

# FIGHTING STEREOTYPES

Leslie Arnold certainly does not strike you as a boxer.

The 22 year old Glendon student does not fit any of the stereotypes surrounding boxers. She is definitely not a stocky, musclebound, toothless savage. These, however, are the misperceptions with which Arnold has to deal.

A fourth year student taking a concurrent program in psychology and education, Arnold cuts a lonely figure in the male dominated sport. A boxer for four years, she is accepted as part of the amateur boxing fraternity but is tired of training only with men. Arnold is now looking to spread the boxing gospel to other women.

Raving about the physical and intellectual stimulation the sport gives, the future elementary school teacher started a women's boxing clinic last fall at the Thistletown Boxing Club in Etobicoke.

Arnold always had this unlikely interest in boxing because of her family. "My grandfather (Harry Arnold) was a coach; he trained in New York and he also coached the University of Toronto varsity team. He used to train with Tiger Williams, who's my great uncle, Sammy Luftspring, and all those guys."

"But how I actually got into training was because of a friend I had who was training at U of T and I used to help him hold his focus pads (large pads worn on the hands which the person training hits) . . . Eventually I got really bored so he started showing me how to hit the focus pads. It was a lot of fun and I started from there."

That was four years ago. Arnold has been training seriously in gyms for the past three and a half years, overcoming the initial skepticism

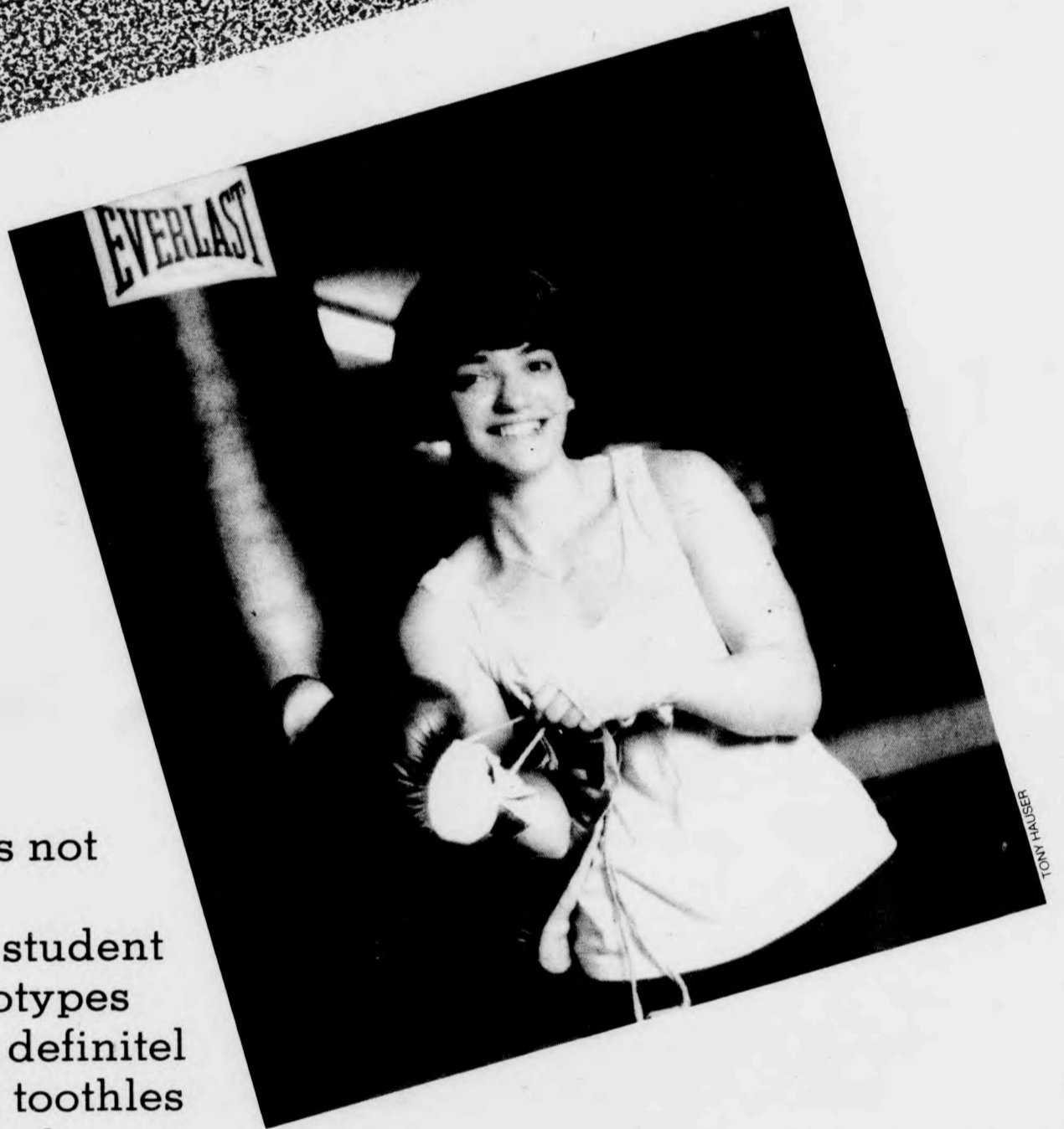
she encountered from her friends and coach.

