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FAYETTE COUNTY GYM CONTINUES DECADES-LONG LEGACY

Uniontown, PA – For six decades, almost any kid in or around Uniontown who wants to step into the boxing ring has turned up at Shaffer’s Boys Club. The club was founded by Tommy Shaffer Sr. and always has given local youth a place where they can train free of charge, learning not only the art of boxing, but also ethics and sportsmanship.

Shaffer, born in 1932, was himself a boxer from a young age, winning his first Golden Glove amateur boxing title in 1948 at the age of 16, according to information provided by his son, Tommy Shaffer Jr.

Shaffer was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1953 and served in the Korean Conflict, for which he received eight medals, including the Korean Service Medal, Bronze Star and Good Conduct Medal. His military service didn’t slow down his boxing career, as Shaffer became the All-Army Middleweight Champion with a 38-0 record.

On his return to the U.S., the owner of the former Kacur Athletic Club passed the gym on to Shaffer. By the age of 34, Shaffer had fought approximately 250 amateur bouts and had continued to earn Golden Glove championships. He embarked on a successful professional career, defeating some well-known competitors, including Doyle Baird, the number one contender for world champion at the time.

Meanwhile, Shaffer also touched the lives of even more young boxers through his training and promotion work at the gym. Among them was Richard Giachetti, a Golden Glove champion who went on to work the corner for such big names as Mike Tyson, Larry Holmes and Oscar de la Hoya.

Shaffer, who passed away in 2013, also got to know four-time world champion Michael Moorer when Moorer was just 10 years old, boxing at the Uniontown Holiday Inn.

“I used to fight for Tommy (Jr.)’s father,” Moorer said. “I loved the guy. He was an original. He definitely took no (expletive) from nobody, and I loved that about him. He was an honest, straightforward guy.”

Moorer, of course, went on to a famed career that included four world champion titles in two weight classes: light heavyweight and heavyweight. He is one of only four boxers to ever win a championship in both of those weight classes.

Raised in Monessen, Moorer said he never thought he would move back to Pennsylvania. That is, until he got a call from Shaffer Jr.

“He brought me back. He gave me a call and asked me to be a part of his gym,” Moorer said. “I thought about it, and I said, ‘Why not?’”

So, Moorer headed back to Fayette County to coach kids at the newly renovated Shaffer’s Boys Club.

“I gravitated to doing this just to give back to the kids,” he said. “It’s not about me anymore. To be able to pass the knowledge on to other kids, that’s a blessing.”

Moorer said his grandfather was his trainer, so becoming one himself is like coming full circle.

And it’s not just kids Moorer is training. Shaffer Jr. said he got a call asking whether he knew anyone who could train former Pittsburgh Steeler Le’Veon Bell, who has transitioned from the gridiron to the ring.

“I didn’t hesitate to suggest four-time world champion Michael Moorer” Shaffer explained.

Bell is training for a potential match against another former NFL player, Adam “Pacman” Jones. Shaffer said the bout, dubbed the “backyard boxing brawl,” would take place in Pittsburgh, just before the NFL draft set to be held there next spring.

Despite the big names coming through the doors these days, Shaffer Jr. remains dedicated to continuing his father’s legacy of running a gym that is open and accessible to kids around the area. He noted the gym is free for kids, which allows youth who can’t afford to use other local gyms a place to go.

He said his father’s legacy casts a long shadow. The elder Shaffer received numerous awards during his lifetime, including two Distinguished Service Awards from the Uniontown Jaycees, a Citizen of the Year Award from the City of Uniontown, and the Big Brother Award from B’Nai Brith of Uniontown for his service to youth. But it’s the kids he mentored who memorialize him best.

Shaffer Jr. said of all the people whose names grace buildings and parks around Uniontown, “No one has come close to the contributions and the man-hours that my dad did, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, for 53 straight years. Plus, taking kids to boxing (matches). The kids remember you for the rest of your life.”

Shaffer Jr. said people still approach him to tell him that his dad was like a father to them as well.

“He’s been dead 12 years. It still happens,” he said. “So, this is really about the kids.”

Adults can work out at Shaffer’s Boys Club as well, at a cost of \$35 per month, but kids always have been free – another piece of the senior Shaffer’s legacy that will remain.

“I can never fill his shoes,” Shaffer Jr. said. “His name is synonymous with boxing.”

To learn more about the Shaffer’s Boys Club, follow “shaffersboysclub” on Instagram. To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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For more information, contact Kristi Kassimer Harper, Public Relations Specialist, at 724-437-4571, kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info or Jamie Rankin, Journalist, at 724-437-4571, jamierankin13@gmail.com.