

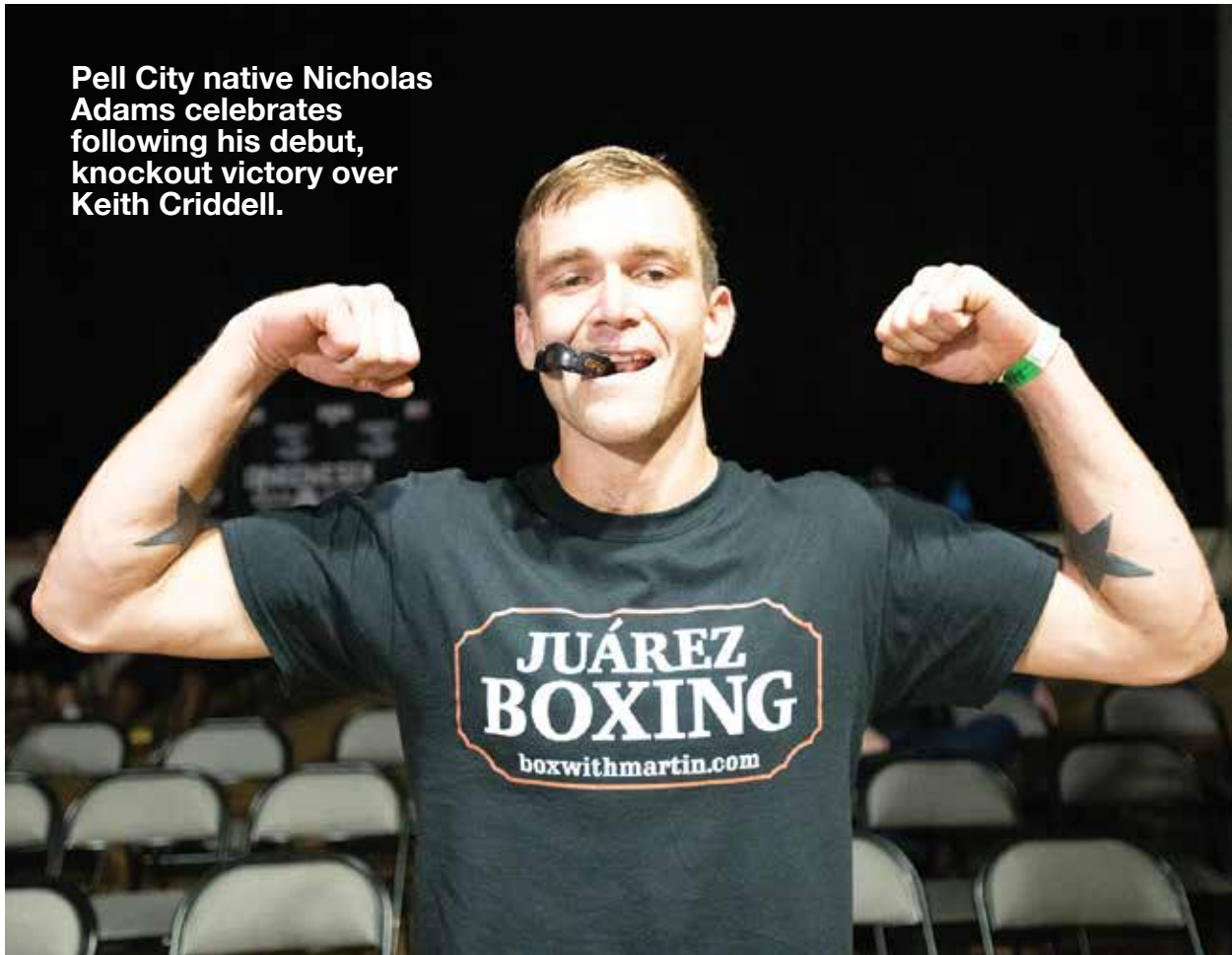
Anthony Stewart (right) stares down Jayvone Dafney (left) as referee Keith Hughes goes over the rules.



STEP INTO THE RING

Professional boxing finds new arena in Pell City

Pell City native Nicholas Adams celebrates following his debut, knockout victory over Keith Criddell.



Story by Loyd McIntosh
Photos by Wallace Bromberg Jr.

On a sweltering hot Friday afternoon in late July, the parking lot of Total Body Fitness is so full, many cars have parked in the grass and mud in the vacant lot next door. Inside, the gym is just as packed as dozens of athletes, trainers and others mill about.

