

VESTED INTEREST

Meet the personalities
at the heart of the sport
With JOHN DENNEN



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HIGH LEVEL:
At a Commonwealth
reception Williams
[right] presents Prince
Charles with a Boxing
Academy wristband



MENTOR:
Williams helps
to guide young
people in the
gym at the
Boxing Academy
and became
London
champion this
year [below]

**'I'M TRYING TO
USE MY MISTAKES
TO TEACH OTHER
PEOPLE NOT TO GO
DOWN THE SAME
ROAD AS ME'**

Meet
Jermaine
Williams,
a man who's
had to learn
the toughest
lessons the
hard way



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Amateur Editor

JERMAINE WILLIAMS is a strong fighter. The middleweight won the London stage of this year's England Boxing Elite championships.

He's also the head of boxing at the Boxing Academy in Hackney. The Boxing Academy, which used to be a charity but is now a free school, combines academic tuition with boxing for young people at risk of exclusion from school.

"I understand where the young people are coming from and am really hard line on boundaries and discipline, which boxing teaches as well. To be able to channel anger, because young people are quite angry. They need that sort of attention, a mentor's positive attention," Williams tells *Boxing News*. "They have all sorts of influences from gangs, they see a lot of things going on around them, which is easy to get dragged in to."

It's a great school doing important work. Jermaine also became the first boxer to represent them in the Elite championships. He's the perfect person to work at the school. He has learned

what the pupils there ought to know. And in his life he learned these lessons the hard way.

He was born in Kingston, Jamaica and grew up in a scarcely believable environment. "My mum, she was working long hours so she didn't have time to discipline me," he recalled. "So I was on the street all the time. It was a bad area. There were shootouts when I was growing up. One story – once I had to hide behind a wall because there was a football match happening and out of nowhere a car pulled up and it was like a Western, guys were just shooting at each other... I was so scared, I'd never known anything like that."

He was nine years old. He became desensitised to that violence. He was sent to live with his father where life only became harder. "I was a boy version of Cinderella. I had to wash the clothes, I had to clean the house. I wasn't allowed out to do any sport. I used to love running," Jermaine said. "If he came

home and didn't see me, he would beat me. I was abused a lot as a young person and, when I say beaten, it started off with belts and then it escalated because I was getting used to belts. It escalated to sticks and it escalated to the fan belt from the engine. At one point I got hit with a machete as well, not chopped, but the flat side of the machete. Anything he could find.

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"I used to cry myself to sleep at night wondering why." He would eventually go to London, England, to live with an aunt. Jermaine faced a new set of challenges here. "I was bullied at school for my accent. I was racially attacked a few times by a group of boys and just the general walking on the street you have cars screeching, people shouting random racist stuff at you," he said. "Pretty much out of the frying pan into the fire."

He was 12 years old. Teased for his clothes and his shoes, he began shoplifting. "From JD Sports,

TX Max, to try and get the nicest stuff because I wasn't getting it from anywhere. That was my justification for stealing. Then I fell in with the wrong crowd," Williams said.

After his time in school finished, the Home Office turned down his immigration application. At 16 years old he was an illegal person, he couldn't work, claim benefits or even, without a national insurance number, go to college. "I had no paperwork that would allow me to access any further education or anything. So after that I was on the streets a lot, trying to make money, again with the wrong crowd, we started doing street robberies, then we started hustling. It kind of escalates, escalates," he recalled. "I was looking for a family basically, and I found that in friends at the time."

A street fight saw him arrested and sent to prison. He had a knife in his possession, a weapon he didn't use in the fight but carrying it meant he faced a severe sentence. He spent three months on remand at Feltham. His time in prison was violent. A minor argument quickly became more serious. "He must have been a heavyweight, if I was to put it in

boxing terms," he recalled. "Next thing I know he headbutted me, held me down on the bed and started choking my life out."

Williams managed to escape his clutches before guards broke them apart. "I was contemplating revenge," he said. "A week later I got released on bail so that revenge never happened, thankfully."



Williams enrolled himself in a multi-skill course in Lambeth, opposite Fitzroy Lodge, one of London's great amateur boxing clubs. Eventually he made his way to the gym. "I got in the ring with [coach Mark Reigate] and he gave me a body shot. The wind, the life came out of me," he said. "One body shot and I felt it straight out and I thought I need to learn that. From then I dedicated to it, did my runs, Mick Carney as well as at Fitzroy Lodge."

He has Fitzroy Lodge tattooed on his right arm. "It changed my life," he said. "I would probably be in prison or dead. Or worst case scenario sent back to Jamaica, probably dead as well."

He had found the family he had been looking for all along. Now he is making a very real difference to the lives of similar young people. "If I had someone like me when I was younger, I'd have had a different life right now," he said. "You can't really change the road you've gone down, you just have to use it to the best that you can. And that's what I'm trying to do here. Use my mistakes to teach other people not to go down the same road as me."

What can I say? This boxing is a tough game. Lost 3-2 on a split decision tonight against Ukraine. Everyone I've spoken to thought I should have won and got the decision. Anyways that's boxing for you. Coming home with a bronze medal to add to the collection. I've had an amazing six months training, winning gold at the Commonwealth Games and medalling at the Europeans. Look forward to having some time off when I get back and live a little bit of a normal life for a couple weeks before we get back to the graft. Two years till the Olympic Games and I'm getting better and better. Oh and as for the tip, got headbutted a few times so sat in a Bulgarian hospital waiting to be stitched. On a positive, I still got my teeth. Thanks again for all the support and messages guys.

As LAUREN PRICE can attest, the European Championships is a brutal tournament. The middleweight can be proud of her bronze medal. The championship was concluding as *Boxing News* went to press. We'll have a full report next week.

We grinding.
HODDSDON expect to have a strong squad at the Haringey Box Cup.

Great days sparring
in Kazakhstan – 6 x 3.5 min rounds with a new opponent each round. Can only do me good to be mixing it with the world's best. Looking forward to a well-deserved rest. CONOR LOFTUS on a gruelling training camp overseas.