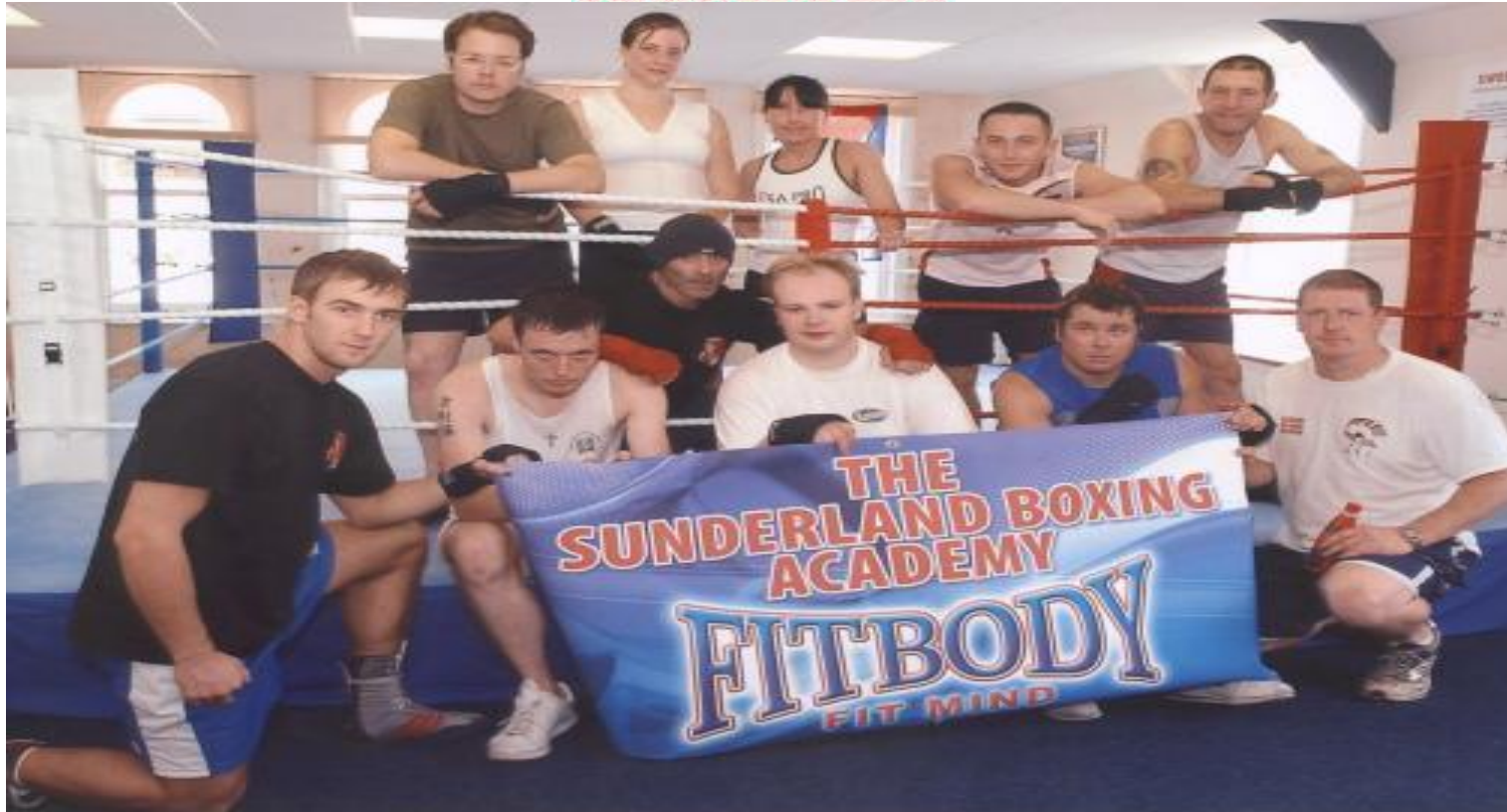


Sunderland Echo



Academy of fight : Coaches Ian Watson and Graham Hill with learners including Echo reporter Ross Robertson (Front, centre) on the Sunderland Boxing Academy foundation course.

