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THE BOXER

CALEB TRUAX

IS FIGHTING
HIS WAY
TO THE TOP

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Engineered with all the right tools, the 'Truax train' is full-steam



ahead toward boxing stardom. Next stop:

THE GOLDEN AGE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG

BY BOBBY HART

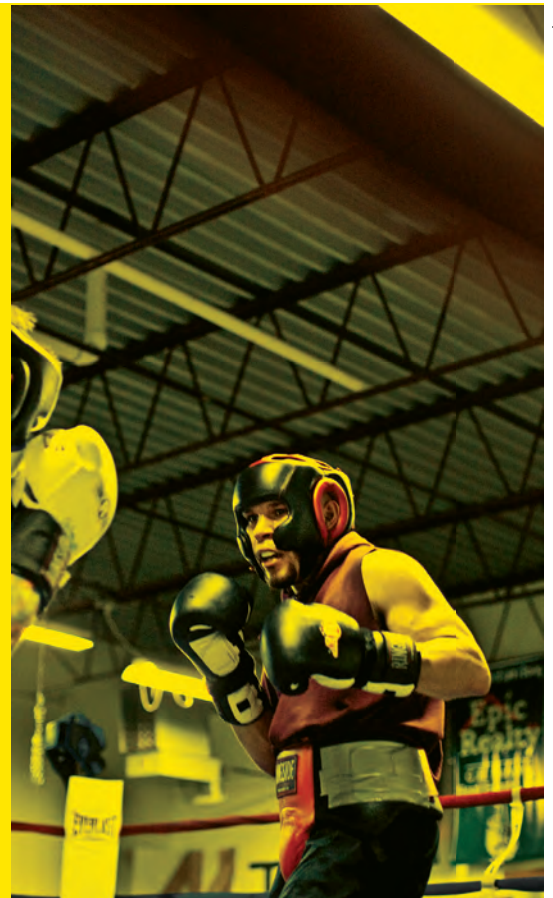


Caleb Truax spent most of his life as a team player. A 2002 Osseo High School graduate, he played football and baseball for the Orioles, and even played Division II college football for Virginia State University before deciding to hang up his cleats after a knee injury. But when he put on a pair of boxing gloves and stepped into the ring for the first time as a 20-year-old at a Toughman contest, Caleb was all by himself, staring at an opponent who desperately wanted to lay him out.

“Just one on one, it doesn’t get any better,” says Truax, now 26. “When you win, it’s all you. There’s not a better feeling in any sport that I’ve been in than once you get your hand raised at the end.”

Truax, who was named *Boxing Digest*’s “Prospect of the Month” last April, has had his hand raised a lot since he started boxing six years ago. As an amateur

in 2006, he was the USA Boxing State Champion, the Region 1 Champion and the Upper Midwest Golden Gloves Champion. In the last three years as a pro, he’s compiled a perfect 14-0 record (including nine knock outs), highlighted last November by a unanimous 10-round decision over Kerry Hope for the WBF International Super Middle Weight Championship.



- ▲ Sparring is a big part of Caleb Truax's training.
- ▲ A solid jab is key to establishing his attack.
- ▼ Gloves must be tied tight for maximum impact.



THE “WHOLE PACKAGE”

Ron Lyke has studied his fair share of boxers. The owner and head coach of Anoka-Coon Rapids (ACR) Boxing Gym has been around the sport for 45 years, both as a former pro fighter and now a trainer. But he hasn't seen any as naturally talented and complete as Truax. “Right off the bat, you could see he was good,” says Lyke, who met Truax when he first started training for Toughman Contests at ACR. “By his third, fourth fight he was fighting upper-Midwest champions and experienced guys. He caught on so quickly, it was unreal.

People thought we were lying.”

They weren't, but Truax's natural talent would only have taken him so far. It's what's swirling around inside his head that makes him special, according to Lyke. “Intelligence is a great thing because you got a lot of guys with talent, but they don't think,” Lyke explains. “But (Caleb's) smart; he can think, too. He don't just go in head first. He'll get a guy with the same talent, and he'll use his head and knock the guy out. You've got to use your brains. It's not all brawn. He's a natural athlete, too. Just all around, he's the whole package.”

