a good thing. The confidence of the Galway man is clearly growing as he negotiated six rounds with **Norbert Sallai**. Whether Barrett is thrown into the lion's den later in the year with returning Belfast hero Martin Rogan remains to be seen, but the Irish heavyweight champion once again showed that he has enough moves to make it an uncomfortable night for many domestic operators.

'Coley' opened the show on this occasion and immediately commanded centre ring with his southpaw jab and good movement. Sallai looked robotic and slow but proved his toughness throughout the contest and was never truly dented by his opponent, but did suffer a welt under the left eye from the third-round onwards. Referee Micky Vann totalled 60-55 on his card, indicating that Norbert had shared a round.

Featherweight **Patrick Hyland** is now 20-0 and has stored Irish and IBF Intercontinental titles in his trophy cabinet since turning pro in 2004. 27-year-old 'Pajo' must now be ready to take the next step up in his career after a six-round 'keep busy' assignment, beating **Yordan Vasilev** over the stretch.

Hyland was in great shape and used his skills and jab to dictate matters from the off. Vasilev was down in the second-round from a well placed barrage of punches and his face reddened as the beating intensified in the third. Patrick eased off the gas and turned southpaw in the fifth-round as Yordan went into survival mode. Third man David Irving's 59-54 scorecard means Vasilev suffered another loss on his lopsided slate.

It's good to see Westport's **Finbarr Eade** getting some more ring time. The sawn-off lightweight may be advancing in years but he strikes me as the type of boxer that wouldn't let anyone down if, say a few fights down the line, he was thrown in for a national title. The tattooed marauder followed up a first-round knockout win in City

West in August with a win here over ubiquitous survivor **Wladimir Borov** from Bulgaria. Grizzled Borov rarely gets halted but Eade did use his arsenal to have the veteran rocking on more than one occasion. 'The Rock' carries a bit of pop in his fists and needs to stay busy to fulfil an Irish title dream.

Given that debutant **Michael McLaughlin** hailed from Donegal it was always going to guarantee the light-welterweight a fervent reception and this was certainly the case. Opponent on the night **Valentin Stoychev** had lost his only other fight to date and was up against it from the opening bell as McLaughlin established a sharp southpaw jab. However, the fast start was not a forebearer of things to come as Michael began to unravel from the second-round and escaped with only a draw.

Both men tasted the canvas in this four-rounder but by the end of the contest it was Stoychev who looked more likely to prevail, with McLaughlin feeding off his vocal following to try and fiddle through. Veteran coach John Breen looked visibly frustrated with Michael's inability to follow instructions and when referee Micky Vann concluded at a 38-38 stalemate there were little complaints, apart from a couple of dissenting ringsiders who thought the plucky visitor had done enough to claim victory.

Talking of good receptions, Finglas super-middleweight **Brendan Fitzpatrick** enjoyed one in his debut fight last month when the exciting pugilist dismissed Poland's Mariusz Radziszewski in two painfully one-sided rounds at the National Stadium. While Mariusz had lost all six of his professional bouts, the opponent on this occasion, **Zahari Mutafchiev**, sported a 2-3 slate which at least signalled that he had experienced the pleasure of having his arm raised. Fitzpatrick made sure he wasn't going to enjoy that feeling tonight, outlasting Mustafchiev over six exciting rounds.

Ref Emile Tiedt gave it to Brendan by a score of 59-55 but it was never really plain sailing for the man trained by John Breen and Eamonn Magee. Fitz showed all the moves in the opener, putting Mustafchiev on the back foot and drilling in combinations with class. The pace slowed in the second-round and a little of the zip was missing. Fitzpatrick's mouth trickled blood in the third and he shipped a couple in the fourth before a clearly fatigued Mustafchiev began spitting his gumshield out for respite.

Mr Tiedt did not take kindly to this and warned the away man, who was hanging on for dear life at the end of the contest as Brendan boxed his way home proving that he has the stamina to compete.

WILLIE THOMPSON RETURNS - 5TH OCTOBER

Ballyclare boxer Willie Thompson will put a 17-month spell of inactivity behind him on Sunday October 10 when he meets Ashley Theophane in a six-rounder at the famous York Hall venue in Bethnal Green. The welterweight, who boasts a 6-1-1 record, has signed with Scottish promoter Paul Graham (a former BBBofC referee) and now expects the fights to flow, with a second bout already pencilled in for November 19.

Not that Willie is overlooking, or indeed concerned about, the tough test that lies ahead in the form of Theophane, who has been enjoying a purple patch over in America.

“No I’m not worried by Theophane but I wasn’t worried about Michael Jennings and I don’t think he’s in the same class as Jennings,” confirmed Thompson. “I’m confident of going in there and sticking to my game plan for the six rounds.”

Now 30 years old, Willie cannot afford to hang around for too much longer and is keen to get back into the sort of form that saw him reel off six straight wins after turning pro in June 2007. A draw with Karl Chiverton and then the loss to Jennings stunted his progress, but Willie’s absence was not without good reason.

“I lost my father and haven’t had a good year, losing time out of the ring but I’m settled now and ready to start working again,” he revealed. “I can hopefully start with an Irish title over here but I’m targetting a shot at the British title and with a couple of good wins behind me I can get back on track again.

“John [Breen] is coming over on Sunday and I’ve been getting great work in the gym, sparring with the likes of Neil Sinclair, Joe Rea, Paul McCloskey and Stephen Haughian, all the top names that John has. I’m feeling fresh and ready to go.”

Theophane, who holds wins over DeMarcus Corley and Delvin Rodriguez, has been predicting via a ‘Hoodstripes’ press release that

the fight will be a real tear-up. Thompson says that this will suit him and it's these type of fights that made him sign with his new promoter.

"My promoter Paul Graham got the fight for me and I had communicated with Paul on the Internet before he came over to John Breen's gym to watch me spar and asked if I would be interested in signing with him. I had been in training for four weeks and got a bad cut on my eye and then another week I suffered a bruised arm so I had to contend with that during preparations.

"John still thinks I have enough in the tank to do it so I should be alright. I'm due to have a fight in Scotland afterwards so this should be a good warm up fight for me.

"I haven't been in the ring for about a year so I'm definitely looking forward to getting back in," Willie concluded.

PRIZEFIGHTER DISAPPOINTMENT FOR MCBRIDE AND TIMLIN - 9TH OCTOBER

There was double Irish interest in the fourth heavyweight tournament of the Prizefighter series on Saturday October 9 as **Kevin McBride** and **Declan Timlin** featured.

It was Reading veteran Michael Sprott who eventually took the spoils in the final, beating old adversary Matt Skelton on a split decision but Clones native McBride could deem himself slightly unfortunate after dropping a contentious decision to Skelton in the semi-final. Big Kevin, weighing in at a whopping 20 and a half stone, appeared to have dropped Skelton with a chopping right hand in the second round of their clash but Scottish referee Victor Loughlin missed the decisive blow, even though Matt believed he had been counted when asked in the post-fight interview.

Skelton had outpointed Ali Adams in his quarter-final, while McBride bested slippery African Franklin Egobi before the two engaged in a semi-final brawl.

Declan Timlin, meanwhile, returned to the boxing ring (from MMA) to put his 7-0 record on the line. Unfortunately the treacle footed Galway man was not at the races and was stopped in the second round by surprise package Shane McPhilbin, trained by Carl Greaves a regular visitor to these shores. McPhilbin who had arrived as a relative novice was defeated by the vastly more experienced Sprott (who toppled Danny Hughes in his opener) in their semi-final.

It wasn't the prettiest tournament in the popular series as inexperienced novices mixed with overweight, faded stars causing some of the contests to descend into messy brawls. McBride, however, could find himself propelled into an all-Irish showdown with the likes of Coleman Barrett or Martin Rogan after proving he still has something left to offer.

MCCLOSKEY WANTS KHAN - 9TH OCTOBER

Fresh from his latest European title defence Paul McCloskey is targeting a world title showdown with one of the division's big hitters – Amir Khan. But does the 22-0 light-welterweight have a message for the current WBA champion and former Olympic silver medalist?

“Do you want to go for a drink?” McCloskey said, tongue-in-cheek.

“I know what I'd like but what happens is a different thing,” he continued. “The team will sit down and we'll talk about what's next. Obviously, he's a world champion and I'm European champion. Then there's Devon Alexander out there and Timothy Bradley, very good fighters. The way I feel at the minute I wouldn't be afraid of fighting anyone of those boys, of course I'd be confident of beating them.”

After seeing off the challenge of Italian Giuseppe Lauri (a challenge he may possibly have to face again next) in the King's Hall in June, Paul's stock continued to rise as he dissected tough Scotsman Barry Morrison in seven one-sided rounds at Letterkenny's Aura Arena.

“My training camp went really well and I felt really sharp and from the first bell I landed about four or five jabs and just had a feel for it right from the beginning. I'm a professional champion and you can't overlook anyone in this game because one punch can end a fight so every fight I train for is like a world title fight. If you start losing then you don't go anywhere.”

The 31-year-old also sensibly dismissed any pre-fight animosity coming from Morrison's camp as mere gamesmanship, intended to build the fight up.

“I think it's just a bit of hype,” he said, “a bit of talk and mind games trying to get under my skin a bit but I covered my end of the shift and knew that I was fit and ready for the fight. I don't care who

I fight basically, I'd studied Morrison on DVDs and saw his strengths and weaknesses so I exploited them."

If the Lauri rematch happens, as has been proposed by the EBU, it will be because of a technicality regarding the post-fight drug testing. Paul, however, realises that he fought the wrong fight last time and would need to use the boxing skills and superior movement rather than accommodating Lauri in the trenches.

"I can't explain why I got into a fight with Lauri but I just did and he got in my face at the weigh-in so I was a bit wound up, which is why this game is a learning process. The crowd is always there behind you but I'm focused on what I was doing and one night's madness can mess everything up. I've got good reflexes and I use them to the best of my ability."

FRAMPTON FACES REID TEST IN BELFAST - 12TH OCTOBER

Carl Frampton will contest the Celtic super-bantamweight title on December 3 at the Ulster Hall against dangerman Gavin Reid. Carl moves straight into championship class following his three-round blitz of former European title challenger Yuriy Voronin.

“It’s great to have my first title fight and I hope it will be the first of many,” said Frampton. “I believe I can go all the way, and Gavin Reid is the next stop on that journey.”

Originally from Aberdeen, opponent Reid is now based in Redcar, Yorkshire. The 31-year-old turned pro in 2007 and has had 14 bouts to date, mixing with quality names like Stephen Smith, Scott Quigg and Ricky Owen. A former Prizefighter participant, Reid is no stranger to springing an upset, having snapped the unbeaten records of Stuart McFadyen and John Donnelly, both by knockout. 7-0 Carl Frampton has been warned.

“I’ve been in with lots of tough boxers in the past so I’ve no fear coming here to fight Carl,” said Reid.

This is Frampton’s second successive professional contest at the famous Bedford St venue and promoter Barry McGuigan believes the Tigers Bay native is evolving into a superstar.

“He got a great reception last time against Voronin and it will be even bigger and better against Reid,” McGuigan said. “We don’t have to hold Carl back, so fighting and beating Reid for the Celtic title will help Carl close in on British, Commonwealth and European title fights in the near future.”

FEATURE ARTICLE: MICHAEL CARRUTH – 14TH OCTOBER

It was 18 years ago in Barcelona that Michael Carruth secured his name in Olympic history, winning Ireland's first ever boxing gold medal when outpointing Cuba's Juan Hernandez Sierra in the 1992 final. Now working as an IABA development officer, while coaching at a local club in Dublin, Carruth reflects fondly on what was arguably Irish boxing's finest hour.

"I won two medals that day - one for boxing and one for the high jump!" Michael jokes, in reference to the gigantic leap he took in centre ring when victory was announced. Just hours after Wayne McCullough had been beaten by Joel Casamayor in the bantamweight final, Michael achieved welterweight gold with father Austin looking on proudly in the corner alongside head coach Nicholas Cruz.

"I'm a father myself now so I can understand the feelings he must have had," continues Carruth. "My dad has been my coach all through my life and it was great he could share that moment with me.

