

### **The Belfast Boxing Ring – Rinty Monaghan**

#### **Outline Proposals for the Erection of Statues within the City of Belfast**

The Belfast Boxing Ring was established in 2010 with the aim of celebrating the rich and diverse history of boxing in the city. In addition, the project seeks to acknowledge the valuable contribution which the sport has made to the social fabric of Belfast. This will be achieved by the erection of three statues at the undernoted sites:

- Cathedral Gardens – statue to Rinty Monaghan
- Dunville Park – statue to John Caldwell
- Woodvale Park – statue to the boxing greats of the Shankill Road.

Belfast has a long and proud association with the sport of boxing. The city can boast a long line of amateur and professional champions who have placed the name of Belfast on the international map and represented their city with skill and pride. For a relatively small place in international terms, Belfast has produced seven Olympic boxing medallists and a wide and ever-growing range of professional champions at World, Commonwealth, European, British and Irish level. The sporting achievements of our boxing fraternity over many generations have been legendary. These achievements which continue to the present day give us untold enjoyment and a great sense of pride.

The sport of boxing has consistently proved to be a unifying force that has time and again crossed the physical and sectarian boundaries of the city and provided, in particular, a valuable outlet for young persons from all areas of the city. The story of Belfast would not be complete without recognition of the contribution made to the life of the city by all of those involved in the noble sport of boxing. We are rightly proud of the rich contribution which boxing has made to the sporting, cultural and community wellbeing of our city. We are proud of our boxing heritage which continues to inspire, in particular, many of our young people to dedicate themselves to emulating their heroes.

The Belfast Boxing Ring is a non-sectarian and not-for-profit project which aims to celebrate those citizens who, through dedication and boxing excellence, have brought pride to the city. This will be achieved – subject to a range of public and private funding – through the erection of three statues which will mark the proud legacy which the sport has given Belfast. The Belfast Boxing Ring seeks to promote what unites Belfast as a city and can promote community cohesion: the sport of boxing is a perfect basis for this aim.

### **Statue to John Joseph ‘Rinty’ Monaghan at Cathedral Gardens Belfast**

After initial consultation with a wide range of interested bodies and agencies, the Belfast Boxing Ring has agreed that, initially, the project will concentrate on securing adequate funding to erect a statue to Rinty Monaghan.



This Cathedral Gardens open space, which is situated beside the University of Ulster and St. Anne’s Cathedral, has been chosen for the statue to John Joseph ‘Rinty’ Monaghan 1918-1984. It is owned and managed by the Belfast City Council and is managed as an open space for recreation. The original area was highly commercialised but was devastated by the German attacks on Belfast in April 1941. The area lay vacant and was known locally as ‘Bomb Square’ until it was redeveloped as part of the regeneration of the area which coincided with the establishment of the University of Ulster Art College in the 1960s. The Gardens serves as a gateway into Belfast city centre and the rejuvenated Cathedral Quarter.

The location which we would seek to erect the statue to Rinty Monaghan would be within the Gardens at the junction of Lower North Street and York Street. It is a 'neutral' space within the city and, as such, the statue would not be contentious, nor 'owned' by any one community. The statue will be approximately 10 feet in height, cast in bronze and placed on a marble base.

### **Rinty Monaghan – A Proud Career in the Ring**



Born in Lancaster Street in 1918, close to the proposed site for his statue, Rinty Monaghan's fighting career drew huge crowds from all parts to Belfast's King's Hall. In October 1947, he claimed the National Boxing Association's flyweight world crown after outpointing the American, Dado Marino at Harringay Stadium in London. The mantle of undisputed champion of the world rested on his shoulders after his defeat of the tough Scottish fighter Jackie Paterson on 23 March 1948. Monaghan became the first Belfast boxer to claim a world title and, effectively, put the city on the world sporting map. However, soon after, a long-standing chest complaint forced his retirement as champion. In 1950, Monaghan's trophy-cabinet contained the British, European, Commonwealth and World crowns. Of the 66 official bouts he fought during his illustrious career, he won 51, drew 6 and lost 9. Monaghan endeared himself to his supporters after his fights by singing *When Irish Eyes are Smiling* to the King's Hall audience, which joined in the singing.

In reality, Rinty Monaghan was one of Belfast's most loved and treasured sons. A true character who epitomised the Belfast spirit and was an inspiration to us all. It is fitting that his memory should be preserved for future generations. His appeal as a boxer, an entertainer and as a symbol of all that is good in this city is unquestionable.

### **Potential Benefits to Belfast**

The statue to Rinty Monaghan would provide a focal point and a tourist attraction at a key entry point to the city. Influenced by the plethora of public statues in Dublin and elsewhere, the Belfast Boxing Ring believe that this statue would:

- help regenerate the area and provide a valuable attraction that would enhance the visual amenity of the area;
- would be welcomed on a cross-community basis as Rinty Monaghan was a hero to all communities in the city whose fame crossed sectarian barriers;
- mark the valuable contribution which Rinty Monaghan make to sport in Belfast; and
- create a source of community-base pride and ensure that the name and achievements of Rinty Monaghan are remembered in perpetuity.

### **Community Involvement and Funding**

The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Rinty Monaghan occurs in 2014. We believe that this would present an appropriate opportunity for the unveiling of this statue. It is estimated that the costs associated with this project would be in the region of £50-60,000. However, it is the aim of the Belfast Boxing Ring to work in conjunction with Belfast City Council – who own the property – to minimise the costs associated with this project.

The erection of the Rinty Monaghan statue is considered to be the primary aim of the Belfast Boxing Ring. We have established a significant support base within local communities and among all political parties. In addition to public funding for the project, the Belfast Boxing Ring will be undertaking a significant programme of

fundraising, together with seeking substantial patronage from a number of individuals who are linked with boxing. We will seek to work in conjunction with local communities in the New Lodge and Tigers Bay in order to garner support and a sense of ownership of the project.

We would be grateful to discuss this matter further with the Members of the Committee.