



OUABC

Alumni Newsletter

Trinity 2022

Welcome to the Trinity 2022 edition

I had hoped to bring you news of the Varsity Match after not holding one in 2021 due to the pandemic but, as I'm sure everyone knows, the 2022 match was cancelled on the day. I count myself lucky at getting the news having just retrieved my train ticket from the machine at Marylebone Station, and so not having a wasted journey, but I know there were others who made their way to Oxford only to find out on the night. None of this compares, however, to the disappointment boxers will have felt after preparing hard for weeks, only to have the proverbial rug pulled out from under them on the day.

Over time, the full story of what happened might emerge, but now isn't the time to speculate on that. I can report, however, that people much better placed and qualified than me are working hard to resolve the issues that caused the cancellation, and to secure the future of a fixture that is very close to all our hearts.

Anyway, onwards and upwards and this newsletter still stretches to nine pages (in large part due to the contribution of one of my former team mates) and announces the appointment of a new Chair of the Alumni Association, remembers family members who won Boxing Blues for Oxford over the years, features a Q&A with the very much respected Mark Vincent, and includes a new feature in which I recommend a book on boxing to you each term. You might have to indulge me on the last of these but, you never, know, you might just like my recommendations...

Mark Linehan

The OUABC Committee 2021-2022

President: Max Jenkins, Corpus Christi

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The Committee is supported by the following:

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OUABCAA PRESIDENT

I'm delighted to announce that my former team mate Robin Duggan has been appointed President of the Alumni Association. Robin won his three blues at welterweight from 1986 to 1988 and picked up a British Universities title in 1988 too. A difficult sparring partner, but always a voice of reason, he is in my humble opinion perfect for the role.

Robin replaces Sir Bruce MacPhail, one of the founders of the Alumni Association and to whom our thanks must go for providing inspiration and leadership for many years.

BOXING FAMILIES

I thought the team I captained in 1988 might have been a bit unusual to feature two siblings. Robin Duggan boxed and won at welterweight and Simon Duggan did the same at middleweight, having also boxed together in the 1986 Varsity Match. If that weren't enough, a third Duggan - Mike - boxed at light-welterweight in 1991 and 1992. The 1988 team also featured a winning light-heavyweight, John Mark Considine, whose brother Niall boxed at welterweight the following year.

I asked Simon Duggan to reflect on his experience of boxing at Oxford with his brother and he shared the following thoughts with me, in his typical colourful way:

"I went up to Oxford in 1983 and my brother Robin, although two years younger, followed in 1984 as scientists didn't have to do as much reading and preparation for the Admissions Test. I fancied taking up a new sport as, although my alcohol capacity would qualify me for a Blue in most eras, I was on the slim side for a rugby forward and knew I didn't have the hands to play at a high level. I encountered Paddy McGuinness (hush hush) at Freshers' Fair and he was uncharacteristically welcoming and encouraging. I played college rugby and drifted around the fringes of the Greyhounds as a fresher, going on their end of season tour, and made weekly sporadic appearances at boxing training as I fancied getting fitter. The training was good but I struggled with skipping and didn't attract much attention from Alf, Peter and Percy!

Robin arrived in 1984 and we used to go to boxing training together. I was still playing rugby, having been in the OURFC pre-season training squad but getting injured and fed up with the back biting and prima donnas! In my time they never fostered the camaraderie that was so evident when I became involved with Percy's boys! I got a shock when Robin was invited to the Christmas training squad. I wasn't but a few blokes whom I had sparred with, and didn't rate, were! Rob embraced the fierce training regime and clearly improved and was travelling reserve for the 1985 match in enemy territory which we lost on the heavyweight bout, having selected a hefty South African I used to cope with in sparring! That got me thinking!