There is excitement and even a little tension in the air. All of this activity isn't for a hot, new exercise class. No, excitement builds for the weigh-in for a boxing event taking place in a little over 24 hours at, of all places, the CEPA Building in Pell City.

Organized by the Alabama-based boxing promotion company, One One Six Boxing, Saturday's event, Logan Martin Rumble 2, is the second boxing "show" One One Six has held in Pell City, the first coming in December 2020. One One Six is also notable for being the state's first and only

boxing promotion owned and operated by a woman and St. Clair County native Brandi McClain.

Since launching, One One Six has held close to 10 boxing events showcasing fighters from all over the country but with a concentration on boxers from the Southeast. Operating out of Gadsden, One One Six has hosted Money Powell IV, James De La Rosa and Michael Williams Jr., the undefeated prospect of Roy Jones Jr. This weekend, her focus is on a boxer named Anthony Stewart, who at age 40 is competing for the Alabama State Cruiserweight Title.

"Anthony has a lot riding on him this weekend, but he's a very talented fighter. He's ready for this moment," McCain says. "I think he has an opportunity to fight on TV, and I'm doing everything I can to make that happen for him. It's my job to make my fighters' dreams come true."

At the weigh-in, Stewart is sitting at a table with his trainer, Dave Godber, a boxing lifer with extensive experience as a fighter and trainer. Currently, Gober owns Round 1 Boxing For Health, a gym in Vestavia where Stewart trains while he's

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Unleashing a flurry of punches, Anthony Stewart has Jayvone Dafney on the ropes.



not busy with his full-time job as a welder for Ox Bodies in Tuscaloosa.

Since his last sparring session a little over a week ago, Stewart has geared down his activity to give his body the rest it needs for his title fight on Saturday. “My last week, really what I’m doing is I’m trying to focus my mind on rest, relaxation, how I can make my body 100 percent when I step in the ring,” says Stewart.

His opponent is a little-known boxer named Jayvone Dafney, a 34-year-old cruiserweight fighting out of Los Angeles with a record of 2-3. Anthony and Godber have spent much of their preparation watching film and studying Gafney’s strengths and, more importantly, weaknesses. “Everybody has habits, and that’s what we want him to do. We want him to fight in his bad habits,” Godber says. “That’s what I’m really good at. In the first 30 seconds, I can tell you exactly how this man’s fighting.”

Godber is of the mindset that boxing is a 50-50 sport – 50 percent physical, 50 percent psychological. He’s been working tirelessly on Stewart’s mental approach to boxing, helping his protégé to think on his feet and react to whatever his opponent does in the ring. “Everybody’s got skill,” Godber says. “You can be the best fighter in the world, but you have to have the mental attitude to know how to survive and how to make good decisions.

“Everybody looks like a champion on the heavy bag,” he adds, “but when you get in that ring and the pressure’s on you, you have to overwhelm yourself with the mental aspect.”

“When I’m in there, I don’t just react,” adds Stewart. “I’m thinking to myself, ‘when I do this, what does he do? When I throw this punch, where does he move? When I throw this punch, where does he drop his hand? If he drops that hand, we’ll I’m going to come here.’”

Like many of today’s professional boxers, Stewart honed his fighting skills in the crazy world of ultimate fighting in what he calls “loosely organized” underground events in bars and joints in places like Jasper and Cullman. Stewart turned pro in June 2018, defeating a boxer named Andre Brewer. Leading into his title bout in Pell City, Stewart’s record stands at a healthy 5-1-2, four wins by knockout. Fit, mentally acute, and rested, Stewart is brimming with confidence just 24 hours before the bell rings in the biggest fight of his career in the heart of Pell City, the Main Event for Logan Martin Rumble 2.

“I don’t like to say anything derogatory about anybody that I’m about to fight but ...” he stops himself before finishing the statement and collects his thoughts before continuing. “It’s like this right here. I’m coming to handle business. Anybody that’s in my way of that title is going to get broken down. I want to see what kind of man he is. This is *mano a mano*. I want to see

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how he faces adversity because I'm going to *touch* him."

Still, at the age of 40, one question Stewart is asked often is how much longer can he continue boxing? How will he know when it's time to hang up the gloves? "Through all my amateur fights and most of my pro fights, I didn't take many punches. There will be a time when I got to hang it up, but right now I've got a five-year plan, which takes me to 45," explains Stewart. "We're going to stay in shape and keep this going."