"I had a David versus Goliath mentality in the final and really had nothing to lose. The next nine minutes flew by because of my frame of mind. It wasn't the prettiest fight to look at but I was very good that day. I had the ability to win a fight in a round or two and then close up shop."

Those tactics worked perfectly as Carruth frustrated Hernandez to claim a 13-10 victory, despite being deducted three points after a public warning.

"I was so confident before the third round that I asked my team if I should start going forward and they verbally attacked me in the corner! They told me to keep on the back foot because I was catching him every time and beating him that way."

With an Olympic medal usually the pinnacle of any amateur boxer's career, it was inevitable when Carruth succumbed to the allure of the professional game, signing terms with Frank Warren in 1994.

Spending six years in the paid code, Michael struggled with weight and never fulfilled his potential.

"I was over talking to Bob Arum, Don King, the lot of them," he recalls, "but in the end I decided to go with Frank Warren. I like Frank but in hindsight I probably shouldn't have signed with him because he had a lad called Prince Naseem and didn't need anybody else. I was fighting on undercards when I should have been topping bills after three or four fights."

Sporting a 14-1 slate, Michael took an ill-fated trip to Germany in 1997 to challenge WBO champion Michael Loewe.

"Had the fight been in Dublin then I would have won it easily but it was the guy's first defence," he laments. "I was beaten on a split decision and probably deserved a rematch but that guy retired after the fight. He never boxed again because I gave him a good tanking in the last three rounds."

Shortly after, a fight with Javier Castillejo fell through and Carruth found Adrian Stone in the opposite corner, in what proved to be his last professional contest.

"I didn't do anything for three or four weeks and then the Adrian Stone fight came up," Carruth recalls. "I'd put on too much weight and kidded myself into getting ready for it, not training as hard as I should have, dehydrating and just about making the weight. Then I decided that was the end, I'm not going to do it anymore. I remember being in a sauna in London and my lips were cracking, I was so drawn out. That wasn't the game I love - the game I loved was back in 1992 winning Olympic gold. I was over 30 years old so I decided I didn't need it in my life anymore."

A sixth-round defeat to Stone saw Carruth retire from boxing and after operating in various roles both in and out of the sport -including a stint as masseur for Westmeath Gaelic Football team- he finds himself searching for his natural successor.

"I'm more than happy now with my role at the IABA and never seriously thought about returning to the ring," Michael insists. "It's a very rewarding, dream job I've got. We go to the schools, youth clubs and projects and put the idea of boxing to them, showing people what it can offer."

Michael believes that in London 2012 the Irish squad can better their three-medal haul achieved in Beijing two years ago and is still rightly proud of his own achievements.

“I have no real regrets, although when I turned pro I could have gone to America because they love Irish fighters,” he muses.

“When you wake up in the morning at seven or eight years old, you dream of becoming an Olympic champion. I boxed the fight of my life, fulfilled my dream and came home to a hero’s welcome.”

FULLERTON AND FANCONI – 17TH OCTOBER

He may be leaving an assault on the titles a little late, but Northern Ireland could have a new superstar on its hands. 37-year-old heavyweight Nicky Fullerton made a belated professional debut on Saturday October 15 but domestic pugilists have no call to lose any sleep. The Ballymena man had taken up the sport in a bid to raise some much needed cash for the Fanconi charity that raises money and awareness for those suffering from the genetic condition that causes bone marrow failure and increased risks of cancer.

By day Fullerton is a journalist for the News Letter and 'Combat Corner', his regular Friday slot regarding all of the fistic arts but mainly filled with boxing, has become a surprise hit with fight fans.

On the night Nicky faced off with heavyweight Martin Rogan, British featherweight champion Martin Lindsay and rising stars Carl Frampton and Jamie Conlan. A mystery boxer, dubbed Mr X, filled the final slot on the card and turned out to be former Commonwealth champion Eamonn Magee who had been training the star attraction for his big moment. Nicky's famous father, Jackie Fullerton, a respected football commentator for the BBC took the MC's microphone for the evening.

GAVIN NOT IN BELFAST FOR A HOLIDAY - 18TH OCTOBER

Quite often a boxer's record fails to tell the full story. The bare statistics of Carl Frampton's next opponent, Gavin Reid, may be fairly unpleasing on the eye at 6-7-1 (1 KO) but this is a pugilist who has no qualms about travelling into an opponent's backyard for a scrap. In fact, the 31-year-old relishes being the underdog.

"I don't mind boxing away from home, I have a gumshield and will travel anywhere," explained the Scottish national, now residing in the Yorkshire town of Redcar.

"I boxed in Belfast a couple of times as an amateur and the crowds are excellent, they really appreciate their boxing. Carl seems like a nice lad which is good because sometimes you can't be bothered with some of the people in this sport! When I talk about his boxing skills I have to be serious because he's a serious boxer. He's strong, fit, comes forward and can punch, plus his amateur calibre is strong and has given him a boxing brain."

Reid is undoubtedly a neat step-up for 7-0 Frampton and possesses a CV littered with top domestic names like Scott Quigg, Stephen Smith and Ricky Owen.

"Scott Quigg was definitely the most solid puncher I've faced so far," confirmed Gavin. "From round one onwards he hit with the same power and conviction throughout the fight."

"The single hardest shot I've been caught with was by Ricky Owen in the Prizefighter and as soon as he connected with that punch, my head went. It took me about a round and a half to get back in to the fight and when I knocked him down his head was still there but his legs had clearly gone. So he must have some boxing brain and chin to have got through that."

"The Nicaraguan (Bismarck Alfaro) was strong and awkward," added Reid, "and used his head a bit; Stephen Smith was a hard puncher but he realised that I was tough and wasn't going anywhere so he boxed me from about round six. I didn't have the boxing ability to

draw him in and box behind the jab, I like to have a tear-up and allowed Smith to get his breath back when I wanted to drag him into the trenches.”

Even when Reid loses he usually gives a good account of himself and occasionally the battle hardened super-bantamweight goes into the lion’s den and comes out victorious. He has snapped the unbeaten records of John Donnelly and Stuart McFadyen, both touted prospects at the time.

“I do have a punch to turn a fight around although I’m not a single punch expert, rather a wearing down, workrate sort of puncher. That happened when I fought John Donnelly because for the first three rounds he was all over me trying to knock me clean out. I’d come off the back of a knockout defeat to Andrew Singh Kooner so I can understand what his thinking was, but he underestimated me and I ground him down for a knockout.”

Previous experience also counts, with an appearance in the super-bantamweight Prizefighter tournament won by Limerick’s Willie Casey earlier this year. Reid engaged Welshman Ricky Owen in a three-threes barnstormer.

“Being in Prizefighter was an absolutely brilliant experience,” he said. “All the boxers spent about two days together having a laugh and getting to know each other so even after the fights we all got together again. It was the pinnacle of boxing with a group of gentleman outside of the ring, getting in and wearing their hearts on sleeves trying to take each other’s heads off.”

Having four mouths to feed at home means that the presence of the Celtic title adds further motivation to Reid’s quest. A win over Frampton would also do his career prospects no harm at all and the winner of this bout will be right in the thick of the British title mix.

“Having the Celtic title on the line certainly adds more of an incentive for me to come across and beat Carl,” agreed Gavin.

“It’s a prestigious title to obtain and I was supposed to box for this before against Ricky Owen in Heston – Carl was actually on the same bill – but the place got flooded and it never came off. I’m thankful it’s happening for me again now.

“This is a great fight if I can get that upset win. They see me as a stepping stone or a springboard and nobody really wants to be seen in that way but even though they are looking at British titles so am I and it’s a childhood dream for me to win a title, the same as any other fighter.”

Shamrock Shorts: European super-middleweight champion Brian Magee could fight for the WBA title before Christmas after being named mandatory contender for Dimitry Sartison's crown..... LA based prospect Jamie Kavanagh extended his unbeaten record to 3-0 (1 KO) with a four-round points victory over Ricardo Malfavon (Sept 30)..... Returning heavyweight Martin Rogan claims he would be willing to sit down and talk about returning to John Breen's gym in Belfast.....Talk heats up regarding a potential clash between Limerick's Andy Lee and Derryman John Duddy, following Lee's fourth-round knockout of Troy Lowry in Indiana.....Returning welterweight Willie Thompson dropped a 60-55 verdict to Ashley Theophane in his comeback fight.....Belfast's Kevin O'Hara had lands himself a place in the super-featherweight Prizefighter tournament on November 20 only for a torn bicep injury to shatter his chances of competing.....Paul Hyland is installed as no.1 contender to the European super-bantamweight title.....Cork manager Gary Hyde signs former amateur standout Mark Heffron.....Andy Murray and Patrick Hyland will share top billing in Castlebar on November 20 as Brian Peters announces another big card.....DolPhil Promotions' next show will take place on December 10 in Tallaght, Dublin; Anthony Fitzgerald will headline.

FIGHT PREVIEW: WILLIE CASEY VS. PAUL HYLAND - 4TH NOVEMBER

When Spain's reigning European super-bantamweight champion Kiko Martinez withdrew from his maiden defence against Limerick's **Willie Casey** last week, a potentially barnstorming main event fell by the wayside. When Casey's domestic rival **Paul Hyland** stepped up to headlining status as Kiko's replacement, suddenly the excitement and intrigue was increased as fans now look forward to an all-Irish civil war on November 6.

Casey's fledgling career has really taken off and the Southill stylist is looking to cap off a remarkable run that has seen him fly into European title contention seemingly from nowhere: "It's all happened very quickly for me really," Willie agreed. "This time last year I was only just getting ready for my third professional fight so it's been a crazy year and I want to cap it all by winning the European title."

There are two points that could decide how this one plays out. Firstly, whether Hyland possesses enough power in his punches to keep Willie at bay for the full 12 rounds and give the marauding southpaw something to think about when he steams in for the kill. Rather than being a chilling one-punch knockout artist, Casey tends to wear opponents down and overwhelm them with his volume and work rate. His style inevitably leaves gaps in the defence and much of Hyland's success could lie on whether he can exploit these. Paulie may not hit with massive authority but it was his speed and accuracy that stunned Eugene Heagney to defeat inside three rounds last December and a well placed body shot dropped durable Rob Nelson in Tallaght when the two met in 2009, so he is not averse to seeing his opposition hit the deck.

"I didn't have to think twice about taking the fight and there is no doubt in my mind that I will be European Champion," said Hyland, who was preparing for Russia's Andrey Bogdanov when the call came.

"I know it won't be easy and it will probably go the distance but I've no doubt my hand will be raised at the end. It's been a whirlwind few days, after Kiko pulled out injured I hardly slept on Friday or Saturday night with the excitement. It's sinking in now though and I just can't wait."

A second point of interest is whether Casey can box to instructions and resist getting drawn in by the vociferous Limerick crowd. Part of Casey's plan in his last fight -an eight-round win over Italian Emiliano Salvini- was to box on the back foot and work for openings, rather than move in straight lines and attempt to bludgeon his opponent - a tactic that to be fair has garnered massive success for him thus far.

Coach Phil Sutcliffe and his team are astute enough to realise that raw power and boundless energy can only take a fighter so far and when the levels in class increase it is necessary for a boxing brain to take over. Casey wore down the likes of Mark Moran and Josh Wale in the Prizefighter tournament earlier this year, stopping both men in their tracks with his superior punch output. Prior to this he had travelled over to Canada to halt unbeaten Tyson Cave with a relentless body attack.

I foresee this being an excellent fight. The fact that national pride is at stake will only raise the temperature when, inevitably, the contest moves into the trenches and neither man will want to give an inch. If Hyland can stay disciplined, resisting the temptation to engage with Willie and use his quality movement, as the fight enters into the final rounds it could be extremely close on the cards.

Indeed, I think this will be a distance fight and both men will have their moments in a cracking encounter. Given his home advantage, high workrate (always a clincher with the judges in tight rounds) and added pop, I tentatively tip Casey to prevail on points. For a fighter with only ten fights on his ledger and relatively unknown a year ago it would be a remarkable achievement.

