

Boxing prepares them for life

Movie tracks Rogers Parkers

By FELICIA DECHTER | STAFF WRITER
fdechter@pioneerlocal.com

Life, for some, can be a grueling fight, a constant battle to overcome odds.

It can be done, however, as independent filmmaker Kevin Berrey shows in his, "Shadow of a Bout," a documentary about four Rogers Park teen boxers, "braving the blows dealt by life and their opponents in the ring."

"Shadow of a Bout" tells the story of learning to lose, lose, and lose in order to win," said Berrey, a former Evanston resident now living in New York. "It's an inspirational documentary about four Rogers Park teens and their boxing coach, coming together to surmount extraordinary odds in the boxing ring and in life. Their hard work and sacrifice have earned them better health, self-confidence, and a safety net of friends to prepare them for some of the hardest battles one faces in life."

It's also, Berrey said, a portrait of the Loyola Park youth boxing team, and depicts the humanity behind the fights and the struggles of everyday people. A free screening/fundraiser of the nonprofit film will be held at 7 p.m., Wednesday, June 7, at No Exit Café, 6970 N. Glenwood Ave.

Berrey said some monies raised will go toward defraying screening costs, yet the major-

ity of funds go toward letting the current team keep up its "valuable practice," of traveling to out-of-state competitions.

He decided to write the film about the boxers—who are all from single-mom families—after being introduced to them by his brother-in-law, Steve Hoffman, then an assistant coach of the team.

Berrey said after meeting the boys and Coach Barry Levy in 2001, he was impressed, and he decided to choose that particular team because of what Levy brought to it.

The teens were training as a part of the Chicago Park District youth boxing program at Loyola Park, and "the rela-

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Kevin Berrey

tionship between the coach and the boxers, as well as the way the boxers related to each other intrigued me," Berrey said. "Boxing is not a team sport, and yet they had the makings of a team or a sort of surrogate family."

Berrey started developing the film in 2001, and he followed the boys and their families. The "center of gravity," of the film, he said, was the team shooting to get to the National Junior Golden Gloves tournament in Syracuse, New York.

As Berrey got to know the team better by traveling to

competitions and taping their fights, they welcomed him into the fold, he said. "I did not really know the boxers and they were young, between 10 and 14, when I first met them," Berrey said.

"There was definitely something about them, they had been working with Barry for years and they had a lot of courage for kids. I admired that about them. They also had to accept my presence for the film to work the way I wanted to do it, which they did."

Berrey said the purpose of the film—which he created along with photographer and co-editor Stephan Knuesel—is to "capture the exciting experience of being with this team of unique kids, and to bear wit-

ness to the importance of there being such teams and programs in the first place."

"To me, the sport is just as important as the participation in it and way it can make life more bearable for kids who come from families and whole neighborhoods that do not have it easy," Berrey said. "It is not a message-based film, but personally, I really want people to come away with a sense of the complexity of our communities. I find it inspiring to see how an individual can make a difference in others' lives."