Fight Night

It's now Saturday evening and the gymnasium at the CEPA Building has been transformed for professional boxing. The ring sits at the center of the court with professional lights placed in opposite corners. There are 11 fights on the card with the Stewart-Dafney fight bringing the night to a close.

Most of the bouts are scheduled for four rounds, with three scheduled for six rounds, including the main event. The first three fights of the night ended in knockouts – two in the first round, one in the second round. However, one of the best fights of the night was the fourth on the card, the stunning debut of a young fighter named Nicholas Adams.

A native of Pell City, Adams initially attended Pell City High School, transferred to Ashville High School, before eventually earning his GED. He worked as a corrections officer before recently devoting himself to boxing full time after deciding against pursuing mixed martial arts.

He signed on with One One Six Boxing but found himself in need of a new trainer and coach less than a week before his professional debut. He hooked up with Martin Juarez, owner and operator of Juarez Boxing in Irondale, who has been impressed with Nick in the short time he's worked with him.

"I met Nick four days ago. He called me over the weekend and said he was without a trainer and needed some help," Juarez explains. "Just the time we've spent in the gym, we've been able to build a rapport with one another, and I've taught him some stuff that he's never known, this being his first professional fight.

"Nick shows a lot of great attitude and great effort and has come a long way in four days," he adds. "I'm expecting only great things from him."

Adams has a lot riding on this fight as well. He and his wife, Morganne, have a preschool-age daughter, Sophie. Not only is this Nick's pro debut, but his primary source of income for his young family. At the weigh-in on Friday, Morganne was both excited and apprehensive about her husband's bout. "I keep thinking I am ready for this, and we keep getting closer, and I don't know. My stomach's in a knot," Morganne says. "I'm very nervous, but I know he's going to win."

Adams' opponent Saturday evening is 32-year-old Keith Criddell, boxing out of Atlanta in a Super Middleweight bout scheduled for four rounds. Despite his record of 0-3, Criddell has almost a year of experience as a pro boxer, having made his debut in August 2020. Adams' path to victory is clearly uphill.

From the opening bell brought through the end of the third round, the action was exciting and, to the general boxing fan, evenly matched. In reality, Adams was winded, having come out too hot in the first round throwing a flurry of punches and expending a lot of energy. By the end of the third round,



Anthony Stewart looks on as referee Keith Hughes attends to Jayvone Dafney.



Thanks for helping us Discover THE BEST OF ST. CLAIR

In our annual non-scientific polling from our readers, the 2021 “Discover the Best of St. Clair Awards” are now official.

We thank each of our readers who took the time to cast their ballot and root for their favorite.

Wait no longer, here are the 2021 winners:

