

Rainbow Hall To Riches - A Dylan Moran Story



Dylan Moran pictured at the Raging Bull Kickboxing Club in 2014 Photo: Noel Browne



Like many, Dylan is convinced the future of Waterford boxing lies in safe hands with brother Mason (12).

Jordan Norris

The world of boxing is a very lonely one. It's cruel, tough and not for the faint hearted. This was known to Dylan Moran all his life, but never more so than on June 28th last.

10-0 professionally, the Kilmac kingpin headed to the Resort World Catskills Casino in the US, home of Mike Tyson.

His opponent was Dennis Okoth, a seasoned amateur with a mixed record, but one who could pack a punch.

The fight started well for the 25-year-old, picking off his opponent with the consummate ease his fans have now become accustomed to. Three rounds later, it was all over, but this time it was Dylan on the floor.

The days after could probably be best described as a moment of epiphany for Moran.

The dream had come this far, there were changes that needed to be made, and there was no time for giving up now. The humble beginnings which made the fighter the man he is today still lie very close to heart, but the criticisms also act as a motivator.

"The aftermath of that was crazy, absolutely crazy. You really realise how alone you are in boxing I suppose. Everyone else gets on with their lives - boxing is my life [...] I had the fight, what happened happened. It shouldn't have happened but it did. Then you get home and unpack the case and everyone that's with you goes their separate ways. Then it's like wow. It really hits you.

"I suppose it was a major break point, you have critics on the internet saying he's been found out, he wasn't good enough. I just said to myself, look Dylan, self-pity is going to get you nowhere. I have a choice to make - I'm either going to go up from here or I'm going to go down and up is what I chose. It happened, it's boxing for God's sake - I'm not superman, I made a mistake and I got caught. I can honestly say you learn more in a losing dressing room than a winning dressing room and that's a fact."

The rebuild from that point brought Dylan to Germany and Liechtenstein, but it was long before that the origins of this particular dream were sewn.

An amateur career littered with success came to a stop when decisions and 'politics' so to speak became involved, as an 18-year-old, Dylan decided that he would not put his hard and soul in for it to be continually broken, whilst also knowing that it was not yet the time to turn professional.

"Professional boxing was always the end goal. I had a year or two to kill and I just ended up kickboxing, my Dad got me kickboxing with Billy O'Sullivan, and yeah - amazing two years. Travelled the world with that, picked up numerous titles and then I was of age to turn professional and headed off to Manchester and here I am. It's been a mad story."

There was never any particular point in time for the 25-year-old 'Real Deal', where he thought that this is it, I can make a living from this now - that notion has always been in his head, from being a young lad running through the fields of Kilmacthomas, fighting in Rainbow Hall and in Lawlors' Hotel Dungarvan.

Early professional victories in England and Ireland then propelled Dylan to Mexico, and the perspective that left him with, then cemented the notion that his dream had most certainly come true.

“Many a time I walked away from it, got a job, tried to do what everyone else was doing and it just didn’t feel right, it wasn’t what I was supposed to be doing.

I’m like how did I ever end up fighting out in Mexico? – To me, I’m just this kid that comes from Kilmacthomas you know. I grew up in Ballybeg, spent the second half of my life in Kilmac, the two of them places in the sport of boxing are very minuscule – they don’t really exist in the world of professional boxing. I just had this little idea in my head, running the fields out in Kilmac, and I ended up in Mexico with a bag on my back fighting in a 6,000 seater stadium.”

Soon after his stint in Central America, off headed Dylan, willing to make the necessary changes to propel his career to new heights, to Germany and Liechtenstein, where he would sign a dream contract and live in a world where distractions could never get to him, the foothills of a mountain, going in as a sparring partner for the WBC Champion, Abass Baraou.

“Basically, these sparring partners are brought in to be a punchbag for the week. I went against the grain though, and I gave it to this guy. At the end of it, the guy who owned the facility just asked me if we could have a meeting, and said look I like what I’ve seen of you all week, an Irish lad to come over and give as good as he got. What’s your situation?”

“I said I was signed in America at the moment. He put an offer on the table which was way better than what I had in America. He said look, leave me deal with it and he did. It came to a conclusion where everyone was happy and I moved to Liechtenstein, now I’m living and training over there.”

Victory over Michael Likalu set Dylan back on the right track again, before fighting on an exclusive card at the Stanglwirt Hotel in Austria – home to the training camp of brothers Wladimir and Vitaly Klitscho, a regular haunt of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Eastern Europe’s richest sons.

“I was fighting on this show, only six fights and there were literally just loads of upper class millionaires smoking cigars watching us beat the heads off each other in the ring. It was the maddest set up I’ve ever seen, another crazy experience but got the win there, boxed out of my skin and lone behold, Gennady Golovkin’s manager, Tom Loeffler, happened to be there.”

