

## Bleak days for Livonia boxing club

By Brad Emons  
staff writer

Something is missing at the Livonia Boxing Club. The musty, old smell common around a gym just isn't there.

It would be tough to recreate Rocky's script here.

Tucked away in the basement of the fire station off Middlebelt Road, just south of Seven Mile, you find compact quarters, with all the necessary equipment neatly stashed away. The mirrors, heavy bag and ring are all in place. You can find gloves or headgear by simply opening a cupboard door.

Paul Soucy, the man who organized the club nine years ago, has seen a lot of changes and often felt he was like a gypsy, moving from old Jefferson Elementary School on the south side of Livonia to the Jackson Community Center (midtown) and now a new, more modern and clean home (northside).

Several fighters from surrounding areas, including the muscular pro Booker T. Ward from Ann Arbor, find their niche these days at the Livonia Boxing Club.

GONE ARE regulars Dick Quilton, Craig Payne, Rick Longberg and Danny Marderosian. Quilton, once Soucy's close associate, left the club several months ago. He's faded away as has Payne, Longberg and Marderosian.

During 1983 and 1984, the gym was a beehive of activity, but interest has waned of late.

Soucy, whose enthusiasm never wavers for the sport, continues to moonlight as a manager and coach, hoping as he says, although not prejudiced, to find that "Great White Hope."

When Payne, the black super-heavyweight, made his bid for the U.S. Olympic Team, (he fell short in the Olympic Trials Box-offs to Tyrrell Biggs by a 3-2 decision) hordes of Rockys came out of the workbench.

But those days have gone. "They've closed a lot of gyms down and a lot are coming here,"



The Livonia Boxing Club, despite some rough times, remains a haven for young fighters like Scott Daniels and Rob Diffenbaugh.

said Soucy. "But we're getting near to an Olympic year and the interest will pick up again. Hopefully somebody will walk in and be as good as Payne."

"I TRY TO RUN two or three shows a year, but for some reason, the amateur shows are not drawing. But I'll never give up."

Soucy stresses sparring and has revamped his coaching staff, bringing in such persons as Ypsilanti's Greg Owens and Detroit's Dave Mundy. He also works with Westland's Roger Coon on his staff.

While Soucy enjoys the luxury of a bigger volunteer staff, including a board of directors, He doesn't have to worry about keeping the club afloat financially anymore.

"I don't have to sell as many raffle tickets and beg the public," he cracked. The LBC has received almost \$6,000 since 1983 from the Amoco Corp. The donation is placed in the name of Ed Merlo Sr., a truck driver for the oil company from Dearborn Heights. Merlo is a former boxer and

his son, Ed Jr., participates in the program. He is a student at Bishop Burgess High and sports a 12-2 amateur record.

Another local charity, the Hearts of Livonia Fund Inc., kicked in \$1,500 to go toward the LBC program.

BUT DESPITE the infusion of funding, Soucy is looking for fighters, ones who will rise at dawn to train, like 14-year-old Scott Daniels, a 132-pounder from Westland, and 15-year-old Rob Diffenbaugh, a 119-pounder from Livonia.

"I alternate getting up with them each morning (to run) because I've got a lot of faith in them," said Soucy. "Right now I'm putting in as many hours as I did back then (with Payne)."

In only his second amateur fight, Daniels emerged victorious at a junior tournament, held Nov. 28-29 at the Howard Dell Community Center in Pontiac. Daniels evened his record at 1-1.

On the same card, Diffenbaugh lost a close match but sports a winning record at 3-2.

Soucy also has high hopes for Livonian John Larkin, a 20-year-old University of Michigan student who captured his fourth straight fight on Dec. 15, a unanimous decision in a Senior Novice bout across the border in Windsor.

"JOHN TRAINS hard and is very sincere," said Soucy. "He's about ready to go into the Open Division." With LBC boxers winning six of their last eight fights, Soucy is looking to the future, but he needs more bodies.

There's a \$10 fee to join the club, which is open 6:30 to 9 p.m., Monday through Thursday.

"Sometimes we'll get 25 to 30 on a night and about half come from the city (Livonia)," Soucy said. "There's plenty of room and we'll be open during the Christmas holidays."

The LBC's next competition, according to Soucy, is next month at the Silver Gloves Tournament in Pontiac.

work and a lot of sparring.

"1987 should be my year."

Through the efforts of Corradi, Darnell nearly had former world welterweight king Wilfredo Benitez as an upcoming opponent for a Jan. 23 card at the Trump Plaza in Atlantic City, N.J., but the deal fell through. Corradi also manages light-heavyweight Jim McDonald, a native of Flint, who will fight Prince Charles Williams on that card for the U.S. Boxing Association title.

"We offered some substantial money, but they (Benitez camp) turned it down," said Darnell's manager. "We're going to get a 10-round fight against a name fighter, probably something on ESPN. It won't be too hard. Steve has a good record and good appeal. Everybody would like to fight him now."

## boxing

should have put him out," Corradi said. "Steve didn't pursue him, and I don't know why."

Darnell, who knocked out Armando Guzman in the second round on Nov. 7 on ESPN-TV's card from Lake Tahoe, isn't worried about his future.