Determined not to be outdone by junior, encouraged by the great Reed Morgan, with occasional amused encouragement from Percy, whose betting shop was opposite my flat, I trained consistently during the summer term. There were few large boxers and it was pretty obvious that I was a candidate at the heavier weights. The training was enjoyable, the camaraderie was terrific and I was already friendly with Reed, Chris Mack, Mark Linehan and Sam Neaman and related to Robin! I was in the team for all the fixtures in 1985-6, although frustratingly several opponents withdrew. I did act as cornerman for Rob in a cracking bout with Steve Diggie who also made the 86 team. In my final year, I was keen to have something more to pad out my CV in the hope of a graduate traineeship!

Robin and I both boxed in the UHBA Championships which Oxford hosted in 1986. I lost a bloody light-heavyweight semi-final on a split decision, the verdict being announced shortly after Percy had briefed me on my tactics for the final! Rob had a good run and got to the final but had damaged his hand knocking out his semi-final opponent and boxed in the final following a painkilling injection from our esteemed Club Doctor, Stuart "Crippen" Herbertson.

Rob was probably our man of the match in the 1986 Varsity Match, putting us ahead with a convincing points victory over an experienced former police boxer Joe Gorry (who I later met in London boxing circles when Sam Neaman and I boxed for Angel ABC). By the time I boxed we had already won the match and it was a slightly disconcerting experience, trying to focus while everyone else was going mad! I lost a scrappy split decision to a big Tab who was more interested in wrestling than jabbing and

felt rather flat, despite feeling so pleased for my team mates, especially Rob, as family and friends were there and I wanted to put on a good show. There was some limited press attention from the Oxford Mail and The Times about a pair of brothers boxing in the match “for the first time in many years”. Gratifyingly, Rob was referred to as “little brother” which is at least physically accurate!

After a year working, and training at the Angel, losing a hastily-arranged bout when I had only been in the gym for a few weeks, I returned to Oxford in 1987 to do a PGCE. I felt I had some unfinished business with boxing and the Tabs! I had stopped weight-training and slimmed down to middleweight where my height and reach advantages enabled me to box at range, thereby taking fewer punches. I had also improved my defence. Mark Linehan was captain and we did a lot of sparring together. David Holmes had taken over as coach, with help from Henry Dean, and I knew several of the squad. Robin was on top form and we drove each other on although we only ever sparred one round together to save him from further punishment!

Rob was imperious in winning the UHBA Welterweight title. I didn’t get in the team as Mark was first choice middleweight, which was fair enough although he was not as hard as me! We developed a fantastic team spirit, truly a band of brothers, and went into the Varsity Match confident. We knew some of the Tab old blues and fancied that a couple were vulnerable. Our confidence was justified as we outclassed them 7-2 and I got the Best Boxer medal, which helped redress the account with the Tabs, Rob and Mark!

Our younger brother Mike went up to St. Anne’s in 1990, having been reared on, and bored by, these tales of derring-do. They must have worked because he got Blues in 1991 and 1992!”



Robin (left) and Simon Duggan with Coach, David Holmes, in 1988

I can vouch for 95% of Simon's account above! Whilst siblings in the same team only happened one time before (the Thesigers - see below), as far as I'm aware (don't be confused by two "Eagans" boxing in 1923, that was Eddie Eagan who boxed at both light-heavyweight and heavyweight and won both bouts!), a bit of research shows that members of the same family winning boxing blues is not as unusual as I originally thought.

Lord Selkirk - James Douglas-Hamilton - boxed at lightweight in 1962, following in the footsteps of his father, the Marquis of Clydesdale, who boxed at welterweight and light-heavyweight from 1923 to 1925, before becoming Scottish Middleweight Champion. And his uncle, Lord David Douglas-Hamilton, also boxed for Oxford, at heavyweight in 1934 and 1935, and Scotland.

Two other notable boxing families were the Fabers - with brothers Malcolm boxing at light-welter and welterweight from 1960 to 1962 and Trevor boxing at featherweight and light-welterweight from 1966 to 1968 - and the Thesigers - with travel writer Sir Wilfred boxing at light-heavyweight from 1930 to 1933 and his brother Roddy winning his blue at middleweight in 1933.