"At first, I think people were really afraid I was going to get hurt. I've been in the sport for over three years now and I've never been bruised. You're working with coaches and they're not going to put you in a situation where you're going to get hurt, so those types of fears have dissipated."

Arnold does not remember any type of resistance to her involvement in sports. "My friends were amused (at first) but most of them think it's really great and they come to the gym to watch; they get a real kick out of it. Everyone's been really supportive and I never had to defend why I was boxing."

Arnold also received an amused reaction when she approached her first coach, Boris Gitman. "I had kept up with amateur boxing and knew there was a very famous coach emigrating from Russia. When he came here I approached him." Gitman accepted her as a student but Arnold had to prove herself before the Soviet emigré took her seriously.

"He (Gitman) just thought it was a joke so I had to do a lot of talking but he eventually took me on. I'd say the first two of three months I was with him he really didn't pay much attention to me but then they notice you're coming to train every day, that you're serious about it, and he started taking a lot of



interest in me."

Even with her family's history of boxing, Arnold is still confronted by people perplexed with her pugilistic choice. "Before I got into boxing I was semi-interested in fitness in general so I did the dancercise routine. It was fun but when you do that, or do weights, or a general workout, I felt I was working out for the sake of maintaining body shape."

"There's no skill involved in dancercise. There's slight coordination but other than that there's no real discipline involved. I may be biased but I feel the same way about weight training. I'm sure there is some skill involved in the lifting of weights but it's minimal. It's really the number of hours you put into it. Whereas in a sport, there is a real skill, a real discipline, there's a totally different element there than just training."

Arnold was seeking some sort of activity that was more stimulating than dancercise, both physically and mentally. Boxing was that sport.

"When I go to the boxing gym now, my goal is not to lose weight, my goal is to become a technically skilled boxer," Arnold says. "And because it's a real discipline, it's also a lot more intellectually stimulating. Boxing is a highly technical sport so that the more involved you get into it, the more you reach the point where you have to start refining everything you know."

So why not squash? It is a technical sport that demands constant refinement and a high level of skill to excel in. Arnold is quick to respond, giving the impression she's been asked this question numerous times before.

"(The difference between) boxing and squash, to me, is the difference between chess and checkers. There's definitely skill involved in checkers but chess is really intricate, there's a lot of thinking going on, there's a lot of concentration. The other reason is because of the nature of boxing, it's a lot more intense. If you make a mistake in squash, so what, you lose your point. If you make a mistake in boxing, you can get hurt."

The high stakes and the payoff that they bring appeal to Arnold. "If you manage to get through three rounds and you have fought a really good match, the type of feeling you get is a real euphoria. I don't know if a lot of people walk off the squash court feeling as if they're on Cloud Nine."

"When you walk out of a ring and you have had a lousy fight, it's tough, it's really tough. You can't blame it on your ball, you can't blame it on your racquet, it's just you."

Arnold is much like an ambassador for the sport; she worries about the negative image boxing has and constantly tries to clear away the misconceptions surrounding it. She is convinced that amateur boxing is the most physically and mentally challenging sport there is and wants others to see the light. Arnold does not want the poor reputation pro boxing has of brawling gladiators and high-rolling Las Vegas bookies to spill over onto the amateur side.

"There is a big difference between pro and amateur," Arnold says. "Because amateur boxing is involved with teaching kids and there's no money involved, they're much more strict with their rulings. You don't fight if you