



Stacey Lyall, mother of three, spends time at Quinte Bay Boxing club sparing and learning with a community of women. Lyall boxes as a form of freedom, “I do it to let some anger out,” Lyall says. “I’m not an angry person, but it’s a release.”

THROWING PUNCHES

Story and Photos by Hannah Eden

“I believe all sports are for male and female. So why would boxing be any different?”

- Stacey Lyall



Lyall takes part in a gruelling ‘after session work out’ at Quinte Bay Boxing Club. Lyall attends boxing three times a week as part of her fitness routine.

THIS IS THE MODERN WOMAN. I watched as they fought and ran and punched with their fearless, tireless energy in the boxing ring. These women in the John Howard Social Club building, sweating under the florescent lights, were the purest image of a modern woman. My own prejudice about female boxing ran quickly out of the door. I had entered in as the four women took part in 30 minutes of intense workout and core training – which, in my uneducated mind, looked more like grunting at the top of their lungs while the pounding of fists competed to be heard. These women were hard-workers. “This isn’t boxercise,” spat the coach. “There is no dicking around here, this is a real sport.” Most of the women in Quinte Bay Boxing Club are young mothers. In this small community of female boxers in Belleville, women laugh to each other as they throw punches intended to break bones. Bouncing backwards and forwards on the hall floor, Stacey Lyall, a mother of three, grabs her keys, thanks the coach for the great work-out and skips out of the ring saying, “Got to go pick up the kids, bye!” It wasn’t always like this. ***** The Olympic Committee Executive Board did not recognize female boxing as a sport until the 2012 Olympics in London. Despite the historical evidence that boxing has been a competitive sport since 688 BCE, it has taken over millenia for this highly physical, contact sport to be recognized professionally for females.

The International Female Boxing Association is the voice of female boxing in a male orientated sport. One of the primary goals of the IFBA is to develop female boxing into a sport which will persuade Olympic Committees that women’s boxing is worthy of being included in future world games as well as garnering support for the future induction of women in the Boxing Hall of Fame. However, despite the necessary yet slow progress, female boxers have been pioneering their way through a male dominated community for years. Since the mid-90’s, Savoy Howe, the founder of Toronto Newsgirls Boxing club, a club offering special classes for female victims of violence and at risk youth, has been tirelessly devoting her time to the creation of equal opportunities for women. In November 2006, Howe’s hard-work finally caught media attention as she opened Canada’s first and only all-female and female-owned boxing club. It wasn’t until over half a decade later, in 2012, that the Olympic Committee recognized female boxing as a sport. While the international sporting organization continues to squabble in the public arena, Lyall wrestles with her own commitments as a mother and a boxer. “I am pulled in every direction during my daily life and I give 100 percent of my time to work and my kids,” shares Lyall. “When I go to boxing I leave my kids, husband and work at the door. This is one thing that is for me and only me.” The heavy, hot sound of fists hitting gloves is juxtaposed to the feminine dance Lyall creates with her feet as she

waltzes across the ring. Always paired with one or two partners, exclusive friendships are fused by casual conversation at the beginning of the session, as the women take turns to talk about their work week and their home life. The gentle reminders of what the women have left behind sit in pink gym bags on the side-lines. Engagement rings and car keys are exchanged for wrist-wraps and skipping ropes. Hunton, coach of both the male and female boxing groups, has seen many try and fail at keeping up with the workout. Men and women alike usually leave after the first two sessions, barely making it through the core training. Gender is clearly not a saving grace against the trials of a competitive training session. “My thoughts are that I am a strong woman that takes pride in exercising and staying fit,” says Lyall. “Boxing is a difficult sport, it pushes you to your max capacity and I love feeling mentally exhausted after one hour of boxing.” Her alternative sport involves rounding up her two oldest daughters to sit down quietly and complete math homework before a family meal. “If I had the option I would be at home with my kids everyday,” shares Lyall. However, despite the clear femininity exhibited in Lyall’s appearance and welcoming demeanor, becoming a female stereotype is the last thing on Lyall’s mind. “I believe all sports are for male and female,” said Lyall, “So why would boxing be any different?”



Lyall comforts her daughter, Callie (three) after a bump on the head during play-time. One of the Lyall family rules states “Keep your hands to yourself.”



Lyall spars with a partner at the boxing club. “This is the one thing that is for me and only me,” she says.