

John Duddy wears Custom Everlast Jacket Style Robe pg. 65

The Fighting Irish-John Duddy

Introducing the newest Irish sensation.

WORDS. NOAH FOWLE, PHOTO. NURA QURESHI

On the eve of St. Patrick's Day, "Irish" John Duddy was more than 3,000 miles from his home, but as the bagpipers first notes brought the 5,000-plus crowd at the Theater at Madison Square Garden to its feet, the raucous cheers could have placed him back in County Derry, Northern Ireland. Making his way to the center of the ring amidst the chants of his name, Duddy was poised to make yet another statement in his budding career. In less than two minutes he did just that – knocking out Shelby Pudwill with a crushing right hook, claiming the vacant WBC Continental Americas Middleweight Title.

Duddy's precise dispatching of his opponent seemed a mere formality in the evening's festivities as his fans rushed him to celebrate after the final bell and announcement. Only too eager to reciprocate their enthusiasm, Duddy would take more than a half hour to return to his locker room as he signed autographs, snapped pictures, and shared the congratulations of his fans.

In today's world of superstar athletes and big money contracts, Irish John Duddy is a rare competitor whose combination of hard work, humility and humor has made him a fan favorite both in and out of the ring. Perhaps the most exciting prospect in New York City's crowded fight scene, Duddy continues to take his success with a grain of salt, while at the same time ratcheting up his performance in each successive fight.

"I'm only out to prove something to me self," he says. "In this sport, it's too easy to be made a fool of by fighting bums."

Sporting a record of 16-0 (14 KOs), Duddy is walking through his opponents and proving that he is ready for each new step that he takes. After only two and half years as a professional, Duddy is ranked 41st in the world. But even more impressive than his decisive and often quick victories is the close relationship he maintains with his admirers.

"People like him because they can relate to him. It's like a mirror effect," says Duddy's promoter and fellow Irishman Eddie McLoughlin.

"He trains hard, three times a day, because he respects the sport and its fans."

Duddy is thankful for all of his support and knows how to satisfy the boxing world with his explosive style.

"The reception of the Irish community is great; they really come out for one of their own," Duddy says.

But Duddy is drawing the attention of more than just the Irish media, fighting up and down the East Coast from Boston to Florida.

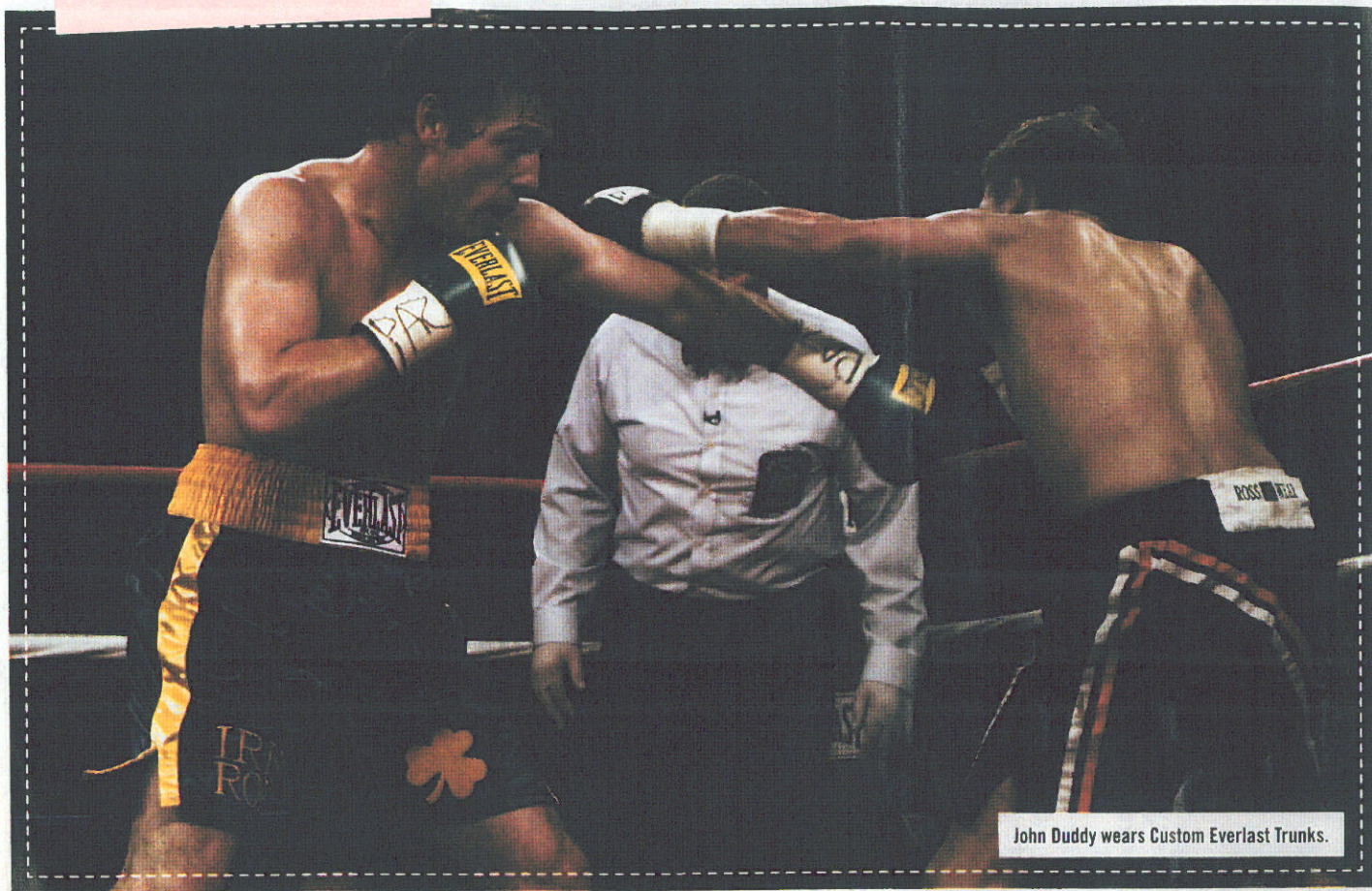
"The world is looking for a star, and the way the world is today, people have more in common," he says.

With his roots as a blue-collar worker in Northern Ireland, Duddy indeed has a lot in common with the average boxing fan. He is familiar with life outside of the limelight and knows how to live up to his fans standards – through plain old-fashioned hard work. Sparring at Brooklyn's famed Gleason's Gym, Duddy is as popular there amongst the trainers, managers and other boxers as he is with his fans. At the close of his workouts at Gleason's, Duddy cools down with a unique exercise reminiscent of his days as a construction worker. Dripping with sweat, he pounds on the hulking lorry tire with a sledgehammer. Harry Keitt, Duddy's trainer, developed the exercise to simulate wood chopping, a workout practiced by many of boxing's greats.

Says Keitt: "John left Ireland for a purpose. Sure he's making friends in the process, but he's taking care of business first. A lot of guys have talent, but that's not what makes a champion. It's desire. John has it, more than anyone I've seen. And you can't beat that."

Despite the constant attention he garners, Duddy maintains an even keel. "I think that I've actually become more popular in Ireland since I left," he says. "Each fight is like any other. Some are just wrapped in a prettier package. At the end of the day it only matters what happens in the ring, and I am taking it one fight at a time."

Photo: Nura Qureshi



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