

Ken Kleban, Evan Kleban and Curtis Gunn: Get into the fight with HomeTown Boxer

Written by Patricia Gay

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When Ken Kleban, a commercial real estate developer, was a kid, his dad took him to resorts in the Catskills where he saw boxers Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay), Emile Griffith, and Oscar Bonavena working out at their summer training camps. Those boyhood experiences fostered in him a lifelong love of the sport, and he enjoys boxing as part of his personal training regimen.

Fellow Westonite Curtis Gunn, an insurance and finance businessman, developed an interest in the fights at the University of Miami in Florida, where he and his frat brothers would go to the local gym and watch the likes of Sonny Liston spar.

The two met through their service as volunteers with the Weston Volunteer Fire Department, and became fast friends with a mutual interest in boxing.

Last year, while Mr. Kleban and his son Evan, 20, were watching a title fight in Montreal, they noticed on the undercard a contender was listed from Connecticut. “We realized how exciting it would have been to have seen him train in the earlier stages of his career — if we had only known about him,” Mr. Kleban said.

The two of them decided then and there they wanted to get involved in the local boxing community and provide a way for other fans to do so as well.

So, along with Mr. Gunn, they created a website, hometownboxer.com, that provides accessibility to new fighters and allows fans to discover rising stars.

The tagline on the site's home page is "Get in the fight," which they hope other boxing fans will do by becoming part of the HomeTown Boxer community.

"Sure it's fun to watch the pay-per-view title fights, but we are looking to give the fan so much more. We are continually impressed by the level of commitment and openness in these young athletes and their willingness to interact with their fans," said Mr. Gunn.

Promote a future contender

The website features its "Promote a future contender" program, developed with assistance and advice from retired professional heavyweight boxer Gerry Cooney and Bruce Silverglade, owner of Gleason's World Famous Boxing Gym in Brooklyn.



The program is an original one, never seen before in boxing, and was modeled after Kickstarter, an online funding platform for creative projects in the arts. The contender program allows fans to help defray the training costs of up-and-coming boxers (both male and female) while experiencing the highs and lows of their careers.

"Boxing is a very difficult and expensive sport," Mr. Gunn said. "Many kids come from underprivileged situations and have substantial expenses for gym time, training and equipment."

That's where the "Promote a future contender" program comes into play. From photos and biographies listed on the site, fans may choose a boxer to sponsor as well as a level of sponsorship. Bronze sponsorship starts at \$250 a year, Silver sponsorship is \$500 a year, and Gold sponsorship costs \$1,000 a year.

Each level of sponsorship provides the chosen fighter with HomeTown Boxer training equipment and reimbursement for allowable training expenses under USA Boxing guidelines if the fighter is an amateur.

In return, all sponsors receive weekly emails or texts with current and inside information about the fighter and a HomeTown Boxer cap.

Silver level sponsors also receive an expert video analysis of the fighter and an understanding of the fighter's style and fight game plan.

At the Gold level, sponsors get all those things plus access to training sessions, a meeting with the fighter's team, and the opportunity to play an active role in the fighter's career.

Protect the kids

Mr. Kleban believes it is important to have something like the "Promote a future contender" program for young boxers. "Boxing is renowned for shady characters, and while some in the business reportedly have the interests of the boxers at heart, others don't, and a lot of boxers are taken advantage of. We want to protect the kids from unscrupulous people. Not to mention that most boxers have no medical insurance. If they get injured, they are on their own," he said.

Fans will find the athletes they sponsor are very approachable in person as well. "These fighters are slugging it out in the ring and work hard for every penny they earn. They enjoy people taking an interest in them. I think fans will enjoy watching these fighters rise in the ranks," Mr. Kleban said.

Because this is a new venture and concept, Mr. Kleban wants sponsors to know where their money is going.

"It's all invested in the boxer. For example, if you choose the Silver \$500 level, \$350 goes to boxer plus the boxer gets \$150 worth of training equipment from HomeTown Boxer," he said. HomeTown Boxer sponsors a line of boxing gloves, headgear and training wraps.

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“We’re hoping this program encourages fans to get in the fight,” Mr. Gunn said.

For more information, visit hometownboxer.com. The program is also accepting interns. Interested applicants may write to Mr. Kleban at Ken@hometownboxer.com.