Dublin's **Anthony Fitzgerald** is hoping it will be third time lucky when he finally meets **Lee Murtagh** in defence of his Irish super-middleweight title. Two fights ago, with Fitz showing impressive improvements to his game, I would have picked him to beat Murtagh without much question. In his last fight -a rubber match win over Robbie Long- Anthony's performance was choppy and Long was allowed into the fight for extended periods. Taking this into account, there is a case for veteran southpaw Murtagh to use his experience and skills to confuse and bemuse Anthony. A lack of power (no stoppages

from 27 wins for Lee) could be the difference however and Fitzgerald's freshness should see him through over the distance.

Reinvented as the 'Iron Man', 39-year-old **Martin Rogan** returns to the ring following a one-year absence to contest a six-rounder. The Belfast heavyweight has received treatment and operations in his time away and reckons he has found a new resilience while out of the ring. Given that he is down for an appearance in Castlebar on November 20 it is unlikely that his opponent on this occasion will too taxing.

Cuban talent **Luis Garcia** steps up in class to face former world title holder, and the first man to drop Joe Calzaghe as a professional, **Byron Mitchell**. The Alabama resident is now 37 years old and showing form far removed from his peak years but can still offer a stiff test to the enigmatic Garcia who has a tendency to blow hot and cold. Mitchell has bags of experience but was never overly strong in the chin department even in his heyday. If Luis turns up focused he can start hurting the former WBA king around the midway point of this scheduled 10-rounder.

Brendan Fitzpatrick, **Gavin Prunty** and **Alan Donnellan** make up the rest of the card, while cruiserweight **Jon Fogg** makes his professional debut and **Mike Perez** gets an eight-round assignment. Alexei Collado (formerly Acosta) is off the bill with a back problem.

EURO STAR: TITLE GLORY FOR LIMERICK HERO CASEY - 7TH NOVEMBER

After all the pre-fight hype the main event only lasted just under four rounds. Far from being an anticlimax, the all-Irish European title fight between **Willie Casey** and **Paul Hyland** was an outstanding, ultra-competitive spectacle that ended with Limerick's own Cinderella man Casey claiming victory in front of a fervent home support. Dubliner Hyland more than played his part but ultimately rued the decision to stand toe-to-toe with his relentless opponent who ground Paul down with sheer aggression and precise power punching. Referee John Keane jumped in at 2-09 of the fourth-round as Hyland sought too much respite on the ropes, failing to punch back and wearily nodding his approval at the third man's intervention.

"Obviously no fighter wants to be stopped, it's our nature to fight on," Hyland admitted at the post-fight press conference when asked if he thought he had been prematurely halted.

Most agreed that the stoppage timing was right and Hyland went on to explain that a punch behind the ear had scrambled his senses and forced him back to the ropes in an attempt to regroup. Casey was in no mood to let him off the hook and stuck to the game plan despite having stylistic problems with Hyland in the first-round. Planting his feet and meeting Willie head on Hyland thought he could hurt Casey and as the round wore on I also started to believe that he could. The left hook to the body –clearly a punch Team Hyland had worked on- was landing frequently, right hands sneaked through and Willie occasionally looked one dimensional, but he did appear to buckle Hyland at the round's end with a right hook.

Paul's breathing must have been hampered by the second-round as his nose began to bleed and his mouth gaped open. Casey was trading on raw power, missing and hitting gloves most of the time but pushing Hyland back steadily and thrashing his hands as they cupped

the head and ears. It was the non-stop waves of Casey's attacks that were slowing Hyland down as he tried to get back to his boxing, using the tidy long range skills that outfoxed David Chianella in Italy for the EU belt earlier this year. It proved futile, with Paddy Hyland screaming in the corner for his son to keep the distance, brother Patrick imploring Paul to "make Willie miss big" he had no option but to stand and trade and everyone knew that that was the wrong option. Could Hyland hold the discipline and keep Casey at bay for 12 rounds? I pondered that question pre-fight wondering whether Willie would get carried away by his home crowd, or indeed if Paul had the pop in his shots to keep the relentless southpaw at distance – the answer on both accounts was no.

Casey was his usual self in the press conference, laughing and joking with the media while paying tribute to Hyland. He feels that the two could meet in a rematch somewhere down the line and believes Paul can still fulfill his dream of becoming a world champion. I could have seen a rematch being a possibility had the fight gone to a close decision, but a fourth-round knockout is, on paper at least, fairly decisive.

Willie will defend against Spain's Kiko Martinez next, probably again in Limerick, once the puncher has recovered from the injury that forced him out of the main event and to amiably vacate the title to make this fight possible. Kiko was ringside and spoke through a translator at the press conference. He predicted Hyland would win but agreed that he got his tactics wrong, but overall the Spaniard enjoyed the headline attraction. He said it would be a different story with him against Casey and his punch power would tell. We shall see.

ROGAN HEADS UP LIMERICK UNDERCARD - 7TH NOVEMBER

All eyes were fixed on heavyweight **Martin Rogan** as the self-styled 'Iron Man' returned exactly one year to the day of his last bout (a rematch defeat to Sam Sexton). His opponent in this one was Bulgarian **Yavor Marinchev**, a chunky survivor employed to help Rogan through six rounds. The 39-year-old was not in the mood for hanging around and hunted Marinchev down with hooks and body blows. A purposeful flurry culminating in a left hook to the body and the visitor was down and out, counted by Emile Tiedt at 2-41 of the round. Bigger tests lie ahead for the likeable Belfastman who is targeting a European title and now trains with Gerry 'Nugget' Nugent who also handles Martin Lindsay (who was working as a second in Rogan's corner).

"The arm felt good after the operation and I was strong in there," said Rogan post-fight. "My timing was a wee bit off but that's understandable given my layoff – I'm pleased with the finish."

The enigmatic figure of **Luis Garcia** again appeared on this Hunky Dory fight card and fans were treated to flashes of his immense talent before an early finish. You never quite know which Garcia will turn up and thankfully he looked alert and focused against former two-time world title holder **Byron Mitchell**. With the duration cut from ten rounds to six Garcia maintained a sensible distance from Mitchell's sporadic bombs as the Alabama veteran struggled to pin down the unbeaten starlet. The class was all from Garcia, with combinations reigning in on Mitchell who looked leaden footed and unable to compete with Luis' variety.

The way Garcia feints with a lead right hand and turns it into a swiping uppercut at the last moment is pure class. Mitchell was rocked badly from a volley of punches at the end of the first round and I had a suspicion that had he been any less experienced then referee Micky Vann might have stepped in and saved his head from the rockets. The assault continued into the second-round and a four-punch combination

hurt Mitchell and forced him to suddenly take a knee and begin shaking his head. Given that he had taken the shots and then gone down shortly after gave some fans reason to believe that Mitchell was looking for a way out (he was gesturing that a thumb in the eye or some other misdemeanor had occurred) and who could blame him. Vann escorted Mitchell to his corner and waved it off after a brief consultation, offering Byron a chance to leave the ring with some dignity. The time was recorded as 0-51 and a damaged left eye was the official reasoning (although I later caught a TV replay which showed it was a tasty uppercut on the corner of the eye that did the damage).

After a long distinguished career it is time for Mitchell to retire. As for Garcia, the 22-year-old is now 10-0 (8 KOs) and talking world titles after the bout. If he can maintain a positive attitude and prove he possesses the stamina for a long hard fight then Luis can undoubtedly mix with the very best at super-middleweight.

The eagerly anticipated Irish super-middleweight title clash between **Anthony Fitzgerald** (holder) and **Lee Murtagh** (challenger) was cruelly cut short in the second-round when Murtagh suffered the worst cut I have ever seen in a live contest. Anthony signalled his intent from the get-go smashing in right hands as experienced Murtagh retained his focus and circled with a strong southpaw jab. It was warming up nicely in the second stanza when the two clashed and suddenly the Leeds visitor reeled away holding his head, clearly in pain. When he removed his glove, blood pumped out of a diagonal gash on the forehead and spewed across the canvas before ref David Irving called a halt and took Murtagh to his corner and summoned the doctor.

It wasn't the sort of injury that could be caused from a punch and the laceration appeared indicative of an elbow or, my first instinct, of a clash of heads. TV replays appeared inconclusive but the official word concluded it had been heads and the decision appeared to be a no contest. Whatever, Fitzgerald retained his title and followed the decision with a leap on to the ropes no less, while an angered Murtagh protested through a blood soaked towel. Two previous attempts to match these two fell through and maybe they are destined to go their separate ways.

Cuban heavyweight **Mike Perez** returned to action with a bang, needing less than a round to blow away hapless journeyman **Pavel Dolgovs**. A flashy hook had Dolgovs down within seconds of the starting bell and shortly after a southpaw jab and left hook had him cut

on the forehead and tasting the canvas for a second time. The time was recorded as 0-40 of the round and Emile Tiedt refereed. Perez needs to get busier if he is to step up in levels and fulfill his undoubted potential.

Since turning professional Finglas super-middleweight **Brendan Fitzpatrick** has been racking up the appearances and this was his third outing, with **Kirilas Psonko** the latest victim. Brendan was made to work harder than expected by his decent opponent and was found labouring on the inside on occasions and paid the price as Psonko tagged his static head. Fitzpatrick puts the punches together well but can be a little one-paced. A cut eye hampered his progress from the fourth-round but Psonko was tired and suffering a nosebleed by the last session. Ref David Irving scored it 58-56 in Brendan's favour.

Galway's **Jon Fogg** was making his professional debut but came unstuck at the first hurdle, getting stopped in the third-round by Spain resident **Ricky Pow**. Chunky Fogg looked like he could slim down a weight or two and his short stocky physique meant he had major problems dealing with Pow's height and reach advantages. There was little time for feeling out as both men got down to business immediately, hurting each other with barrages until either aggressor punched themselves out and backed off allowing the opponent a chance to attack.

By the end of the second-round Fogg resembled a 50-fight veteran finishing a gruelling 12-round title fight rather than a debutant negotiating his first six minutes of action. Swelled cheeks, welts under both eyes and a nasty gash above the left optic were only the start of Fogg's woes as blood seeped from his nostrils. By the third-round Pow (who was no great shakes himself) began to unload his big punches behind the jab and it was no surprise when an exhausted Fogg was rescued by David Irving at 1-41 of the round. He was announced as being in no position to continue and would need to consider what he wants out of professional boxing before continuing on this long hard road.

Charismatic Dubliner **Gavin Prunty** had his hands full with **Marius Kravcukas** of Lithuania. So much so that he dropped a four-round decision to the spirited away man who applied steady pressure throughout and stifled Prunty's rhythm. Gavin was up against it when a left hook dropped him in the first-round, but he enjoyed southpaw stance success in the second and was warming up, yet constantly out of range, in the third. A big final session clinched it for Marius and an

incorrect announcement as the winner only rubbed salt into Prunty's wounds as referee Emile Tiedt and announcer Mike Goodall conferred on the correct scoring. It was a deserved 38-37 in favour of Kravcukas.

Alan Donnellan moved to 3-0 with a 40-37 victory over **Zahari Mustafchiev** who had given Brendan Fitzpatrick plenty to think about in Letterkenny recently. Donnellan holds his left hand too low at times and eats right hands as a result, a habit he must address when the opposition improves. Another frustrating aspect of his game is an inability to sustain attacks. Often, a good burst or flurry is followed by Alan leaning in and holding his opponent while scuffling with arm punches, halting any momentum. The jury is out but Donnellan could prove an interesting future contender in the Irish title mix, if little more. Veteran Micky Vann officiated in this one.

FRAMPTON FOCUSED ON CELTIC TITLE SHOWDOWN – 12TH NOVEMBER

Carl Frampton is fit and focused as the 23-year-old prepares for his first professional title fight. Frampton contests the Celtic super-bantamweight belt on December 3. The 7-0 hotshot headlines against Scotland's Gavin Reid in the Ulster Hall and was looking sharp on the pads in Midland ABC recently.

"The weight is great and with the fights coming along thick and fast, I don't have time for the weight to rise," said Carl.

"Gavin Reid is better than his record suggests. He gives every fight a good go and with eight weeks of preparation he'll be in top shape. I need to get in the best shape of my career to meet him."

"Carl's going over to Scotland for some quality sparring with John Simpson," added Barry McGuigan. "We watched the recent European title fight between Casey and Hyland and I believe Carl is ready for either man, that's the level we will be targetting very soon. December 3 is going to be a great night and with an undercard that sees fighters tested."

