

"I don't miss home at all because it's always going to be home."

Tris Dixon speaks to a level-headed Irishman in New York

# DUDDY: I'M LIVING THE DREAM

Photos: Marty Rosengarten & Action Images/Reuters

**T**HERE was no joy for the Northern Irish amateurs at the Commonwealth Games recently but Irish eyes are smiling over in the States.

One star in particular who is shining is Derry middleweight **John Duddy**, whose stock is set to rise further when he boxes on the Miguel Cotto-Paul Malignaggi bill at New York's Madison Square Garden tomorrow (June 10).

Duddy has earned high praise, and a big live and TV following, in compiling a 16-fight unbeaten record in the US.

Tomorrow he meets Chicago's Alfredo "Freddy" Cuevas, who in 2003 went the full 12 rounds with future world middleweight king Jermain Taylor and also holds a victory over Wilfredo Rivera.

In 2004 Cuevas lost to contender Kingsley Ikeke after he was butted accidentally and it went to the cards in the eighth.

So Duddy is making a move up in class. He feels he is ready for it.

"My career's going better than I expected, but I'll just keep my head down and keep working," he said.

"I'm trying to improve everything, I suppose. I'm working hard in the gym and trying to get better at what I'm doing. I try to correct my mistakes - you can't get complacent or you get punished in this game.

"My power has come on leaps and bounds since I was an amateur - that's something we've been working on. We're also working on the basics over and over again, such as head movement and the jab."

His team consists of promoters Irish Ropes, managers the McLoughlin brothers and trainer Harry Keitt, who are all also involved with Duddy's friend and another New York-based Irishman, light-middleweight James Moore.

The Irishman, who admits openly he is in love with girlfriend Grainne Coll, is pleased he has been so well received Stateside.

He said: "I've been accepted well in New York with the Irish, as you'd expect, but everywhere I travel -



**ANOTHER STOPPAGE: Shelby Pudwill is polished off in March**

Chicago, Boston or Florida - I get good support. I'm very fortunate and I'm enjoying it."

And while he is happy to entertain the punters with his generally crowd-pleasing style, he knows results must come before putting on a show.

"I'd rather have a bad victory than a good loss," he said. "All I'm interested in is winning, and if I keep doing that the fans are certain to be entertained and see me fight."

And although home is where the heart is for Duddy, he is loving his time Stateside.

Of a possible return to his native land, he said: "I'm sure it's inevitable that I'll fight back home and in England, but at the minute I'm happy over here and next up I'm fighting in the big arena at The Garden.

"I don't miss home at all because it's always going to be home and I can always go back no matter how long I'm here.

"I'm enjoying myself too much here in America - I'm training every day and I'm living the dream. I'm doing what I really want to do and I'm keeping busy."

He definitely hasn't forgotten where he comes from. He idolises the likes of Barry McGuigan and Steve Collins and was brought into the sport by his father Mickey.

Dad sparred McGuigan, Ken

Buchanan and Charlie Nash and had a brief pro career as a light-welter in the early 1980s.

While Duddy believes his 10-round victory over Julio Jean in February was his best learning fight ("he taught me a few things about the rough and tumble of the game. I could have hit him with a sledgehammer and he wasn't going anywhere"), probably his best performance was against Kevin Rooney's heavy-hitting prospect Lenord Pierre last year.

Former Olympian Pierre was explosive but never got out of the starting blocks in being stopped in a round in March 2005.

"That was a shock to a lot of people," smiled Duddy. "Some were criticising me for taking the fight and when I looked at it on paper he was 16-0 with 11 KOs and I was 8-0. He had a lot of good victories.

"But I boxed all over the world with the Irish amateur team [he lost only 5-4 to America's future Olympic gold medalist Andre Ward in 2001 in Dublin] and felt I had the goods to beat him.

"But never did I believe I'd do what I actually did that day. But things seem to be going my way and I just put it down to all the hard work I do in the gym."

Pierre was recently involved in a wild brawl with Willie Gibbs when he was leading on two cards before Gibbs did his Julio Cesar Chavez-

Meldrick Taylor impression and stopped him with seven seconds remaining in their 12-rounder.

"I felt so sorry for him," said Duddy of Pierre.

Middleweight is definitely John's division: "I love being at this weight - I feel as strong as an ox and I can see myself being this weight for the rest of my career.

"I really don't mind who I fight. At the end of the day an opponent is an opponent, it doesn't matter who they are as long as I'm 110 per cent in myself."

One name often mentioned alongside his is Birmingham-Irishman Matthew Macklin's. While Duddy is aware of his compatriot and says he is "a good fighter", he is only concentrating on one fight at a time.

"I suppose in the future it would be a good fight to have, but I don't really worry about future opponents."

