

ALLSTON-TAB BRIGHTON-TAB

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Irish boxing legends exhibition at BC

Editors note: The following was submitted by Boston College.

The exhibition "Fighting Irishmen: Celebrating Celtic Prizefighters 1820 to Present" makes its Massachusetts debut at Boston College, presented in collaboration with the New York's Irish Arts Center. The exhibit is free and open to the public, and will be on view at BC's John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections from now through August.

"Fighting Irishmen" is composed of an eclectic collection of boxing artifacts, including prints, photographs, paintings, robes, gloves, boxing bags, films and other items that offer "a veritable stroll down memory lane for fight fans and historians alike," exhibit organizers said.

New England boxers are prominent in the exhibit, including legendary world heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan of Roxbury, who reportedly attended Boston College for a short time, and three-time New England Golden Gloves winner "Irish" Micky Ward of Lowell, who is the subject of a 2007 biography by WCVB-TV and ESPN sports anchor Bob Haloran and of the upcoming feature

film, "The Fighter."

Among the artifacts and pictures on display are Sullivan's fur coat; a blazer specially made for Dempsey; photographs from the archives of Sports Illustrated magazine; Charlie Nash's Olympic jersey when he was fighting for Ireland; photographs of the classic Micky Ward vs. Arturo Gatti trilogy; and historic photos of heavyweight champs Sullivan and Corbett (who gained fame as the man who knocked out Sullivan in 1892), Braddock, Tunney, Dempsey, Cooney and Jerry Quarry; world featherweight champion Barry McGuigan, nicknamed "The Clones Cyclone;" light-heavyweight Billy "Pittsburgh Kid" Conn; and Bobby Cassidy, who was ranked number one in the world as a light-heavyweight in 1975, among others.

The exhibit also includes: a heavy bag from Gene Tunney's training camp; equipment from current female fighter Maureen Shea, used for training actress Hilary Swank for the acclaimed film "Million Dollar Baby," and fight equipment from Ireland's John Duddy. The exhibit also displays three original oil paintings from the Tunney collection by artist

Mahonri Young, Brigham Young's grandson.

Among the items on display is one of the oldest and rarest pieces of sports memorabilia in existence: the mummified right arm of 19th-century Irish prizefighting legend Dan Donnelly, who is slated to be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in June as part of the "pioneer" group. Donnelly was the first Irish-born heavyweight champion; his victory over the English champ George Cooper in 1815 sparked a national celebration, O'Neill said. After Donnelly's death, his corpse reportedly was exhumed for medical study. His right arm eventually was retrieved and placed on view in a number of pubs across the country as a symbol of Ireland's pride, most recently at the Hideout Pub, County Kildare, which displayed the icon for some 50 years. The pub's former owner, Josephine Byrne, has lent it to the "Fighting Irishmen" exhibit.

In addition, visitors can view video of historic fight films provided by the Boxing Hall of Champions during their tours of the exhibit.

The exhibit catalog is chock-full of essays by luminaries of the box-

ing and sports journalism worlds, including Irish actor Liam Neeson, himself a former fighter, who serves as honorary chairman of the exhibit. "Watching two great fighters, evenly matched, is, for me, one of the great visual poems you will ever see," notes Neeson, who has selected memorabilia from his own boxing days on display in the exhibit.

Burns Library is at 140 Commonwealth Ave., Chestnut Hill. The exhibit is free and open to the public. Hours are Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. (except holidays) or by appointment. Venue is handicapped accessible.

For information, call 617-552-3282 or visit www.bc.edu/burns.