Lurgan welterweight Stephen Haughian heads the undercard with a tough encounter against Derby's Dave Ryan. The 27-year-old, who calls himself Rocky, is a former Midlands Area champion and won that title by knockout.

Unbeaten flyweight Jamie Conlan also features, alongside Ryan Greene and Troy James.

Prospect Chris Keane gets a tricky opponent in the form of Sheffield's Billy Boyle, a former Commonwealth title challenger. Boyle has mixed with the likes of Nathan Cleverly, Tony Oakey and Carl Dilks during a 19-fight career.

FLYWEIGHT CONLAN HAS A PUNCHER'S CHANCE – 12TH NOVEMBER

He may not make a whole lot of noise outside of the ring but Belfast's Jamie Conlan is certainly making his presence felt within the squared circle. The 24-year-old was a slick moving amateur, whose brother Michael recently competed in the Commonwealth games, but as a professional Jamie is starting to add a little bit of spite to his punches.

"My power is starting to show now, I'm sitting down on the shots and John [Breen] has me working on the bodyshots and uppercuts, things that wouldn't have been used so much as an amateur," said Conlan.

"I'm enjoying the pro game immensely. Each day you digest more and more and I'm learning how to pace myself. I feel myself getting stronger as the fights come along."

Featuring on the last Ulster Hall bill, Jamie impressed his considerable following with a third-round pounding of Hyusein Hyuseinov.

"My last opponent came in a lot heavier than me but that wasn't a concern because I'm used to sparring bigger, heavier guys in the gym. I can handle all sorts of styles and want to stay active.

"I've been sparring with Andy Murray and Patrick Hyland up at Breen's Gym and feeling sharp and ready for my next fight night.

That next assignment will come on December 3, against a yet unconfirmed opponent.

"I think my opponent on the night will be a Georgian and I'm expecting a tough night's work," concluded Conlan.



WILLIE CASEY AND PAUL HYLAND REFLECT – 15TH NOVEMBER

For as long as it lasted the European super-bantamweight title fight between Willie Casey and Paul Hyland was an intense battle with neither man willing to give ground to his fellow countryman. It was southpaw Casey who prevailed, wearing Hyland down for a stoppage in the fourth-round, sending his Limerick faithful into raptures. Both men faced the media post-fight and explained the contest from their individual viewpoint and mused over what's next on the agenda.

"Everything paid off in the ring tonight," said Casey, following a gruelling eight weeks of preparation. "Hats off to Paul for taking the fight in my backyard, he has a lot of talent and we all saw Bernard Dunne win a world title after Kiko Martinez beat him so Paul can draw inspiration from that and do the same if he keeps working hard at this game.

"That was the hardest fight so far in my career, even tougher than the Prizefighter and the Tyson Cave fight, but the 'Big Bang' found the finisher in the fourth."

Indeed he did, grinding down his slicker opponent whose main chance was to keep the fight long and try to outbox Willie. In some quarters the stoppage was viewed as being a touch early but Paul himself did not seem to protest too vehemently when referee John Keane intervened.

"Should it have been stopped?" Paul asked rhetorically. "Not at all because I'm a fighter and we never want the fight stopped. I tried to punch back and even hold a bit but the ref just stepped in. Willie stuck to his plan but I felt strong and was enjoying the fight.

"I suppose I'm disappointed but not complaining about the stoppage. Casey did catch me, to be fair, as my dad [trainer Paddy] said afterwards I just got excited after some early success. It was a good little scrap when I mixed it with him on the inside."

Willie is on a remarkable run of wins and recorded Irish boxing history by winning the title in only 11 contests (he's the 13th Irish Euro champ overall).

“It’s amazing how far I’ve come in the game since I turned pro two years ago,” he admitted.

“Phil Sutcliffe saw me as an amateur once and persuaded me that the pro game was for me, he told me that he would make me European champion within three years and here I am after only two years and with 10 fights behind me. I put in all the training, the time and dedication to claim this belt and I’m honoured to have won tonight. Hyland is more skilful and technical than me but we both showed that we can box a bit. I also thank Kiko for relinquishing the belt and giving myself and Paulie the chance to fight for it.”

Power-punching Martinez is used to destroying Irish dreams having relieved Bernard Dunne of this very title in August 2007 with a brutal first-round knockout. Having won it back in his last fight – a National Stadium points win over Arsen Martirosyan – Kiko was training for Casey when he suffered an injury and relinquished the belt, as he sees it, for the good of Irish boxing. Casey and Hyland met in the University Arena and the rest is history.

“I was ready for Kiko this time,” continued Willie, “and I’ll look forward to meeting him in my next fight. If he was injured then I’m glad he pulled out because I want to fight him when 100 per cent fit and nothing less. He said he wasn’t fit when he lost to Munroe and when I win my belt or defend it against any opponent I don’t want any excuses at all.”

We know what awaits Casey next, but what about Hyland, who suffered his second defeat in 20 bouts as a professional?

“Naturally I want the winner of Willie versus Kiko,” he boldly proclaimed.

“I was enjoying the fight and it was one silly clip to the back of the ear that caught me out. I just couldn’t see anything but that’s the way it goes and I’ll be back knocking on the door of titles very soon.”

28-year-old Willie’s skills have undoubtedly improved since he switched codes in late 2008 and he paid tribute to his team at the Crumlin Boxing Club in Dublin for whipping him into fantastic shape.

“People take my fitness for granted and think I’ll be gone after three or four rounds, too tired to carry on. Phil Sutcliffe and Joe Clifford [strength and conditioning coach] know me well, they see me preparing for eight weeks, doing padwork and sparring and everything else.

“I’m just as strong in the final rounds as I am in the first six, there’s no stopping me whatsoever once I hit a rhythm in that ring so bring on my next challenge,” Casey concluded.

FEATURE ARTICLE: PAUL MCCLOSKEY – 18TH NOVEMBER

Standing on the stairwell outside John Breen's furnace-like Belfast gym, dripping from head to toe in sweat, Paul McCloskey is a man enjoying his boxing again. A frustrating spell of inactivity followed the Dungiven pugilist's finest moment to date, when he outpointed Spaniard Daniel Rasilla in Magherafelt last November for the European light-welterweight crown. Not that the skilful southpaw was complaining. The focus has always been on making it into the higher echelons of the light-welterweight division, doing his talking inside the ring and achieving a world title dream that he and his team believe will soon be fulfilled.

Behind the unassuming manner, however, is a man fiercely driven to succeed, proof of which came in his last fight with Giuseppe Lauri when, suffering from a badly swollen eye and faced with adversity, Paul was dragged into the trenches, his only option to slug it out and win ugly.

"It was probably the second or third time in my career that I've been involved in that kind of fight and in a funny way I kind of enjoyed it," he enthuses.

Paul proved that night that he possesses the grit and fierce desire required to go hand-in-hand with his sublime skills. The same character traits that trainer John Breen recognised from the beginning.

"Paul has a tendency to drop to his opponent's level sometimes and I believe we will see the best out of him when he fights an excellent opponent, he will excel," states 60-year-old Breen who has seen some colourful characters and a fair few decent fighters pass through his gym doors during an overall 50-year involvement in boxing.

"When he fought Nigel Wright in Limerick in 2008, again he found himself with a swollen eye and really up against it but he listened to my instructions, rallied himself and won the fight clearly – it was a testament to his character."

McCloskey has Breen's full backing and holds nothing but praise for his chief motivator: "We enjoy a very good working relationship," Paul confirms, "John's the trainer, I'm the fighter and I'm not above anything so whatever John says I do it. If he thinks I'm training too hard he tells me to slacken off and it's a good thing to have a machine driving you. Working with Eamonn Magee too I'm in good hands. I trust John as a trainer because his track record speaks for itself and I don't doubt anything he says.

"Next time I'll go out there and do what I do best which is box and move," adds McCloskey, "countering with distinction."

Countering with distinction, while operating out of an elusive southpaw style, is indeed what McCloskey does best. In March 2008 he announced himself on the scene with a ten-round domination of former world title holder Cesar Bazan. McCloskey's ability to draw Bazan close, before punishing him with combinations, saw Paul turn into a genuine contender that night.

Fights with the likes of Wright and Colin Lynes [for the vacant British title] took Paul to the top of that pile by the end of 2008 and he was named fighter of the year at the Irish Boxing Awards in Newry.

"Even though my toughest fight to date was probably Giuseppe Lauri, my toughest opponent, and I did a very good job on him, was Colin Lynes," states the 31-year-old.

While busy compiling a now 21-0 (11 KOs) record, the Lynes win made UK boxing fans aware of the fistic talents of the man handled jointly by Brian Peters and Matchroom.

"Brian's been a very good friend of mine, since I got involved with him over the last few years. Early on he got me a lot of fights; he's the best promoter in Ireland when you see what he's done over time. He's helped take boxing on to a different level over here and long may it continue.

"Matchroom are great too, I had a few wee injuries and problems last year but Barry [Hearn] and John [Wischhusen] got me over and sorted it out, so I'm as fresh as a daisy now."

Behind the calm temperament, there lies a steely resolve and air of confidence about McCloskey, a determination to follow in the footsteps of some of his illustrious countrymen.

"Being an Irishman of course Barry McGuigan was an influence and being a Derryman in particular Charlie Nash and Billy 'Spider' Kelly. From the modern era Roy Jones Jnr has been an idol of mine, Floyd Mayweather as well – all the slick fighters basically.

Naseem was great when he put on a show and I could give you 30 or 40 names but generally the clever guys are my kind of fighters.

"I've known boxing from an early age, my brother was part of an amateur club when he was young and my father was on the coaching staff so when I was a kid I was in and out of the gym and I picked up on it very quickly."

Away from the ring McCloskey is a family man, running a Eurospar store in his native Dungiven, alongside wife Emma and parents-in-law Francie and Margaret. The names of McCloskey's two children, Cian and Oran, are emblazoned across his fighting shorts.

"My family is another one of my motivations and gives me an extra drive," he affirms. "But I also have that desire to be the best, to be a champion. I'm no different from anybody else, I want to get to the top and I have a lot of belief in myself, I have a good setup around me and a great team so there's no reason why I can't get to where I want to be."

McCloskey's star has risen to the point that he is now being seriously mentioned as a possible opponent for the big-time players he craves to test himself against – the likes of Amir Khan, Tim Bradley and Devon Alexander. All are great fighters in Paul's opinion, but not out of his league.

"I give them all the respect in the world but don't fear them either," he says, "so if I got any of those fights I'd prepare as well as I can and feel very confident of going in and doing a good job."

"Physically and mentally, I'm definitely on a roll now at 22-0 and I've got talent but I work really hard too," McCloskey adds after his latest win, a seventh-round domination of Barry Morrison in Letterkenny.

"I've been a professional for five years and a former British champion, current European champion, in line for a world title so I just want to keep fighting, winning and moving on. I don't care where I fight for a world title but imagine fighting for it here [in Ireland], anywhere in the country would be amazing, a dream come true. But if I had to travel then I would do it because opportunities are something you cannot turn down."

McCloskey is a dedicated boxer who doesn't lead an extravagant lifestyle out of the ring and has steadily moved his way from an undercard debut at the King's Hall to topping bills in the famous Belfast venue.

“Paul has come a long way and is still improving,” attests John Breen. “He was a good amateur, not a great one, but I’ve brought him on as a pro and now I’m 100 per cent convinced he will win a world title.”

Back inside the gym, joining young prospect Jamie Conlan on the skipping ropes, McCloskey has shown he holds the mettle, coupled with the talent, to get to the very top. The ambitious Dungiven man makes a solid case for his inclusion in the mix of light-welterweight world champions. With more success on the European scene, the quietly confident Derryman could be sharing the ring with one of them sooner than expected and turning his lifelong ambition into reality.



MURRAY AND HYLAND VICTORIOUS IN CASTLEBAR - 21ST NOVEMBER

Andy Murray is fast closing in on a crack at European king John Murray and the Cavan stylist improved to 23-0 with a 10-round points verdict over Brazil's **Claudinei Lacerda** in Brian Peters' 50th boxing promotion.

