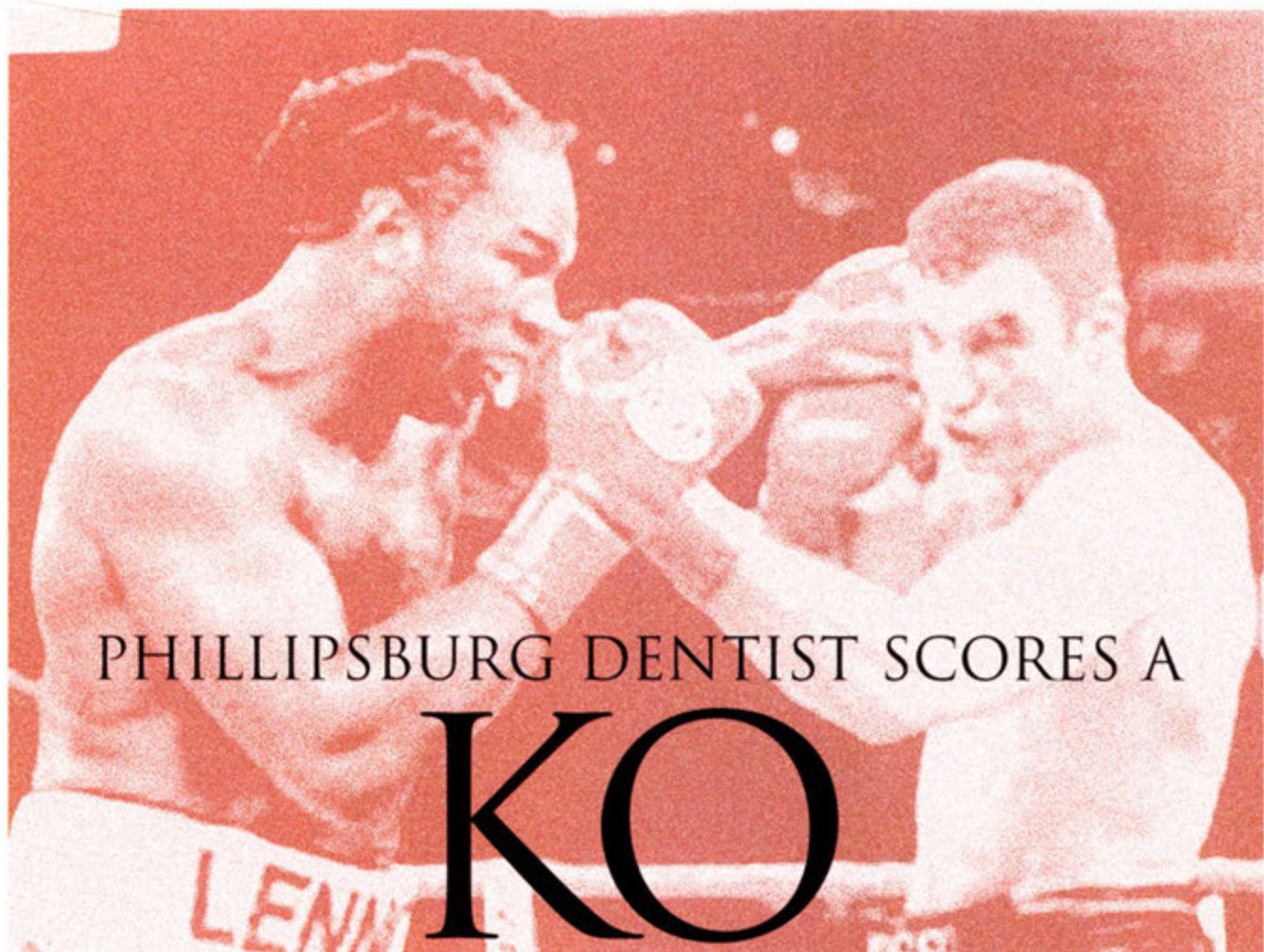


By Jack Romig



PHILLIPSBURG DENTIST SCORES A
KO
 FOR PRO BOXING

“It is a great thrill to feel that all that separates you from the early Victorians is a series of punches on the nose,” wrote the journalist and fight fan A.J. Liebling. And the chain of pain Liebling imagined is as real for boxers in the Lehigh Valley as for any pug anywhere. When you put on gloves and step into the ring, you enter a long line of those who hit and get hit – literally absorbing a harsh craft and delivering it to others.

Dr. Jeffrey DeMartino, today a Phillipsburg cosmetic and laser dentist, started his amateur boxing career at St. Anthony's Youth Center in P-burg. When he was a boy, his father, also a dentist, fashioned custom mouth guards for him.