One family that is unique in Oxford's boxing history is the Newtons. Paul Newton won his three blues in between 1976 and 1979, representing the university at featherweight and lightweight. What he possibly couldn't have predicted was he would have a daughter who would box for Oxford at flyweight in 2009, only four years after the first full blue was awarded to a female boxer. Paul tells the story:

"I went up to Oxford in 1975. My daughter, Kate, went up in 2004. I loved all sport and as the son of a car factory worker and from a council estate, the physicality of boxing held no fears. In fact, I found it quite appealing. I had an unconventional route to Oxford. I failed my eleven plus which took me down the road of attending a series of state schools - a secondary school, a high school, a comprehensive school and finally a grammar school. Kate had enjoyed a more conventional and stable educational experience, but we had a number of things in common. This culminated in us both boxing for Oxford against Cambridge. I am told that this is a first.

Parents invariably do not like the idea of their sons taking up boxing in this modern day, let alone their daughters. So I am often asked if I put pressure on Kate to box. Ignoring the fact that my wife might read this article, the answer is a definite no. Those who know Kate will know that to be true. Did I encourage and support her - yes. Was I more nervous when she boxed - yes. Am I immensely proud of what she achieved - again yes. Like myself she enjoyed all of the things that the club and boxing offered. We made friends outside of the confines of our college and subject, many of whom remain our friends today. We are aware that the club and boxing for Oxford enriched our university experience. Kate more than myself has 'given back' through her involvement with the alumni.

As a sport there is something incredibly special about boxing. First there is the fitness and those who boxed under Henry Dean will remember his punishing Headington Hill runs only too well. Rob Wainwright who played rugby for the British Lions, Scotland and Cambridge was in his time also a boxer. In a recent talk he told the audience that the intensity of the training and level of fitness required for the Varsity Boxing Match surpassed that for playing rugby for Cambridge as well as for Scotland. He did not mention the British Lions, but I did think about Ian McGeechan's motivational speech ahead of the third test against the South Africans in 1997 when he said "You'll meet each other in the street in thirty years' time, and there'll just be a look, and you'll know just how special some days in your life are." And so it is with Oxford boxers past and present. They have shared an incredible commitment to their sport, attained extraordinary levels of fitness and shown immense courage climbing through the ropes in front of hundreds, if not thousands, of people to participate in an intensely physical one on one encounter.

I am therefore immensely proud to have boxed at Oxford in the 1970s; the life-long friends that I have made and to be part of today's alumni, particularly as I am able to share this with my daughter.

Long may the club and the Oxford versus Cambridge experience continue.”



Paul and Kate Newton

The history of OUABC is rich and the work of Chris Mack in compiling the details of past boxers, teams and records is remarkable. This article is certainly not comprehensive and, if I have inadvertently missed anyone out (and I'm sure I have), please let me know and I would be delighted to provide an update in a future edition of the newsletter.

Q&A WITH MARK VINCENT

We all, I'm sure, remember our team members and fellow boxers with fondness or, at the very least, grudging respect. But there are some former OUABC boxers who really do leave a lasting impression on their contemporaries. One of those is Mark Vincent, who boxed at featherweight in 1973 and at welterweight in 1975. Team member from 1973 Peter Davies remembers:

“Mark Vincent came to the boxing training at Iffley Road as a slightly scrawny chap whose appearance belied a sharp intelligence and a compact boxing technique. He had a good ‘punch to weight’ ability. One knew he was clever being a medic and I was conscious of him thinking that he was cleverer than me and me knowing that I knew he was; so we got along fine. I have always admired his resilience and how he has coped with his debilitating illness (Mark is suffering from advanced MS) has been truly remarkable and an example to us all.

A visit to Mark is inspiring and the visitor gets more out of the visit than does Mark, I am sure. The testimonials from his patients on his retirement - with none, as he noted, from undertakers (as doctors bury their mistakes) - speak volumes for him as a doctor.”



