

Chestnut Crossing Resident a five time Golden Gloves Champion

Wilbur Cameron, long time resident of Chestnut Crossing, is a local boxing legend. After an almost instantaneous rise to fame in 1969, he won five New England Golden Gloves Championships and almost qualified for the Olympics.

Cameron moved to Springfield in 1960. Growing up he watched Muhammed Ali rise to fame. He always wanted to box himself but didn't think there were any training opportunities nearby.



He had a vision and a goal, nothing could deter him.

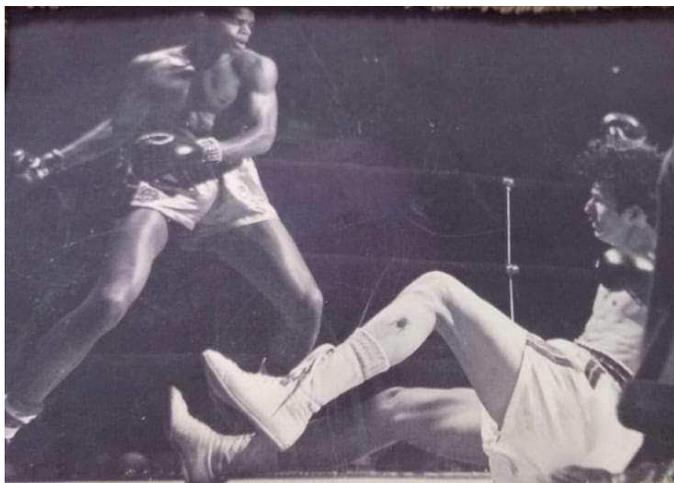
It wasn't until he went to the Dunbar Community Center (which was in the Hill/Mcknight neighborhood) when he was 17 years old to play basketball with friends, that he stumbled on a room with boxing bags and a ring. He never played basketball that day and began training in boxing that evening with coach Duke Belton.

As a brand-new fighter, Cameron learned that if he won enough fights, he got to go to Nationals (which were in Kansas City, Missouri that year). Having never left the Northeast, he set his sites on that plane ride, he had a vision and a goal, and nothing could deter him.

Belton watched Cameron spar and for the first time in his coaching career, allowed a novice to fight open class.

He knew if he fought as a novice, he couldn't make it past the fights in Lowell. He begged his coach to let him fight open class. After saying no many times, Cameron convinced Belton to let him to spar with other open class fighters. Belton watched Cameron spar and for the first time in his coaching career, allowed a novice to fight open class.

Cameron won in Holyoke for the regional title, made it to Lowell for the New England title, and won his first fight there. For his final fight in Lowell, he would be up against a veteran fighter and a Lowell favorite. In the ring, with the spotlight on Cameron, the crowd laughed at him as the announcer informed them that he would be fighting only his fourth fight!



Cameron, left, veteran Joey Francis of Lowell, right, New England Golden Gloves Championship fight 1969. "[This guy from the Lowell paper] took a picture of me dropping him in the second round...no shirts no head gear back then...He's on his way down."



They cheered vehemently for his opponent Joey Francis who would be fighting his 75th fight! At the end of an arduous, exhausting couple of rounds, Cameron recalls, "I put my hand in the center of the ring, they raised my hand. The crowd almost gave me a standing ovation. They really appreciated [that I won]. I never expected that. I thought [there] was going to be more boos and everything but...I beat him!"

Cameron fought and beat numerous fighters in their amateur career, who later rose to world fame.



Cameron waiting to fight Michael Spinks for the final fight at the Denver Nationals in 1974.

Cameron went on to win five New England Golden Gloves Championships (at the time, no boxer had ever won more than three). He fought in many National Championships, and almost made it to the Olympics.

Cameron fought in many tournaments in his career (in exotic locations like Bermuda and Hawaii, and large arenas like the Boston Garden and the Civic Center). He fought and beat numerous fighters in their amateur career, who later rose to world fame. Most notable names that Cameron fought were Marvelous Marvin Hagler, a middleweight world champion in the 1980s; Michael Spinks a light heavyweight and lineal heavyweight world champion in the 1980s; and Kevin Rooney who later trained Mike Tyson.

After tremendous success in his amateur career, Cameron did plan to go pro, he was seriously injured in a sparring match (to prep for his first pro match), and chose not to pursue that path.

In his retirement, Cameron continues to give back to his community on a daily basis mentoring and training young boys in the art of boxing. He ran the boxing training program at the Dunbar Community Center for many years. Today he continues to train and mentor young boys in boxing and life at the YMCA.

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Cameron training a local high school student at the YMCA in September, 2019.

*Do you have a story that you would like to share with the Home City Development Community?
If so, we'd love to hear from you! Email kcharkoudian@homecitydevelopment.org,
or call 413-785-5312 and leave a message for Karoun.*