Claudinei had contested all of his previous 14 fights on home soil and the Brazilian had no doubt taken this assignment with the intention of pushing his career onwards. A win over unbeaten starlet Murray would certainly achieve that. The 30-year-old dangerman came in with the nickname 'Volcano' and nine out of his 13 wins had arrived via knockout - we awaited an explosion.

Two years younger, 28-year-old Murray had to keep his wits about him as Lacerda came out unleashing some serious leather. So much so that Murray suffered a flash knockdown in the opener after a sneaky right hand landed over his low left. Lacerda's attacks were wild but effective, boring in and landing his shots but taking some quality counters from Murray.

Andy was starting to box his way into the bout by the mid-stages and enjoyed fifth-round success, giving Claudinei plenty to think about with his snappy jabs reining in and keeping the South American at bay. Lacerda was tiring by the seventh, no doubt from the exertions and copious amount of missed punches in the early sessions.

Both men had their moments as the fight drew to a close but it was Murray who landed the better blows, seeing out a tricky encounter with some well timed shots slotted through the visitor's guard. Emile Tiedt scored it in favour of Murray at 98-92.

After the decision Lacerda handed his WBO Latino belt over to Murray, who was pleased with his performance.

"On paper it's my best win," he said. "I was more off balance with the knockdown but he's built a good record over in Brazil and punched well. I used my height and boxing skills to keep him off.

“Defence was important, I had to roll my head and block the punches. I showed a good chin, answered the questions and showed that I can go into the trenches and fight on, even after a bad start. The crowd helped me through the fight.”

“It was a brilliant match, well done to the matchmaker,” added co-trainer Brian McKeown. “The exposure across Ireland is great for Andy and he's developing into a nice well-rounded professional.”

Featherweight hope **Patrick Hyland** kept his European title aspirations on course with an eight-round win over Italian-based Albanian **Suat Laze**.

Hyland was originally slated to face Roman veteran Massimo Morra but when Morra broke his hand in sparring Patrick found Laze in the opposite corner. Two of the three defeats on Laze's record came early on in his career, when the 30-year-old was still learning his trade, and he enjoyed a 15-fight unbeaten stretch before narrowly dropping his last fight on points for the EBU-EE title on away territory in Ukraine.

Patrick was looking to restore family pride after younger brother Paul lost his big title chance to Willie Casey in Limerick recently. The 27-year-old enjoyed height and reach advantages over his squat opponent and used them effectively from the off, spearing the jab out and following up with a swift right hand. Enthusiastic Laze turned southpaw to try and offset the rhythm of Hyland but found himself getting picked off time and again as he leapt in with wide hooks.

Suat became increasingly frustrated at spending his evening at range on the end of Hyland's jab. He threw caution to the wind in the sixth-round and started jumping in hope of landing the right hook. 'Pajo' rode out his hefty assaults and boxed his way home to a 78-73 total on referee Paul McCullagh's scorecard.

“I wanted to show the public that I'm not just a come forward fighter, I had to adapt to him because he was a switch hitter,” stated Patrick post-fight.

“He was dangerous for a small guy and patience is the game. If I rushed in then I could have blown up but I was glad at the performance. Another fight and I'm ready for the European title.”

Martin Rogan had his second comeback bout and followed up a one-round demolition of Yavor Marinchev with a win over **Werner Kreiskott**. The chunky German was more solid than expected and stood up to Rogan's heavy punches, firing back enough defiance to keep the bout competitive. This was a perfect fight for Martin, a handy

workout with an opponent who wasn't ready to fall as handily as Rogie's previous foe in Limerick. Rogan's bodywork was impressive and he was beginning to take the wind out of Kreiskott's sails with some well placed rib ticklers.

Belfast veteran **Ciaran Healy** is the new Irish light-heavyweight champion after some cracking shots removed **John Waldron** from his senses in the fifth-round.

Supposed non-puncher **Paul Truscott** found his heavy hands, disposing of **Yordan Vasilev** in the third-round. The former Commonwealth featherweight holder will now be looking to force his way back into title contention and is slated to meet Leeds' Carl Johanneson in a British super-featherweight title eliminator in the New Year.

KIKO MARTINEZ WAITING FOR WILLIE CASEY - 22ND NOVEMBER

While the main event combatants were busy knocking lumps out of one another in Limerick on November 6, there were two interested observers at ringside planning their next moves around the outcome of the vacant European super-bantamweight title fight. Kiko 'La Sensacion' Martinez is one third of what has become an interesting boxing triangle, while promoter Brian Peters is the man pulling the strings.

“It was a fantastic fight tonight,” lauded Peters, who manoeuvred Willie Casey and Paul Hyland together when Martinez pulled out injured. “Willie’s a historical champion right up there with the best in the world. Paulie certainly played his part and there was a great crowd and a live atmosphere here tonight.

“Neither camp had any hesitation whatsoever in accepting this fight. Ideally Paul Hyland would have liked more preparation and we could have used a little extra time to build up the fight but fair play to the two boys and their camps. The Willie Casey story is inspirational, fairytale stuff to win a European title – a superb team effort was involved and a lot of belief.”

As Peters rightly pointed out, the reassembled headliner would not have come together if champion Martinez had not handed in his belt and taken up mandatory status for the winner.

“The Irish people like me winning fights and I want to be an adoptive son of Ireland,” stated Kiko through an interpreter. He plans on having a half-Irish, half-Spanish flag on his shorts.

“I fight better away from Spain than I do at home as I showed when I fought Bernard Dunne. I also think that the referee was a bit quick to stop the fight tonight.”

He wasn’t the only one to take that viewpoint – Paul’s father Paddy nodded his approval – but Kiko felt that Hyland’s tactics on the night were incorrect and he should have used more movement.

“Paul should have run around the ring more,” Martinez explained, “but he got excited and ended up in a fight. Even though I picked Paul to win I was impressed with Willie’s strength and didn’t expect him to be that strong. Even though Hyland fought the wrong fight I believe the crowd got to him a little.”

Now the No.1 challenger but appearing to be considerably over the super-bantamweight limit, Martinez will likely get his chance early next year, possibly in February or March. While Limerick seems the obvious choice of venue, it could yet end up in Dublin. Willie will almost certainly enjoy a top 15, possible top 10, world ranking, with the WBC looking particularly favourably upon European champions.

“You have to take these opportunities when they come, otherwise you never know when they’re going to come around again,” added Brian Peters, in reference to Paul Hyland’s decision to take Kiko’s place at relatively short notice.

“That’s true and I will take my chance when it comes again,” Martinez declared.

“Willie showed good strength and fitness tonight but remember, I am not Paul Hyland, I hit a lot harder. I am the true champion.”

ROGAN'S BACK FOR EUROPEAN TITLE – 26TH NOVEMBER

One of the charismatic figures of domestic boxing, Martin Rogan, returned to action on November 6 in Limerick with a one-round knockout victory over Yavor Marinchev of Bulgaria. Two weeks later he followed that up with a six-round win over rugged German Werner Kreiskott in Castlebar on November 20.

While first opponent Marinchev may not have offered the stiffest possible test, it was a useful exercise for the 39-year-old heavyweight to flex his muscles after a year-long ring absence.

“After a year out I was understandably rusty going back into the ring,” admitted Rogan. “I feel fresh and ready for an assault on the boxing scene, I’m going to make some serious noise in Ireland and beyond.”

Now reinvented as the ‘Iron Man’, Rogan is all nuts and bolts after going through some gruelling operations and rehabilitation to correct the shoulder and neck problems that stuttered his progress. Despite reportedly carrying the injuries from as far back as the Prizefighter tournament, it was a sixth-round retirement loss to Sam Sexton that forced Martin to take action.

“It was good to get back and I appreciate the opportunity to come back down to Limerick,” he said. “It’s about time I started fighting around Ireland because I am Ireland’s ‘Iron Man’.”

Little has changed about the Belfast bruiser, who was busy firing a broadside at certain sections of the media who he feels have been overly negative concerning his comeback, and Martin is now eyeing rematches with the domestic bigwigs.

“The guy I fought tonight didn’t last long, he was no Skelton or Harrison, but he came over to face me and people know what I can do. I’m looking to get a fight with one of the big boys.

“I’ll just leave the plan to Brian Peters, he’s very educated in what he does with his boxers. Brian’s done a great job with Bernard Dunne, Paul McCloskey and Matthew Macklin, the list goes on. I’m stepping

up to the mark with Brian and giving him 150 per cent. I'll be looking for another villain to dispose of as soon as possible."

Martin is rumoured to be chasing an appearance on the Martin Lindsay-John Simpson undercard in the King's Hall on December 15 in what would represent a welcome return to Belfast.

Manager Peters and matchmaker Tomas Rohan will no doubt be looking to ease 'Rogie' back in to the cut and thrust of the ring with some careful matches before letting him off the leash. After a long layoff and intense recuperation it would make sense. But when he does get back to full throttle the Clonard native is aiming high.

"I'm not looking for the Commonwealth title," he stated, "I'm looking at the European title."

COLLINS PLANS FOR BIG 2011 – 26TH NOVEMBER

Cork trainer Paschal Collins may have been quiet of late, but the former pro insists that his stable are working hard behind the scenes and the fruits of their labour will be evident in 2011 when his star men get big title chances. Paschal has teamed up with Frank Warren and is looking to steer light-middleweight Gary 'Spike' O'Sullivan and lightweight Stephen Ormond to Commonwealth glory nights.

“Stephen is fighting on December 4 in Glasgow on the Ricky Burns-Andreas Evensen undercard,” confirmed Collins.

“We haven’t got an opponent confirmed yet but it will be an eight-rounder and the plan is to go for the Commonwealth title. If we get another fight early in the New Year then we’re aiming for Liam Walsh who won the super-featherweight title [wpts12, Maxwell Awuku]. Liam’s a good fighter but he’s young and a little bit green as far as we’re concerned so it would be a good time to fight him.”

Norwich's dangerous puncher Walsh is 10-0 with seven wins coming via the big knockout. The 24-year-old gritted his teeth and dug deep to take the Commonwealth belt against rugged Awuku and would represent a step-up in class for Ormond, who was last seen fighting on the previous Ricky Burns undercard, beating Johnny Greaves in Glasgow.

“Being linked with Frank Warren is very good for my career,” stated Ormond.

“I’m a come-forward fighter who can box a bit too and I like to throw in a body shot for good measure. I’ll enjoy getting in with Liam Walsh if that fight comes off.”

Stephen was drafted in to spar both Willie Casey and Paul Hyland before the pair clashed for the European super-bantamweight title in Limerick recently.

“The Casey-Hyland fight was pretty intense,” said Stephen, who had picked Hyland to prevail. “I was surprised Paulie got stopped but that's the way it goes sometimes.

“I get plenty of great sparring here in Ireland but the exposure I'm getting in England is great too. I boxed plenty of internationals as an amateur, winning three Irish senior titles, two at featherweight and one at lightweight. I always boxed with more of a professional style though so it was natural for me turning over; I didn't have too much trouble adapting.

“The sky's the limit for me as a pro. I want major titles in the long term and in the short term the Commonwealth belt is a good starter.”

Another man who has seemingly fallen off the radar is 11-0 'Spike' O'Sullivan, who was last seen beating France's Sylvain Touzet last June in his native Cork. O'Sullivan was also scheduled to appear on that aforementioned Glasgow card but never made it on due to complications relating to a €300 fine in his name. Collins explains the problems he has been enduring away from the ring.

“Gary has been training and keeping himself in good shape,” Collins said.

“Spike and Stephen will take out British boxing licenses which will allow them to contest the Commonwealth title,” he confirmed. “They have relations in England so are both eligible for that belt, just not the British title itself.”

Paschal also has another familiar face training with him down in Cork.

“I have Ian Tims in the gym now and he's a changed fighter, displaying real power. Ian got an injury in sparring before the Michael Sweeney fight which is why it fell through. He's over that now and absolutely mad for that fight.

“If we can't get Sweeney then we'll look to move up in weight and fight Coleman Barrett at heavyweight or even Martin Rogan.”

So Tims and his team are chasing a shot at the returning 'Iron Man', conqueror of Harrison and Skelton?