Truax is also the rare example of a boxer who is a college graduate, two titles that get the reputation of contradicting one another. At the University of Minnesota, he earned a degree in Sociology with minors in Political Science and African American Studies. The same intellect and diligence Truax used to study books, he now uses to study opponents. “His major strengths are his intelligence and his work ethic,” says Truax's promoter and former pro fighter Tony Grygelko. “I think with those two things you can do pretty much anything in life, whether it's being



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successful in boxing or being a successful politician. I think he eventually wants to go into politics. The kid's got a work ethic to be anything he wants."

HARD KNOCKS, HARD WORK

Truax likes to say he "fell into boxing." After a knee injury steered him away from his college football career at Virginia State University, he transferred back home to be a Golden Gopher at the U of M (where he'd earn his nickname "Golden"). Searching for a new outlet for his athletic gifts, he came across an ad for a Toughman Contest. He joined, learned he had a natural knack for boxing and has been addicted to the sport ever since. "I had always loved boxing, as far as watching it on TV," Truax says. "I just didn't know it was in Minnesota. It's not that publicized around here. When I found out I could train and take it to a different level, I just fell in love with it and kept training and learning more, and here I am now."

Although Truax makes his journey up the boxing ranks sound—and sometimes look—easy, it was far from it. Aside from a part-time job at a local liquor store, Truax dedicates his life to the daily grind of training. "It's different from other sports in the fact that you really have to dedicate your time to boxing," Truax explains. "I wake up in the morning and run at 7 a.m. and come (to ACR) at 4 p.m. to train for a couple to a few hours each day. You have to watch your diet all the time and there's no partying and stuff when you're getting ready for a fight."

In the winter, Truax can often be found running five to six times a week and lifting at Lifetime Fitness in Maple Grove. When it's nice out, he'll run outside near his Osseo home anywhere from 3-6 miles a day, mixing up long distance and sprint intervals. He trains at ACR five or six times a week, unloading on the heavy bag, punching focus mitts with his coach, sparring against other fighters, doing medicine ball drills and various core body workouts, among other exercises. "He's got all the attributes that you need," Grygelko adds. "He's got the skill, the speed, the power and the intelligence, which is important. But the biggest thing he's got is work ethic. He's the hardest working guy that I've ever been around as far as a fighter."

MAKING HIS MARK

With all the hard work comes some perks.

For example, Truax and Grygelko took a trip to Las Vegas in February to watch a fight and spend some time with Roger Mayweather, a former world champion boxer who is the trainer and uncle of five-division world champion Floyd Mayweather Jr. "I got to soak up some boxing knowledge from him," Truax says. "What Roger was stressing to me the whole time when we were talking was how important a good jab is. A lot of times he gets the reputation of being a flashy, cocky trainer. And a lot of times cocky guys get the reputation of not using their jab. I'll definitely take that to heart."

"Cocky" is one adjective that won't be used to describe Truax, whose friendly demeanor outside the ring draws people to him. "He's a great guy," said Tom Halstad, Truax's trainer at ACR. "Everybody who meets him is basically his friend—he's just that kind of guy. He treats everyone with respect, and he gets the same respect right back."

"He's a classy kid," Lyke adds. "He ain't going to be one of those mouthy noise makers that don't back it up. He's a good, responsible kid. Even if he wasn't fighting, I'd like him."

While Truax has made a formidable name for himself to opponents after blowing through competition like a whirlwind since joining the pro ranks three years ago, he has also become the glowing, talented and personable face of the local boxing scene that both the sport and fans have been waiting for. Truax has drawn attendances around 2,500, but Grygelko predicts those crowds could skyrocket to around 10,000 in coming years as he starts contending for major titles. "I think the sky is the limit with him," Grygelko says. "I think he's got a good four more years, at least, before he hits his peak. So the time is perfect for everyone to kind of get on the Truax train." //

"He's got the skill, the speed, the power and the intelligence, which is important. But the biggest thing he's got is work ethic. He's the hardest working guy that I've ever been around, as far as a fighter goes." —Tony Grygelko, boxing promoter



Next Stop: Caleb Truax will compete at 8 p.m. April 23 at St. Paul Armory vs. Phil "The Drill" Williams (11-3) of Minneapolis. "I'm really excited," Truax says. "He beat me when I was an amateur, so I'm going out for a little revenge. It should be fun." Tickets start at \$25; for more information, go to soboxing.com.

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