But the younger DeMartino joined



Dr. Jeff DeMartino's invention helps protect fighters, like Lennox Lewis.

the ranks of the initiated for real when he was an undergraduate boxer at Notre Dame. DeMartino fought in the Bengal Bouts, a tournament at the university that raises money for overseas Catholic missions. “I got caught one time with my jaw loose,” he says. The blow did more than rattle DeMartino's wits. “My jaw was temporarily dislocated,” he says. “I still have some remaining damage, a little click in there.”

SOME PUNCHES
 YOU NEVER
 FORGET

DeMartino knew that when a boxer starts a bout, his teeth are clamped

securely into his mouthpiece. At that point, the old-style "boil-and-bite" guard – it's actually steeped in hot water and then bitten to conform with the fighter's choppers – may be effective. But as the fight goes on, even a superbly conditioned athlete shows strain, a gathering weariness from constant movement, punches thrown, and shots received to the body and head. To keep the air flowing, a tired fighter may start breathing through the mouth with the jaw a little slack. And the wrong punch, like the one that stung DeMartino back at Notre Dame, can do serious damage.

"It's not only the teeth and jaws that need protection," DeMartino says. "If your jaw is loose when you're hit, the impact of a punch can reverberate through the whole skull. A very important reason for mouth guards is to prevent concussions."

DeMartino saw the need for a guard that would maintain a reliable airflow from the start of the fight to the closing bell, while limiting the possibility of a concussion. He went to work designing just such a guard, and the payoff for his efforts was the Bengal Bite®, a mouth guard designed to accomplish the twin protections he had in mind. In time, DeMartino would develop a whole line of Bengal Bites, the name commemorating his ring experiences in college.

FAST FORWARD TO THE 1990's

By then, DeMartino had been to dental school at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, and his practice included a boxing immortal, Easton's own Larry Holmes. In '96, Lennox Lewis – then still a contender for the heavyweight crown – was preparing at a resort in the Poconos for his bout with Ray Mercer, an Olympic gold medallist and former heavyweight champion.

Lewis's mouthpiece was split in sparring, and the British-born fighter's trainer appealed to Holmes for help in finding a replacement. The champ recommended DeMartino, who came through on short notice with a pair of custom mouth guards. Suitably re-equipped, Lewis prevailed over Mercer in a bruising ten-round decision at Madison Square Garden. Lewis went on to become the heavyweight champion of the world – and eventually he would own at least six Bengal Bites, one of which is on display today in DeMartino's dental office.

DeMartino's custom guards have pro-

tected other well-known boxers, including the devastating welterweight Thomas Hearns and Holmes himself in some of his later fights. Consistent with its namesake tournament, the Bengal Bite mouth guard has produced profits that were shared with overseas Catholic charities.

DeMartino Advanced Cosmetic and Laser Dentistry, 256 Roseberry St., Phillipsburg, 908-859-5260
www.demartinodental.com

See more on page 20



Photos courtesy of Dr. DeMartino

Easton's own Larry Holmes has been one of DeMartino's patients.



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LOCAL INTEREST

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GRASS ROOTS



GOLDEN GLOVES

By Jack Romig

"You don't need some thugged-out persona to enjoy boxing," says William Miranda of the Round 1 Martial Arts and Boxing Academy in Emmaus. Under Miranda's tutelage on a recent evening, five boys and one girl pounded the heavy bags, danced on their toes, and dropped to the floor for a fast round of pushups. Though Round 1 teaches all manner of fighting, it is one of the few remaining gyms in the Valley that still features traditional boxing.

Miranda grew up boxing in Queens, in the sort of community training program that once was far more common across the country. It mattered to be able to take care of himself, but to Miranda boxing registered strongly as a mental contest. "I liked learning the craft of it – learning to hit smart, thinking moves ahead, letting them see what you want them to see while you're setting them up for something else later."

Sly and strong, Miranda enjoyed considerable success in the amateur ranks. He won the New York Junior Metro Games, the New York and Regional Junior Olympics, and the Silver Gloves at Madison Square Gardens' Paramount Theater (in the New York Golden Gloves tourney).

The trainer praises his sport for delivering one of the best workouts available, as well as self-confidence in his trainees. "You get fitness out of boxing, and you don't have to get punched out," he says. "We're very careful when we're sparring, and even though I think of boxing as a sport that's geared toward individuality, we train together and become a confident team."

Round 1 Martial Arts & Boxing Academy, 10 N. Third St., Emmaus, 610-965-3150 www.round1pa.com