“Absolutely we want that fight,” Collins confirmed. “Nothing personal against Martin, he's a great boxer but tell him that we want it.

Shamrock Shorts: British featherweight champion Martin Lindsay finally looks set to return to a Belfast ring on December 15 with John Simpson the opponent..... Irish middleweight Andy Lee is looking forward to a 2011 all-Irish battle with John Duddy. The Limerick southpaw is eyeing a slot on the undercard of Wladimir

Klitschko's world heavyweight title defence against Dereck Chisora. Joe Rea is also in line for an appearance on the same bill.....Galway heavyweight Declan Timlin loses in London to Ian Lewison.....Three Ulster boxers fall to points losses in Scotland. Michael Harvey goes down to Santino Caruana, Phil Townley to John McCallum and Willie Thompson loses to Paul Burns.

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CLASSY CARL CLAIMS CELTIC CROWN - 4TH DECEMBER

Carl Frampton is the new Celtic super-bantamweight champion following a second-round knockout of Redcar-based Scotsman **Gavin Reid**. The Tigers Bay prospect shrugged off any suggestions that this title tilt had come too soon in his fledgling career with a dominant display of classy punch picking.

Competing in his 13th professional contest Reid was fresh and experienced, still burning with ambition from a career that has seen him mix with the top domestic names. Bury's unbeaten current WBA Intercontinental champion Scott Quigg broke Gavin down in the ninth-round back in July. No doubt Carl had half an eye on that benchmark and smashed it to pieces.

Frampton landed repeated right hands in the opener as he pinned Reid on the ropes. The local hero bobbed and weaved in and out of punching range whenever Reid stalked forward. It was apparent that Gavin lacked the speed to land with any regularity. Whenever Carl opened up, his shots landed with sickening thuds. Reid was brave and tried to see out the storm but at 2-29 of the second-round he was taking head shots in the blue corner and referee Steve Gray jumped in and stopped the bout.

Unused judges were Mark Green and Ian John-Lewis. Frampton improves to 8-0 (5 KOs) and Reid slip to 6-8-1 (3 KOs).

It's time for Lurgan welterweight **Stephen Haughian** to forget about the defeat to Kevin McIntyre and move on. The 26-year-old can still force his way into the mix and the Celtic title loss in June will be put down to experience. In this one, Haughian's skills made cameo appearances as he bettered slippery customer **Dave Ryan** by a score of 78-74 on Paul McCullagh's slate.

Derby native Ryan had title form of his own, in the shape of the Midlands Area belt, and was no push over at 9-3 (3 KOs) coming in. He brought over some vocal support in the crowd and was clearly up for the job. Haughian established his range finder straight away and

had Dave off balance with clusters of punches. The Derby man was unorthodox in his approach, swaying at the waist while threatening to switch southpaw. Ryan took the second, winging in hooks and causing Stephen to cling on to his man, back against the ropes, as Ryan bulled inside.

The fight was a pick 'em through the third and fourth sessions. It was a question of what you liked best. Haughian was missing more than usual as he struggled to come to terms with the unpredictability of Ryan's movement and opted for single shots – when Dave landed, he landed big. It was a good, honest small hall scrap between two fighters desperate to break into title class. Haughian was at his best when he used his left jab and kept the away man guessing. Ryan's output was noticeably decreasing by the seventh-round as Stephen took control of centre ring and held on despite a cut high to the head late in the fight.

Haughian improves to 20-2-1 (8 KOs) while Ryan suffered his fourth loss from 13 starts.

On the last Ulster Hall bill **Ryan Greene** shut out Matt Scriven over four rounds and impressed with some patient and effective boxing. The hard-hitting southpaw was paired with Hungarian **Lazszo Haaz** in this one and got rid of his man at 1-27 of round one. Greene used his southpaw jab to good effect in the early stages and picked his shots well. Haaz got caught in a blizzard of shots and referee Paul McCullagh jumped in.

Even though the decision to halt proceedings was a touch premature, Haaz was announced as being in no position to defend himself. Solid Greene moves to 3-0 as a professional with his first stoppage win, while Budapest's Laszlo falls to 4-3.

Walsall light-heavyweight **Chris Keane** improved to 4-0 (1 KO) but was made to work hard for his latest success. Keane had to overcome a badly bloodied nose and a rugged opponent in the form of Sheffield's experienced **Carl Wild** to post a 58-57 victory on referee Paul McCullagh's scorecard. Keane's left eye was closed over at the end of the contest and the fans warmed to rugged Wild – now 9-15-3 (1 KO) - who felt he had done enough to win.

Troy James was due to meet Georgia's **Mikheil Gogebashvili** and **Jamie Conlan** was scheduled to meet Mikheil's compatriot **Levan Garibashvili** but neither Eastern European made it to the arena due to extreme weather conditions. That left Jamie and Troy to

entertain one another in a four-threes exhibition bout as both men got a run out in front of an appreciative crowd.

Three of the main men involved in the Celtic title showdown gave their views post-fight:

"First and foremost it was all about the win, but in the back of my mind I wanted to make a statement as well [to Irish and British rivals]," stated Frampton. "Reid has gone the distance, or into the later rounds, with the likes of Quigg, Smith and Savage. To get him away in two rounds was a bonus for me. I let my rivals know that I'm the real deal. I'm not messing about and the Celtic title is a good title to win.

"There's the possibility of a Celtic title defence. Other fights are out there too. The super-bantamweight division is probably the hottest division in Britain and Ireland. There are some big fights to be made and 2011 could be a big year for me.

"The crowd were noisier than last time and when I came into the ring I started doing a wee bit of shouting, so I felt the caveman in me.

"I need to work on my footwork and foot speed. I've been watching Manny Pacquiao videos and he's unbelievably fast. I've been doing explosive padwork and they say 'train hard, fight easy'. Gavin took some big shots in there, fair play to him he's a tough operator and that was not an easy fight. I'm getting better and better, this was my best performance so far. To get rid of him inside two rounds gives me a real confidence boost."

Promoter McGuigan was equally as enthusiastic: "This game is about drawing comparisons until the guys eventually get together. Scott Quigg took nine rounds to get rid of Gavin Reid and I deliberately picked Gavin because of his staying power and the potential for him to extend Carl into the later rounds. I genuinely thought that Reid would take us into the second half of the fight, maybe even later.

"It's very exciting for Ireland that we have got so many quality, exciting fighters in and around the same weight class. Carl's a Protestant kid with a Catholic girlfriend – a real modern Northern Ireland guy, he epitomises a shared future.

"We'd be happy to fight for the Irish title if it was available but we could be looking at British or European level already. I won't put him in for titles if I don't think he's ready. I'd like a Celtic title

defence. Jamie Arthur was under consideration but then he fought, and won, the Commonwealth title. We would be delighted to fight Paulie Hyland, Davie Savage or any of the guys eligible for the Celtic title.

“Carl makes a statement every time he fights and that was the objective. People are beginning to believe what I've been telling them. This kid can do it; with sensible steps he's going a long way.”

And the final word rested with trainer Gerry Storey: “Gavin Reid is never in a dull fight. He's very dangerous when hurt and you may have noticed tonight that whenever Carl hurt him he took his time, did what we had talked about before and took no chances or risks. Frampton controls the pace so well and doesn't waste anything. He's extremely heavy handed.”

DEBUT DATE FOR NELLINS - 10TH DECEMBER

Tucked away on the undercard of the Lindsay-Simpson headliner on December 15, a light-welterweight hopeful will be making his first steps onto the professional circuit. Even though the surname Mills is on his birth certificate, the latest Alan Wilton protégé will box under the name Tony Nellins. Hailing from Belfast, Nellins is back in the city intent on making a name for himself as a paid pugilist after a spell in the army convinced him to give it a go.

“I had quite a successful amateur career,” explained Tony. “I won all the Novices, the Ulster Championships, got into the final of the Irish championships, won the boys’ clubs and then went off and joined the army. I was fighting at 57kg in the amateurs, won the army individuals, then changed my mind and left the army to turn professional.

“I met a guy over in England called Steve Goodwin and turned pro with him, but he wanted me to sign with Alio Wilton to get the fights in Belfast where I can build a fan base. There’s no point in fighting in Chester or anywhere else. I’ve sold over 200 tickets and I just hope I can please all the fans and get a win on the night.”

Nellins plans on training with Alio (whose son Luke also features on the big show) while moving back and forward to England to touch base with Goodwin. He also fancies his chances of claiming a meaningful title, with the Irish and Celtic crowns high on the agenda.

“I’ve been sparring in Eastside and over at the Blacks Road for a bit of extra work. In England I spar Omar Gumati - who contested a British Masters title last year- he fights at middleweight.

“I don’t know anything about my opponent on the night but I don’t want to know either. I just want to get in the ring, do the business and make a name for myself. My style is peek-a-boo. I get the head down and move, bob and weave. I like to move about a lot and come back with a combination every time.”

Tony believes that his strong fan base will provide a solid foundation to progress with. The King's Hall is set to be particularly vocal when he makes his first professional bow.

"I've got loads of support over here in Belfast, in England as well and from guys in the army so if I can shift a few tickets I will hopefully get plenty of fights. Staying active is key, so if you don't train then you don't get fights, you need to stay busy all the time and be ready for the call. I'm aiming be a dedicated full-time pro and am willing to put all my efforts into the game and reap the rewards.

"This is a huge debut for me. People have been fighting all their lives and never got to fight in the King's Hall so for me to be fighting there really is a once in a lifetime chance."

BUMPER DOLPHIL SHOW ENTERTAINS DUBLIN CROWD – 11TH DECEMBER

Local hero **Anthony Fitzgerald** slimmed down to middleweight to claim the spurious WBF Intercontinental title at the Tallaght Basketball Arena on Friday December 10. Forget the title, this was a useful exercise aimed at acquainting ‘The Pride’ with the championship distance and he accomplished the task with ease, dominating **Kevin Hammond** over 12 rounds.

All three judges scored the main event widely in favour of 25-year-old Fitz. John Coyle 119-109, David Irving 118-110 and Emile Tiedt 117-112; Mickey Vann took control of the action inside the ring. The improving national belt holder at super-middleweight is planning to stay at the reduced weight class and aim for the likes of John Duddy, Andy Lee and Matthew Macklin. A fight with Gary O’Sullivan –who Anthony called out earlier this year- could represent a more realistic move and would provide fights fans with a good domestic scrap between two hungry fighters.

LA-based light-welterweight **Dean Byrne** returned home for the second time as a professional and enjoyed a six-round points win over **Sergejs Volodins**. **Gavin Prunty** scored a comfortable third-round stoppage over **Franck Aiello**.

There were wins for both **McDonagh** brothers. **JJ** erased the ghost of his last fight –a chilling knockout loss to Tommy Tolan- with a stoppage win over **Deniss Sirjatovs**. The other half of the fighting siblings, **Paddy**, won his first eight-rounder (making him eligible to fight for an Irish title) with a verdict over **Martins Kukuls**. **Robert Long** signalled his intentions with a first round blitz of hapless Latvian **Andrejs Suliko**, in a super-middleweight affair.

Further into the undercard and there were wins for all but one of the home fighters on this nine-bout attraction. Heavyweight debutant **Paddy Ward** was the unlucky loser, going down on points to recent Mike Perez

victim **Pavel Dolgovs**. Female boxing star **Christina McMahon** outpointed **Polina Pencheva** over four rounds, while **Noel O'Brien** turned the same trick on **Asen Vasilev** in Noel's first pro bout. Man of the moment **Willie Casey** withdrew from the card with a chest infection.

One night later, there was more Irish interest in various locations across the globe. Firstly, in Liverpool, as part of the GR8 Britain SKY pay-per-view extravaganza, **Matthew Macklin** successfully defended his European middleweight crown against tough Spaniard **Ruben Varon**.

Macklin (pictured below) sported two badly bruised cheeks, a cut left eye and plenty of facial swelling following a rough and tumble encounter with unheralded Varon. Matthew needs a step-up in class to bring the best out of him if he is to realise his dream of winning a world title.

Dean Byrne's Wild Card stablemate **Jamie Kavanagh** did not hang around in his scheduled four-rounder, on the Amir Khan-Marcos Maidana undercard in Las Vegas. 'The Nuisance' dismissed Jacob Thornton after just 44 seconds of the opening session.