"I THINK I might be getting a little stale, but I accomplished what I wanted this year," he said. "Now it's time to move into the top 20 in the world. Now I'm going to be fighting animals. Right now I want upper body strength. I'll do some Nautilus

## sports shorts

### ● ROBERTS AT ARENA

Alex Roberts of Bloomfield Hills is a member of the University of Michigan hockey team that will compete in the 22nd Annual Great Lakes Invitational hockey tournament scheduled for Saturday-Sunday, Dec. 27-28, at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit.

Roberts, a defenseman who graduated from Lahser High School, is among a number of younger players who dot the Wolverine roster this season. Junior center Paul Rossi of Birmingham also will represent Michigan in the tournament.

Roberts selected Michigan over Michigan State and Western Michigan. He said the toughest opponent he's faced so far in his career is Jimmy Carson — the Grosse Pointe who currently is playing for the Los Angeles Kings of the National Hockey League.

This year's GLI features tournament co-hosts Michigan and Michigan Tech, plus Western Michigan and Michigan State University. Michigan plays Tech 3 p.m. Dec. 27, while Western plays State 7 p.m. that same date.

The championship game is slated for 7 p.m. Dec. 28.

The GLI is one of three major collegiate hockey championship tournaments slated this winter for Joe Louis Arena. The Central Collegiate Hockey Association (CCHA) championship will be held March 6-7 and the NCAA tournament will be held March 26-28.

A season ticket for all three championships is available for \$89 and a GLI series ticket is priced at \$22. Individual tickets for the GLI are priced at \$9.50 and \$8.

For group rates or general information, call 567-6000.

### ● BASEBALL CAMP

Macomb County Community College's Physical Education Department will be hosting a Holiday Baseball Camp Monday-Wednesday, Dec. 29-31, at the South Campus Fieldhouse.

All interested grade school through college level players may register. The instructional camp will consist of clinics in hitting, hunting, throwing and catching, pitching, middle infield play, first and third base play, outfield play, base running and sliding and stretching skills.

Len Perkins, MCC baseball coach and camp director, has combined a staff of coaches with 30 years experience. The staff consists of Macomb assistant coaches Cliff Duncan, Ron Paukenhagen and Jim Bresclimi, Grosse Pointe South coach Don Griesbaum and Warren Coussino coach Pete Martin.

The \$50 camp fee includes a Holiday Camp T-shirt and use of the available fieldhouse facilities — four batting cages, hitting machines, pitching mounds, tees, weight room and track.

Visiting college coaches, major leaguers and professional scouts

will be invited to attend.

For further information or to register, contact Perkins at 445-7110.

### ● FOOTBALL COACH NEEDED

Birmingham Seaholm High School is looking for a head varsity football coach.

Teaching vacancies are anticipated for the 1989-90 school year which will be appropriate for the person selected for the coaching position. Salary will be determined through placement on the teachers' salary schedule.

Candidates should send a letter and resume to James Liddle, Director of Personnel, Birmingham Public Schools, 550 West Merrill, Birmingham 48012.

### ● FULL OF HOPE

Martha Camp of Birmingham is a member of the Hope College women's swimming team.

Camp, a Seaholm High School graduate, is a sophomore and returning letter winner.

### ● CURLING SCOTS

The Detroit Curling Club of West Bloomfield will host a match against 20 Scot hurriers from the Royal Caledonian Curling Club of Edinburgh, Scotland.

The match is scheduled to take place at the Detroit Curling Club 11 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 21. The Scotsmen will curl against DCC curlers from Royal Oak, Clawson, Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Southfield, Walled Lake Northville, Sylvan Lake, Davisburg, Flint and Detroit.

The Caledonian Curling Club is considered the "mother club" of all curling clubs. Since the Scots are considered the originators of curling, Scottish thorns are looked upon as premier events.

Scotland and North America have been curling in each other's area — alternating every five years — since 1902. The Scots have been guests of the Detroit Curling Club seven times during that span which makes the DCC the most visited curling club since the start of the exchange.

For more information, call 661-2690.

### ● PHILLIPS TOP COACH

Darrell Phillips, girls tennis coach at Birmingham Groves High School, has been named Region 5 coach of the year by the Tennis Coaches Association of Michigan.

Phillips, a business and distributive education teacher at Seaholm High School, has been the girls tennis coach at Groves the past seven years. His teams have compiled a 56-36 record while playing highly competitive schedules over that span.

The Falcons finished fourth in the region this past fall behind Birmingham Marian, Birmingham Seaholm and Farmington Our Lady of Mercy high schools. All three of those schools finished among the top 10 at the Class A state meet.

## Hawk gymnasts fall

The Farmington Harrison gymnastic team opened the season on an inauspicious note Monday losing to Birmingham Seaholm, 115-25-103-75. Tracey Solomon and Sharon Lawson were the top scorers for the Hawks.

Lawson won three events: the uneven parallel bars (8.4), balance beam

(8.15) and floor exercise (8.8). Solomon placed first on vault (8.55), second on bars (7.55) and tied for third on balance beam with Seaholm's Beth Hockman (7.4).

For Seaholm, Erin Ryan was second on vault (8.05), Lee Hammond was second on beam (7.75) and Hockman was second on floor (7.8).

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