BOXERS SHOWN THE ROPES

As contestants battle it out on the American reality show the contender, a veteran Boxer in Sunderland is running Britain's first Boxing foundation course for wearside's would-be champions. Reporter ROSS ROBERTSON forfeited his Sunday morning lie-in to go along and give it a bash.

COURSE IS A LABOUR OF GLOVE FOR WEARISIDE FIGHTER



Helping hand : Coach Graham Hill gives Ross Robertson some tips on the basics of Boxing.

A Brutal sport which relies more brawn

Than on brains – if that’s your opinion of boxing, you’ve never tried it. And I can tell you that from personal experience after putting my overweight, under-used body to the test on Britain’s first boxing foundation course.

With 30 years of boxing experience, winning 16 of his 20 amateur fights, Ian Watson set up the Sunderland Boxing Academy at his city-centre gym, Fit body, Fit mind to train boxers of all ages and experiences on the finer points of the sport.

His six-week course looks at the basics of boxing – stance, flexibility, hand-eye- coordination.

“When I started boxing 25 years ago at Lambton street boys’ club, coaching consisted of ‘go forward’ punching. I wish I’d been shown then, some of the aspects of what we want to teach people on this course.” He said.

The first two classes looked at stance and four of the basic punches – and if you think that doesn’t merit two two-hour sessions of instruction and practice, think again.

The boxing stance developed as the ideal body position for the sport, designed for balance, defence and readiness so you can withstand and deliver punishing blows in fights.

Everything is taken into consideration from the positioning of your feet up, providing optimum balance and flexibility. I was amazed at the science involved.

“You need to keep your feet apart. If they’re in line or too close together, I can push you over.” Said Graham Hill a boxing coach on the course., as he gave me a shove to demonstrate.

The class also made me look at Muhammad Ali’s catch-phrase “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee” in a new light.

Graham said ; “ The key is relaxation – you’ve got to be relaxed. People think it’s all about being tense, but it’s not.

“But relaxation is the hardest thing to master.”

After fumbling through the footwork and basics of the boxing stance (with a lot of help and patience from the coaches) I looked at some of the punches and would-be boxer must master.

These, again are based on the theory and practice of the physics of the human body.



Showing the men a thing or two : Elizabeth Allon, is one of the Women attending the course.

Ian said ; “It’s not like in cowboy films, where you see a guy bring his fist right back before he hits someone. That doesn’t deliver any more force than punching from your chest.”

As I struggled to get the various parts of my body lined up and moving in the right sequence to deliver the perfect punch, Paul, one of the coaches, gave me a helping hand.

“If I asked you to throw a stone as far as you could, you wouldn’t just use your arm, you’d put your whole body into it. It’s the same when you throw a punch.”

Your stance when throwing a punch is also crucial, as you have to ensure you don’t lean forward or back, which puts you off-balance.

You need to twist rather than lean. Imagine you’ve got a pole going through the centre of you and you’re just turning on that, “ said Graham.

After putting on wraps and getting a modest grip on some basic punches, it was time to don a pair of boxing gloves and put what I’d learned into practice on the punch-bags.

In case you are wondering why I need wraps and gloves to just punch away at pads and bags, don’t forget, boxers wear gloves to protect their hands – not their opponents.

Women’s boxing is the fastest growing sport in the UK, and the Women on Ian’s course showed they were every bit as good as the men – if not better.



PUT ‘EM UP ; Ian Watson, of the Fit Body, Fit Mind gym, which has started boxing classes

FITBODY

FITMIND

Sunderland Echo

“Look at that,” said Ian. “The Women are showing the men how it’s done. You’d better make a note of that!”

it doesn’t take a genius to work out that boxing, even training, has a heavy impact on the body. The session started with a warm-up and finished with a warm-down to minimise the risk of strains and cramp.

Nevertheless, my muscles are still giving me the odd painful reminder of my exertions.

Boxing is definitely a sport that keeps you fit, even if you’re just training – just what I needed after a week at my desk.

- For more information on future boxing courses at the Sunderland boxing academy, call Ian Watson at Fit Body, Fit Mind on 0191 567 5771 or Email : admin@fitbodyfitmind.co.uk