TOLAN EYES JEFFRIES UPSET - 12TH DECEMBER

Belfast super-middleweight Tommy Tolan is planning to light up the city with a shock victory over touted Sunderland prospect Tony Jeffries.

Tolan returned from the wilderness in May this year, putting in a commendable effort at short notice before going down on points to Ballinrobe's Michael Sweeney. Tommy confirmed that he was a real threat on the domestic circuit when he brutally snapped the unbeaten slate of JJ McDonagh in Dublin's City West venue in August. The 37-year-old believes that that win provides all the proof needed that he carries dynamite in his fists.

"I have power in both hands and absolutely nothing to worry about on December 15," stated 'The Tiger'.

"Michael Sweeney is a very good boxer and I was 12 stone for the fight. I was contacted at four days notice at 12 stone 10lb and Brian Peters offered me good money for the fight. Michael punches very hard indeed and I fought well on the night. That got me thinking that I'm nothing else but a super-middleweight. That is my natural weight even though I've accepted this fight up at 12st 9lb [light-heavyweight] as the opportunity arose and I just took it.

"I'm looking forward to the Jeffries fight. Preparations have gone well for the team. Jeffries is a big guy, a stand up boxer and I know what I have to do; the game plan has been made and I'm going to have to fight him. I see him being very awkward, like JJ McDonagh, and I will be patient and wait for my chance to come."

Tommy's career has been stagnated by inactivity. He compiled a modest 3-2 (2 KOs) record from 2001-2005, that included, interestingly enough, a four-round points win over a certain Michael Banbula. Fans of SKY's Saturday Fight Nights will have seen Jeffries struggle to an eight-round draw with plucky Banbula, in the Sunderland man's most recent outing.

"I hope Jeffries is complacent and comes over to use me as an opponent because he'll have the shock of his life," continued Tolan.

"Frank Maloney has a contract on offer for me if I win so I hope Tony comes to fight because the Belfast people love a fight."

Indeed, Maloney claims he will have a contract waiting for the underdog in the changing rooms post-fight if he causes the upset. For now Tommy is just happy to be getting regular fights after his five-year hiatus and is thriving from gym work with his close knit team.

"I was never going to knock this chance back. My coaches Gerard McCafferty and Alec Doherty both know I have a puncher's chance. Ciaran Healy is in the team as well and young Paddy McGarrity (1-1 as a lightweight pro) is doing well too. We're a loyal group who have a great respect for one another and there's a good camaraderie among us."

Fights with the likes of Anthony Fitzgerald, Paddy McDonagh or a rematch with JJ could provide some excitement on the Irish fight scene. Tommy could be aiming for much bigger things though if his plans come to fruition on Wednesday night and he knocks former Olympic bronze medallist Jeffries off his perch.

"Tony Jeffries knows that I'm in a win-win situation, there's no pressure on me whatsoever. Nobody is giving me a chance and I love being the underdog, so let people think that I'm a stepping stone. I'm not going to let him come over and knock me around like a punch bag."

LINDSAY MAPS OUT HIS FUTURE – 13TH DECEMBER

Martin Lindsay will contest a world title by the end of 2011. That's the plan according to promoter Frank Maloney who set out an ambitious path to world honours at a press conference in Belfast.

"I can confirm that the next three fights will be in Belfast, in the King's Hall. We want to make Martin a boxing superstar," said Maloney.

"This is my first time promoting in Belfast since the days of Damaen Kelly and Brian Magee. We've tried to keep Martin busy but some fights have been cancelled and one of our promises was to bring Lindsay back here as a headliner."

All the best laid plans of course rest on the assumption that Lindsay will successfully negotiate his way past John Simpson on December 15. The teak-tough Scot will be no pushover as he vies for Martin's British featherweight crown in the local man's first King's Hall bill topper.

"If we get past Simpson okay then the next fight will be another British title defence, we are already negotiating for that," continued Frank. "Plans, of course, are difficult to make in boxing but I want a quick defence, then the European title and then a world title fight by the end of 2011. There will also be regular work for the young local fighters on our Belfast shows."

The young local fighters he is referring to include flyweight duo Jamie Conlan and Luke Wilton and light-welterweight debutant Tony Mills. Conlan faces Francis Croes on the show, while potential Irish title rival Wilton renews hostilities with Usman Ahmed, a fighter he lost to in Dublin back in 2008. West Belfast battler Tommy Tolan also features on this card, with the promise of a long-term contract if he can spring a surprise on unbeaten starlet Tony Jeffries.

While the supporting talent provides interesting side notes, the real star of the show is 28-year-old 'Mac Man' Lindsay.

"Martin Lindsay was a great capture for Frank Maloney Promotions and we promised we would promote him in Belfast," said Maloney, who steered Rendall Munroe all the way to a world title shot in Japan.

"We need the boxing fans here to come out to the shows and we're taking Martin away from leisure centres and putting him into big venues. The King's Hall will be set up for 2,300 people and I want to be hitting around 2,000 on fight night."

Martin has always enjoyed a strong following and is relishing the chance to return to the King's Hall for the first time since 2007, when he outpointed Edison Torres over eight rounds on the John Duddy-Howard Eastman undercard.

"Whether it's the King's Hall or the Ulster Hall, it's great to be fighting Belfast after having a few recent fights on the road," stated Lindsay.

"I would love the next three shows in Belfast. My future is mapped out now and I just need to put in a good performance on December 15. These shows will give all the lads a bit of exposure in their hometown.

"John Simpson could be my hardest opponent to date; on paper he's a former British and Commonwealth champion. Styles make fights and it depends who turns up on the night and performs best - this could well be my toughest bout.

"What you see is what you get with Simpson, he's a rugged customer, with plenty of aggression and always comes to fight, but as far as boxing ability goes I'm a class above. I'm looking forward to my next fights and fulfilling Frank's predictions. The emphasis is firmly on me to perform on the night.

"I've prepared for all eventualities. If it goes toe-to-toe or we have a boxing match, whatever he throws at me I'll be ready. My training has gone very well. I've been sparring with [Commonwealth gold medalist] Eamonn O'Kane, who's a tough middleweight and has a similar style to Simpson's but is obviously a lot bigger. Everything has gone to plan and the weight is on target."

Frank Maloney summed up his feelings on the Lindsay phenomenon: "Martin is an exciting fighter who brings to the table what the fans want to see. His fan base is strong, he's skilful and committed. There are some good world champions at featherweight at the moment so it's all about judgment and timing to land the big fights.

"World title fights are a very real possibility. If the crowds build up then SKY will show their commitment to the Belfast project."

DISAPPOINTMENT FOR LINDSAY AS SIMPSON TAKES TITLE – 16TH DECEMBER

Belfast hero **Martin Lindsay's** world title dreams were left in tatters after Scotland's **John Simpson** ripped away his British featherweight crown, on December 15.

The usually smooth boxing 'Mac Man' was dragged viciously into the trenches by rugged Simpson. Martin's solid jab and wicked left hooks to the midriff were unable to offset the rhythm and pace of the away man's sustained assaults. Promoter Frank Maloney was talking world honours before this bout, but Lindsay is now going back to the drawing board after suffering his first professional reverse.

All three judges –Howard Foster, John Keane and Richie Davies– totaled 116-113 in favour of the Greenock native. Referee was Ian John-Lewis.

Liverpudlian **Paul Edwards** annexed the British flyweight title from Oldham-based Mongolian **Shinny Bayaar** under controversial circumstances. Bayaar suffered a cut from an accidental head clash in the opening session and under British Board rules it was terminated in Edwards' favour. The rule is set to change in January and not too soon in my opinion. Unhappy Bayaar will get a rematch when his cut heals.

West Belfast hero **Tommy Tolan** was talking up a huge upset before his scrap with touted Sunderland light-heavyweight **Tony Jeffries**. A crushing three-punch combination put paid to any aspirations Tolan may have held pre-fight, disposing of the veteran at 1-03 of the second-round. Tony struggled to get to grips with onrushing Tolan in a scrappy opener, but overcame a cut (clash of heads) to find the finisher with a touch of class.

Flyweights **Luke Wilton** and **Jamie Conlan** could soon be on a collision course, with the Irish or British titles being mentioned. Wilton gained revenge over **Usman Ahmed** in the show opener, while

Conlan forced Englishman **Francis Croes** into retirement –from a shoulder injury- in the third-round.

Luke had lost to Ahmed in Dublin almost two years to the day of this second encounter. He left nothing to chance on this occasion, peppering Usman with show from the off. A sharp right hand off the ropes dropped ‘Uzzy’ for a count in the first-round and he kept up the momentum for a 59-55 victory. Conlan, meanwhile, used his skills to keep Croes under wraps until a mistimed right hand pulled his shoulder out of place and out of the contest.

Unbeaten welterweight pairing **Steven Jevons** and **Martin Shaw** went at it as undefeated prospects should, before Jevons claimed the spoils 39-37. Somebody’s 0 had to go, as the old saying goes, and it was Shaw who dropped to 3-1, but should be proud of his efforts. The Chris Aston-trained novice can regroup and come again.

Lurgan powerhouse **Ryan Greene** managed to hustle and bustle his way past aggressive **Simone Lucas**. Greene grabbed it 39-37 on the ref’s scorecard.

Unbeaten light-heavyweight prospect **Brian Cusack** shuffled his way past aggressive Scotsman **Ianto Jenkins**. Cusack prevailed by a total of 39-37.

Popular debutant **Tony Nellins** outscored **Jason Carr** of Sheffield 40-36. Nellins moved well and threw plenty of scoring punches from a compact, effective stance. **Michael Harvey** posted his first professional win (at the fourth attempt) with a 39-37 win over **Dan Carr**.

Shamrock Shorts: Andy Lee spars Wlad Klitschko ahead of his German adventure.....Oisin Fagan hints at a ring return.....Stephen Ormond claims an impressive stoppage win in Glasgow over Sebastien Cornu.....Brian Magee appears to have landed a crack at IBF super-middleweight champion Lucian Bute, scheduled for March in Canada.....Willie Casey will get his shot at Cuban Guillermo Rigondeaux on March 19 in Dublin.

HOW THEY SAW IT: ONE TERM ENDS, ANOTHER BEGINS

Don O'Leary – *DolPhil Promotions*

2010 wasn't a bad year at all. DolPhil has gone from strength to strength and with Willie Casey winning the European title and Anthony Fitzgerald turning into a genuine headliner we can only hope for more next year. The stable is growing, the McDonagh brothers signed with us and other fighters, like Darren Cruise, are turning pro. This is a tough sport but with more shows and good crowds, we foresee a successful 2011.

Pat Magee – *Manager of Brian Magee*

I am very happy with how 2010 went, if you consider that in late November 2009 we got the offer of a European title fight and then to see the transformation in Brian's career, in the space of 12 months, was fantastic. He won the European title for a fantastic purse, then made a successful defence in Dublin and secured a No. 1 contender rating with the WBA. It has been fairytale stuff for us.

The offers have been forthcoming to box Lucian Bute in Montreal and if situations dictate then we would travel to fight him in Canada. I have no interest in signing any new fighters in the near future; the focus is on Brian's career. 2011 is all set to be an exciting year for us.

Paddy Hyland – *Trainer of Dublin's fighting Hyland trio*

The year improved as it went on. I was glad to see Patrick get a couple of fights towards the end. After he fought Mickey Coveney [in February] we hit a brick wall. I couldn't run any of my own shows in 2010, it just wasn't financially viable and after Brian [Peters] came on board, Patrick got two fights back to back and that made an awful lot of difference to our outlook. Getting rusty is no use, for a while nobody wanted to fight Paul. A little more ring time allows the headliners to get used to the crowd, the pressure and fighting on TV.

We tried to get Robbie Long on a few shows but nobody wanted to take a chance against him. Carl Greaves told me that Robbie will be hard to match because of his style, he's tough, rugged, comes to win and offers little reward for opponents. We thought he won the third fight with Anthony Fitzgerald and we'd take a match with Henry Coyle anytime, I think Robbie has the toughness to beat him.

