

WEST ROXBURY ~ ROSLINDALE BULLETIN

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Bringing the fight back to Boston

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Bostonians love their baseball, football, basketball and hockey, but there's one sport that has fallen out of favor among many sports fans - boxing. Roslindale resident and boxing promoter Artie DePinho would like to change that and help revitalize the sport, which has been on a decline for years, due to lack of talent and star power.

When people hear the words boxing promoter, visions of Don King and his big hair come to mind, but DePinho couldn't be more different. At 19, DePinho got his start working for the Providence, Rhode Island company Classic Entertainment and Sports Inc., as the Director of Tickets and Boxer Development.

DePinho, who went to school for Sports Entertainment and Event Management, recently joined the Las Vegas based TKO BOXING Promotions to become the Northeast representative of the company. He said he hopes to bring boxing back to Boston and New England.

"I got involved in promoting when I volunteered to help promote a fight at the Dunkin' Donuts Center in Providence, Rhode Island," he said. "Peter Manfredo Jr. was just coming back from appearing in the reality TV show, 'The Contender'. When someone asked me if I wanted to help promote the fight, I thought they meant just handing out fliers."

A huge snow emergency delayed the fight for a day and that's when DePinho discovered just how much work a fight promoter does and how he wanted to be part of it.

"I saw an opportunity there. I was there working with the fighters and putting everything together. The fight promoter takes on all the risk," he said. "They're the one who pays everybody. They're the one that finds the fighters to fight each other, does the marketing and sells the tickets. I didn't know that at the time, but when everything got delayed, I saw just how much goes into putting on the show."

While working for Classic Entertainment Sports, DePinho promoted over 30 matches and was involved in signing 30 fighters. Some of the shows he promoted have been on ESPN, Showtime and Comcast.

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Artie DePinho and Hammerin' Hank Lundy. DePinho has worked with Lundy since he turned pro. He now serves as his career advisor. Lundy's record is 15-0, with 9 wins by KO.

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"Working on ESPN and Showtime is really top of the line," he said. "I got to meet a lot of the big names in boxing like Joe Frazier, Leon Spinks and Sugar Ray Leonard. I also got to meet some of the big promoters like Don King."

One of the ways DePinho and the new company he works for hope to revive boxing is by helping to build a local fan base for boxers and then foster that talent in hopes of creating a hometown hero that fans can get behind.

"Fighters take great pride in where they're from. They're representing their city, their state and even their country," DePinho said. "And fans love to see their hometown hero make it big. If you look over in England at someone like Ricky Hatton, he's a decent fighter but he's a superstar over there. He can easily draw thirty thousand fans. There's no one here in America who can do that and we have a lot more talented fighters. Hatton is a superstar because he started as a hometown hero. Eventually the whole country supported him and that's what we're trying to start here. We want to start locally and build up from there."

Boston used to be home to a number of boxing gyms and fighters. Roslindale native and long-time boxing supporter, Vinnie Marino used to own a gym in Boston where many fighters came to train. One of the Boston boxers that DePinho would like to see get more respect from the Boxing Hall of Fame is Tony DeMarco, the Boston welterweight who grew up in the North End.

"I think Tony is one of the

best boxers, not in the Hall of Fame," DePinho said. "He was great."

Ed LaVache, owner of Boston Boxing & Fitness in Allston said it's difficult to run a gym supported solely by training boxers. In order to make money from his gym, LaVache said he also needs to run his gym like a more traditional membership driven fitness center as well.

"I couldn't survive just by training amateur boxers," he said. "There used to be government funding for gyms that did that, but no more."

Boston Boxing & Fitness does train a number of amateur boxers though and some have gone on to compete in the Golden Gloves tournament and the larger New England Championships.

"The New England Championships is probably bigger because it gives you a shot at the U.S. Olympic team," LaVache said.

LaVache agrees that in the last few years boxing's popularity has been losing some of its punch, not only in Boston, but throughout the United States.

"We haven't had a really good showing at the last few Olympics and that drains the sport," he said. "In Boston we have a couple of local pros who had really good amateur careers who recently went pro, so hopefully they'll bring back that passion."

Boxer Kevin McBride fought out of Dorchester and went on to beat an already failing Mike Tyson in a seventh round TKO.

According to DePinho, part of the reason for the decline in the popularity of boxing has to

do with the competition being too watered down.

"Right now there are like four heavyweight champions and so many different weight classes," he said, "Fighters are protected too. The best fighters don't have to fight each other. They can fight easier opponents and keep getting wins. Back in the day the best fighters would fight each other and that was for the championship and people got to know who that person was."

DePinho and TKO Boxing are currently not promoting any Boston fighters, but they are promoting three prospects that DePinho hopes are on their way to becoming hometown heroes from New England.

DePinho said fight fans should start hearing a lot from featherweight Matt Remillard from Hartford, Connecticut who is currently 19-0 with 11 KOs to his name.

As a two time WBC World Youth Champion and North American Champion, DePinho believes Remillard has a good shot at being a world champion some day.

One of the marquee fighters DePinho promotes is Providence Rhode Island's Peter Manfredo Jr. The star of the reality TV show, "The Contender" is still a contender with a 32-6 record.

"People got to know Peter from the show so he remains really popular," DePinho said.

Another boxer DePinho promotes is New Haven's Elvin Ayala. With a record of 20-3-1, Ayala has already fought for a world title in Germany, but failed to bring the belt home. DePinho hopes Ayala will get another shot at a title soon.