Mark Vincent today, and with one of the best boxing-themed cakes you'll see

Mark continues to be supportive of OUABC and kindly donated to the Gallie-Lewis-Dean Gym and his name is on the donor board at Iffley Road. He was happy to answer my questions, and I'm really grateful to him for taking the time to do so, as well as to his daughter Jessica and son Tom for helping with this.

What was your boxing experience before going up to Oxford?

School boxing at Clifton College from age 9. Captain of boxing for the school age 17.

How did you get involved with OUABC?

In my first term, I joined the club.

Do you remember your first bout for OUABC?

Yes - against a Southpaw from a local Amateur club. I won on points.

What did you enjoy most about being part of OUABC?

I most enjoyed the friendships formed, some of which are still going to this day.

What did you enjoy least about being part of OUABC?

Ironically, I was always worried about getting hurt. As a training doctor at the time, I perhaps should have thought about this a bit more!

Which was your toughest bout?

Probably my first fight against the southpaw (I'm orthodox). I had my nose broken by a boxer in the navy but I managed to win this.

Who was your most difficult sparring partner?

Pete Davis, a very talented boxer who was the captain at the time.

Apart from the above, what is your abiding memory of boxing at Oxford?

The camaraderie of the team, and the satisfaction of beating Cambridge. We did so in my first year, which ended a long drought.

Did you box at all after you left Oxford?

No.

What are you doing these days?

Retired doctor with grandchildren. Gardening when I can.

If you could give one piece of advice to boxers at OUABC today, what would it be?

Don't!

In all seriousness, enjoy it as it will give lasting memories.

Who is your favourite boxer of any era?

Sugar Ray Robinson.

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

“Journeyman”, Mark Turley

With so many books, biographies and autobiographies dedicated to the champions of our sport, “Journeyman” offers a very different take on boxing. As the blurb says “Journeyman tells a story that is often purposely ignored - that of the modern day boxers who lose for a living”.

Through a series of interviews with journeymen, Turley tells the story of boxers with records that often feature over one hundred professional career losses, yet whose ability belies these statistics. These are fighters whose role in the professional game is to lose and pad out the record of upcoming stars-in-the-making - the “home” fighters, prospects who can sell tickets on the way to winning careers and possible title shots. Journeymen are not supposed to win, but they are supposed to make their opponents look good, a difficult balance.

Turley travels around the country and speaks to articulate boxers who know their job, and take pride in it, whilst maintaining a love of the sport. Avoiding getting stopped, being subjected to mandatory rest and missing the next payday, is a real risk for these fighters, as much as taking liberties with young prospects and becoming unpopular with the promoters that keep them in work.

The book is a real eye opener to an aspect of professional boxing that goes under the proverbial radar, yet makes up the undercard of shows all over the UK. Without these journeymen there would be no champions. Got to be worth a read...

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Journeyman-Other-Boxing-Business-Perspective/dp/1785311441/ref=sr_1_1?crid=4FIP54GWQSKU&keywords=journeymen&qid=1654083452&srprefix=journeyme%2Caps%2C88&sr=8-1

NEWS

Rob Howard (1993) spotted that Charlie Ogilvie, who boxed at middleweight in 2004 was awarded an OBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours for public service, in his role as Strategy Director, COP26 Unit, in the Cabinet Office.

Rob also brought to my attention reports in the Radley College Archives of two former students and boxers who lost their lives in the First World War - Reginald Hodgson, who won a half-blue for Oxford, and Noel Williams, who won a full-blue for Cambridge.

<https://radleyarchive.blog/2018/03/21/commemorating-the-fallen-of-ww1-158/>
<https://radleyarchive.blog/2018/10/22/commemorating-the-fallen-of-ww1-187/>

This newsletter is for you, the alumni of OUABC. If there are any stories, news or updates on past boxers that you would like to share, please drop me an email at marklinehan64@yahoo.com