Overall, things are moving up and these are exciting times. Eddie's retired at the moment although he might consider a move up to heavyweight! Inactivity hurts all fighters and we want to keep our boys busy.

Tom Ward – *Trainer and manager*

The year went okay for us apart from JJ running into Tommy Tolan [see August 7 fight report]. It was a shock but a learning experience at the same time; everybody learns their lesson from a knockout loss. Both lads [Paddy and JJ] have signed with DolPhil Promotions and everything should be going to plan now.

Paschal Collins – *Cork-based trainer*

Believe it or not I'm actually happy with how the year's gone. Although the lads haven't been fighting much –one fight for Gary 'Spike' O'Sullivan and two for Stephen Ormond in 2010- we've been busy behind the scenes. Stephen only came to the gym in March after being based in America. I also wanted to change his style a little bit, which takes time. Both lads will push on in 2011; I have no doubt about that. Ian Tims has been working with us and he is eager to move on. We're looking towards Commonwealth honours and being linked with Frank Warren opens a lot of doors.

Harry Hawkins – *Former trainer of Bernard Dunne and Brian Magee*

It's been a quiet year for me; with Bernard retiring I haven't had a whole lot to do. Brian left in late 2009 but that's boxing and one year you're up, the next you're down. That's the same situation for both boxers and coaches. I really am enjoying working with the amateurs again. There's a good squad here and we're hopeful of pushing some of them towards the 2012 Olympics.

I'd return to the pros if it was for someone I'm interested in. I've had offers from people asking me to train them, but I'm not just in the game to train pro boxers. If I'm bringing someone along, like I did with Bernard and Brian, from kids, then I'd go for that.

Barry Flynn – *Boxing historian and author*

The year 2010 was a truly excellent one for boxing in Belfast. In September, the city hall was the venue for the launch of a new initiative called the Belfast Boxing Ring. Spurred on by the boxing excellence of the city, the Belfast Boxing Ring was established with the aim of erecting a number of statues to the individuals who have brought glory to the city. The notion for this project was the brainchild of former champion and MLA Alex Maskey, and he along with a select committee is at the forefront in bringing the city's boxing story to a wider fraternity.

Fittingly an exhibition to publicise the project was opened by Ballymena-born actor Liam Neeson, who himself was no mean exponent of the noble art throughout Ireland in the 1960s. The day itself brought together a veritable who's who of the Northern boxing fraternity. Neeson's boyhood hero Freddie Gilroy was the guest of honour as he and Neeson recreated a picture of the two that had been taken 50 years earlier. Plans are now at an advanced stage for the erection of a statue to Rinty Monaghan in central Belfast in the near future.

However, while Belfast's past has indeed been glorious, a new generation has come to the fore. Paddy Barnes twice showed his undoubted class by claiming gold medals in both the European and Commonwealth Games - which, added to his Olympic medal, is a truly ground-breaking achievement. Indeed, the performance of the Northern Ireland boxers was a credit to all as Mickey Hawkins oversaw a squad that returned from Delhi with a plethora of medals. In August, the Holy Family gymnasium under Gerry Storey was again in the spotlight as Ryan Burnett claimed a gold medal at the inaugural Youth Olympic Games. London 2012 holds great promise for Irish amateur boxing.

In the paid ranks, Belfast has been reinvigorated with the emergence of Carl Frampton under the tutelage of Barry McGuigan. McGuigan truly knows talent and he has placed Frampton of the right route. On a balmy Saturday night in September, the famous Ulster Hall in Bedford Street witnessed Frampton's emergence into the boxing limelight. 'The Jackal' was pure poetry as he pounded the formidable Yuri Voronin to a third round stoppage. Showing maturity, skill and accuracy, Carl won the battle in the ring and a legion of home-based fans in the process. At ringside, none other than the legendary Thomas Myler was to comment that he had not witnessed

such an exhibition of power-punching since Freddie Gilroy had set the same arena alight decades previously.

The city has enjoyed a renaissance. In June, the King's Hall was rocking as Dungiven's Paul McCloskey produced the goods to knock out Giuseppe Lauri in round 11 of his European light-welterweight title defence. However, most fans of the sport will be hoping that Brian Magee will finally have his day as he is primed for a for a world title shot in 2011. With Bernard Dunne hanging up his gloves in 2010, Ireland is eagerly awaiting its next world champion. The talent and the hunger is there and who knows what glory lies ahead in the coming years with Belfast again prominent on the world stage.

Bernard O'Neill – *Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA)*

The Irish Amateur Boxing Association completed another stunning year in 2010 with Katie Taylor, Paddy Barnes, Joe Ward, Ryan Burnett, Darren O'Neill, Eric Donovan, Tyrone McCullagh and Ken Egan grabbing the headlines in international competition.

Taylor claimed her third AIBA World lightweight title in a row - just a few weeks after she won her third European Union title on the trot in Hungary - in Barbados in September and also scooped AIBA World female boxer of the year award, the second time she has collected this accolade in two years.

Barnes, from the Holy Family club in Belfast, bridged a 19-year gap and won Ireland's first gold medal at European Championships level since Dubliner Paul Griffin in 1991 when he finished on top of the light-flyweight podium at the Ice Palace in Moscow.

Kilkenny middleweight Darren O'Neill claimed a silver medal at the same event and McCullagh, Donovan and Egan landed bronze. The medal haul saw Ireland finish in second spot behind Russia in the medals table.

Meanwhile, Ryan Burnett, also of the Holy Family BC in Belfast, won an historic gold medal at the inaugural Youth Olympics in Singapore this summer, just a few months after he claimed silver at the AIBA World Youth Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Joe Ward went all the way at the World Youths, claiming gold in the middleweight class. Amazingly, Ward, who only turned 17 recently, also won a gold medal at the 2009 AIBA World Junior Championships in Armenia in 2009 at light-middleweight.

The two wins saw the Moate BC clubman become a two-weight World champion before his 17th birthday.

Ken Egan grabbed the headlines domestically after winning a record breaking 10th Irish senior title in a row at the National Stadium in Dublin. Meanwhile, the IABA will celebrate its 100th birthday next year amid the countdown for the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

The first qualifier for the 30th Olympiad will be at the 2011 AIBA World senior Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan. Katie Taylor, who has already been installed as an odds-on favourite to win gold in London, will have to secure qualification for the 2012 Olympics at the AIBA World Women's Championships in China.

Gary Hyde – *Manager and promoter*

Guillermo Rigondeaux is winning titles already and my other signings, Mark Heffron and Levan Ghvamichava, are both moving on swiftly. I want Heffron to go in for Irish titles and Ghvamichava for an EU title. I'm contented at the moment with the fighters I have but I'll be down at the Irish seniors finals again this year and looking for more talent to sign in 2011.

Mel Christle – *President of the Boxing Union of Ireland (BUI)*

The scene is extremely healthy and my wish for 2011 is that we can get as many promotions as possible because that offers more scope for work for the many professionals around.

We have been getting a huge amount of applications for professional licenses. What is most encouraging is that they are mostly native, homegrown applications. I'm also getting many enquiries from England relating to a boxer's entitlement to fight for the Irish title – we work on the Grandparent rule. A couple of years ago we ran an advertisement in the Boxing News magazine making British licensees aware of the fact that they could contest the Irish title if they had an Irish ancestral background. There are more out there now and it would make for healthier ratings. Overall, there is a huge demand for professional boxing in Ireland and long may that continue.

David Mohan – *Belfast journalist*

2010 has been a tremendous year for Irish boxing. Things could not have started any better when Brian Magee travelled to Denmark in January and collected the European super-middleweight title against Mads Larsen with a stunning display - for me that was the performance of the year that has hopefully paved the way for a long overdue world title shot early in the New Year.

As the months rolled by, our stock continued to rise. Paul McCloskey has cemented his reputation at European level and hopefully a world title shot is just around the corner for 'Dudey', while Carl Frampton is really starting to come of age and with a Celtic title now in the bag, 'The Jackal' can enter 2011 with high hopes of further success. In his division is of course European super-bantamweight champion Willie 'Big Bang' Casey who claimed the belt with a fantastic display against Paul Hyland in Limerick.

Martin Lindsay and Matthew Macklin have also has kept the flag flying with some impressive displays and the possibility of a Macklin, Andy Lee and John Duddy trilogy in the New Year is something to look forward to.

Special mentions must also go to rising star Jamie Conlan who continues to impress, Ciaran Healy who picked up the Irish light-heavyweight title to jump-start his career and of course the return of Martin Rogan that has sent a wave of excitement through boxing fans across the Emerald Isle.

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ON THE ROAD.....

From Limerick to Letterkenny, Cork to Castlebar and of course Belfast to Dublin, fight nights routinely appear in weird and wonderful locations and venues, staged by a variety of different promoters. Along with my trusty travel companion Cormac Campbell and latest recruit Nicky Fullerton we regularly plot extravagant routes across the island.

We have encountered wild goats tearing across dual carriageways, an eccentric photographer who believes he can see the face of Richard Nixon in a cliff top (and is trying to convince the tourist board of this fact) and many other characters along the way. However, even the hardcore boxing fan understands that this is no longer a mainstream sport, with only the biggest of events -involving the likes of Mayweather, De La Hoya and Pacquiao- possessing the crossover appeal that draws in the casual fans. While the interest may be dwindling in mainland UK and, as we have already discussed, competing with alternative threats in America, in Ireland it remains strong. The noble art has always flourished in proud fight cities like Belfast and Dublin and healthy competition in the Irish and Ulster senior finals, as well as impressive international team displays and a five-medal haul by the Northern Ireland team at the Commonwealth games in Delhi, indicate that this will continue for many years to come.

The Irish team succeeded at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and look set to repeat that success, and possibly better it, at London in 2012. The amateur game is strong and the professional game also appears to be in a healthy condition. Irish boxers, from North and South of the border, are regularly appearing in European title fights and I can assure you that this is a serious level. Bernard Dunne aspired to world title glory and Paul McCloskey can do the same. Martin Lindsay and Carl Frampton both have talent to burn and who knows where the amazing Willie Casey story might end up? Boxing has its detractors but as the most basic of sports, feeding off the hunger and

desire of human nature it will always evolve and compete with the mainstream sports.

“Boxing will always survive; so long as there are two lads who fancy doing something with themselves then they will box,” says Patsy McAllister.

Holy Trinity coach Michael Hawkins also believes that things are moving in the right direction: “Irish boxing is absolutely booming at the moment; both amateur and professional. McCloskey won the European title, Martin Lindsay is a British champion, while big Martin Rogan was on a great unbeaten run and then Bernard Dunne won at world title level. Bernard of course is from Dublin but trained here in the Trinity. Brian Magee as well was here, so it's all on the up at the moment with younger lads doing well. There's a good structure in place and the Ulster Council are now employing a business manager and a full-time talent coach.”

Michael's brother Harry concurs with this view: “The High Performance initiative has brought Irish amateur boxing to heights you never would have believed possible and all credit to Billy Walsh and his team for that. Opposing teams are now looking to avoid the Irish at all top competitions and that has a knock-on effect for people progressing into the pro game.”

Tom Ward, trainer of the McDonagh brothers, feels the domestic scene is thriving: “I haven't seen Irish professional boxing looking so strong in years. When you look at the likes of Martin Lindsay, Carl Frampton and Stephen Ormond then there's clearly a lot of talent coming up, not to mention the established boys like Andy Lee and Matt Macklin.

“We don't have anything to worry about, from a boxing point of view anyway. We have plenty to worry about away from the ring! There are so many shows taking place over here, with quality fights and European titles on the line. It's looking good.”

The final word rests with BUI president Mel Christle: “What has struck me about the last few years is the insatiable demand for professional boxing in Ireland, both North and South,” states Mel.

“When you add up the number of promotions it is mind boggling considering way back in time, even when I was boxing myself, that two promotions in a year was a windfall. I think it works out about one promotion a month at the moment, in a relatively small population. The crowds are very healthy at most shows and well attended events. It seems to only be getting stronger.”

So there you have it. The immediate future appears bright for both amateur and professional boxing in Ireland. The contents of this book and expert opinions of a wide variety of people inside the scene prove this. It appears that we shall be clocking up the miles on the road for many years to come.

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