“He’s a major player in boxing. After the show he rang my promoter, wanting to know who owns the Irish kid that fought – he says he’s mine, Loeffler liked what he saw and said if you can get this guy a ranking belt, I’ll take him to America for the big fights. He got me the WBC shot against the German champion and if I win that when it happens – we’ll be getting onto Loeffler and heading to America, hopefully to Madison Square Garden or Vegas on some undercard.”

Ferenc Hafner would stand in Dylan’s way first before his proposed bout with Deniz Ilbay to enter the top seven welterweights in the world, and it was a fight that simply could not have gone much better for the Kilmac native.

“America happened for the right reasons, I was cutting corners and doing things I shouldn’t have been doing. When I moved to Germany, I was really living the life over there. No distractions, you’re with other boxers who want to go as far as you – constantly within that environment, around that energy – that just pushed me on.”

“The German lads said to me this guy isn’t very skilful but he’s tough and rugged and will give you a hard eight rounds. I took him out very early and we were all shocked. That was one of my most clinical performances.”

As an individual, Dylan Moran is determined to give back to the people who gave him the most in life. Recent times have seen some fantastic gestures from the welterweight star, offering to help out those in need financially at Christmas time, whilst also recently announcing that he would personally pay for any frontline worker to come to one of his fights in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dylan also runs a gym, attempting to be the role model for young Waterford kids that he in a sense

never had.

"I wouldn't ever dream of forgetting what I've been brought up on. Ballybeg, Kilmac – all lovely people. Who am I to be putting myself above anyone because I've had a little bit of success in boxing? I have a gym now for a lot of kids coming through who never had any idols, parents not giving them good instructions for the ring or for life, and I took the role of teaching these kids the tricks that I wish I had when I was their age.

"I took a liking to it. It's not anything put on. Just me, as a person. Boxing to me is just something I grew up doing, it's not – oh look at me I'm a boxer. It's just second nature to me. If I couldn't fight – I'd be good at nothing else! It's just normal to me, that's just my human nature and if I can see that I've got a little bit of a pedestal to spread a bit of positivity, paint a good picture for the kids coming through then if I can do that you best believe I'm going to use it."

As for the immediate future – Dylan like all of us is sitting with hands tied. No one knows when his fight with Deniz Ilbay is going to happen, but he's completed a nine-week training camp, stayed fit, worked hard, taken up plenty of long distance running and will be ready when the time comes. As he says, when you don't have a fight date in boxing, it's hard to stay in the gym, keep the gloves on and beat the bag. It's important to stay fit in other ways too.

As for the future which lies beyond that, Dylan assures me it's in safe hands, by virtue of his 12-year-old brother, Mason – who is making his own waves in the world of boxing. Dylan's plans at present would in an ideal world see him win the ranking belt, defend that on a few occasions, pick up another and then fight for a world title within two years – whatever legacy he leaves behind, he remains adamant that it will be eclipsed.

"Mason Moran is going to be the one. The kid is gifted. I'm on a good roll at the moment but I did it on my own in a sense – just me and my Dad. He's coming through, watching me do it all. The experience this 12-year-old has, no other in the country has it. He's been in all the dressing rooms, seen the arguments, seen the losses and the wins. He's there absolutely every step of the way, soaking it all in – always boxing and on top of that he has talent to burn.

"In an ideal world, by the time he's old enough to go professional, I'll be slowing down by then and be able to take him along the way, hopefully I'll have a lot more contacts around the world and I can just set things up for him and see how it goes but yeah – great fighter, loves the sport and he's one to watch out for. I've four or five cousins in St Saviours Boxing Club as well, so our family name will be around for a very long time!"

The best way to summarise the essence and ethic of Dylan Moran would be to analyse the following philosophy. I asked Dylan about fighters of old, and particular inspirations in the world of boxing – with the influence of his father obviously playing a major role. He refuses to give any names, on the simple basis that can't come and do anything for him.

"If you want to do something, you've to go and do it yourself. If you don't do it, it's not going to be done – your Mam can't do it, your Dad can't do it. They can help you but everyone has their own life and if you don't do it, it won't happen and that's a little rule that I go by. Anyone that's successful in whatever walk of life, I take motivation from that and it just shows anything can happen."

A love of his county and the people who've supported him to date lies very close to this talented boxer's heart, recalling the days as a young man 'bopping' around Rainbow Hall, telling everyone he would bring real boxing nights to Waterford. Soon he could very well be a world champion, he could very well have his homecoming fight – and the boy from Ballybeg and Kilmac with a dream, can tell us it came true.

With the attitude he's shown in the face of adversity, it's impossible to argue that every success is not merited.