He certainly believes the future of Irish boxing is in very good hands.

"For me, I think it's great. A lot of the guys I was in the Irish amateur team with are now pro and are all unbeaten. Paul McCloskey is 6-0 and Andrew Murray is 6-0, and there's Ben Dunne [21-0] and James Moore [7-0].

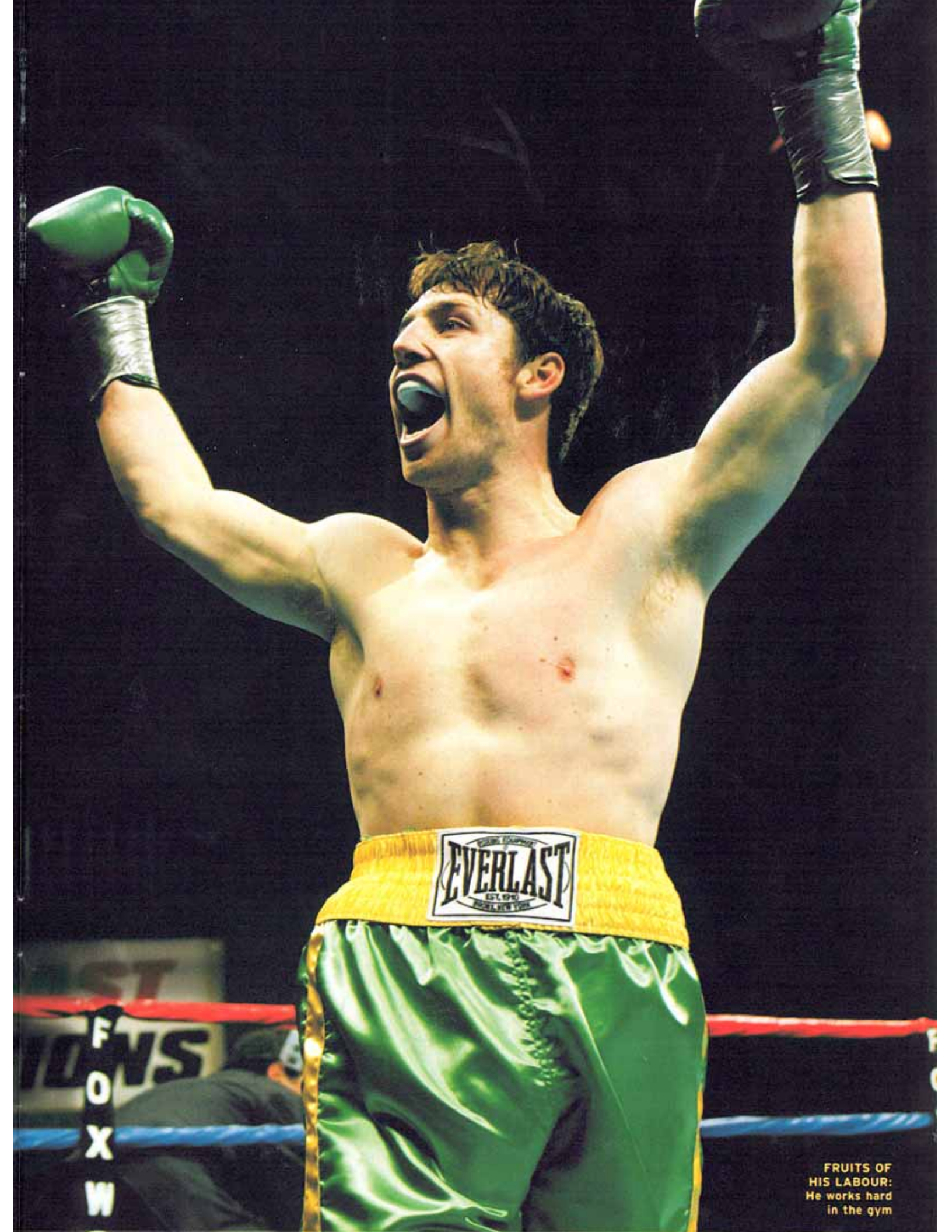
"I think with my generation we're all hungry and we have a good pedigree. I wish them all the success and I think we'll duly have it."

He continues: "It's good to see other Irishmen doing well in boxing, because there haven't been too many of us lately. You can count on one hand the amount of good fighters we've had in the last 10 years. There's been Wayne McCullough, Steve Collins, Brian Magee and Damaen Kelly, but it hasn't been brilliant.

"But now we've exploded on the scene over here and we're seeing a good quality of Irish fighters popping up."

John signs off by saying we haven't seen the best of him yet.

Then it's back to his base in the Bronx to live the dream... of one day becoming a world champ. ■



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**FRUITS OF HIS LABOUR:**  
He works hard in the gym