- **Hamburger** -Charlie’s
- **Catfish** – The Ark
- **BBQ** - Charlie’s
- **Pie** - Pell City Steak House
- **Cake** – Bowling’s BBQ
- **Coffee** - PC Coffee
- **Restaurant** - Charlie’s
- **Fast Food** - Jacks Odenville
- **Lunch spot** –
Charlie’s
Pell City Steakhouse
- **Onion Rings** - Charlie’s
- **French Fries** – Bowling’s BBQ
- **Wings** – Charlie’s
- **Dinner Spot** – Charlie’s
- **Seafood** - The Ark
- **Ribs** - Charlie’s
- **Pizza** – Carpenettie’s
- **Steak** –
Heart of Dixie
Louie’s
- **Asian food** - Oishi
- **Country cooking** - Two Sisters
- **Buffet** - City Market
- **Sandwiches** - Daily Bagel
- **Salads** - Heart of Dixie
- **Meat n Three** –
PC Steakhouse
Triple T’s
- **Breakfast spot** - Bowling’s BBQ
- **Mexican Food** - Blue Tequila
and Cantina
- **Historic site** - Inzer House
- **Kayak Canoeing** - Yak the Creek
- **Scenic Spot** - Ten Islands Park
- **Gift Shop** - Magnolias
- **Park** - Lakeside Park
- **Splash Pad** - Lakeside Park
- **Non Profit Group** - DAR Broken Arrow
Chapter Pell City
- **Civic Club** - Pell City Rotary
- **Church Group**
Calvary Baptist Odenville
Eden Westside
Mt. Pisgah
Petros Youths
Seddon Baptist
- **Library**
Odenville
Pell City
- **Chamber of Commerce** - Pell City
- **Artist** - 4 Messie Monkeys Cayce
Johnson
- **Photographer** - Wallace Bromberg Jr.
- **Woodworking** - 4 Messie Monkeys
Billy Johnson
- **Potter** - Nettie Bean
- **Doctor** - Dr. Rick Jotani
- **Dentist** - Dr. Al Aultman
- **Pediatrician** - Springville Pediatrics
- **Orthodontist** - PT Ortho
- **Chiropractor** - Dr. Chris Webber
- **Pharmacist** - Mark Ross
Margaret Pharmacy
- **Pharmacy** - Margaret Pharmacy
- **Antique Store** - Springville
Antique Mall
- **Dock Builder** - Tradesman
- **Lawyer**
Lance Bell
Laurie Henderson
- **Jeweler** - Griffins
- **Florist** - Jean’s
- **Hair Salon** - Style Bar Pell City
- **Hair Stylist** - Emma Rodman Style Bar
- **Nail Salon** - V Nails Odenville
- **Manicurist** - Pam at V Nails Odenville
- **Massage Therapist** - Patience
Bradford
- **Physical Therapist** - Matt A at Moody
Benchmark
- **Insurance Company** - Cayce Wilson
State Farm
- **Realty Company** –
Blue House Odenville
Realty Pros Pell City
- **Realtor** –
Theresa Harris
Caran Wilbanks
Dana Ellison
- **Mortgage Company** - Coosa Valley
Mortgage
- **Bank** - Metro
- **Boat dealership** -
Rodney’s Marine
- **Boat Sales Executive**
Mark Hilderbrand
Rodney Humphries
- **Boat Mechanic**
Paul Davis
Rodney Humphries
- **Automobile Dealership**
McSweeney
Pell City Ford
- **Auto Sales Executive**
Bronson Honeycutt
Chris Cole
Jamie Crump
Logan Sweatt Pell City
Norman Wilder
Greg Buie
- **Automotive Repair** - Willie’s
Garage
- **Home Builder** - A&W
Construction
- **Interior Designer** - Renee Lilly
- **Upholstery** - Incredible Touch
- **Plumber** - Joiner Plumbing
- **Heating AC** - Pell City Heating
and Cooling
- **Clothing Store – Boutique** -
UG/Uptown Girls
- **Caterer**
Charlie’s BBQ
Polly Warren
- **Grocery Store** - Piggly Wiggly
Odenville
- **Best Veterinarian** - Pell City
Animal Hospital



BOXING

Anthony Stewart celebrates his first-round knockout.



Adams was in danger of losing the fight should it go the distance. Adams' new trainer and cornerman, Juarez, was there to encourage his fighter, but also to give him the unvarnished truth.

"I was tired. He got in my face and told me 'you can't forget everything that we've done these last four days. You've been amazing. Don't forget everything you've learned, and, oh, by the way, you're losing this fight,'" Adams says. "That wasn't something he had to tell me, I could tell. I was falling behind. But when he got up in my face, all the numbness that I had in my legs went away. I don't know what that man said to me, but it was the way he said it. I knew I was going to lose the fight if I didn't put him out in the fourth round."

Adams regained his stamina and focus in the fourth round, connecting on a vicious right hook that sent Criddell to the canvas once and for all. "I took everything (Juarez) gave me and applied it as best I could. It took me four rounds, but I did it," Adams says. "I put him down and pulled out the win for my debut."

Back to the Main Event

After 10 fights, all but one ending in a knockouts or technical knockout, the crowd is ready for the main event. Dafney makes his entrance into the ring first to little more than polite applause.

It's clear this crowd is here to see Stewart. He doesn't disappoint. Following a light show and a short but loud pump-up performance by a Tuscaloosa-based hip-hop artist, Stewart makes his way into the arena. Wearing red and black trunks

with his last name emblazoned across the front, Stewart enters the ring, his tattooed chest and arms already glistening with sweat, his jaw clenched, eyes staring straight at his opponent. Referee Keith Hughes goes over the rules and sends each man back to his corner to wait for the opening bell.

One day prior at the weigh-in the question was posed to Godber, where does Stewart have the advantage over Dafney? "Anthony throws more punches," says Godber.

"We've been working weight on six and seven punch combinations. I don't think that young man's ready for Anthony because he doesn't throw much more than three," Godber continues. "You won't see Anthony on the ropes. You'll see him in the center of the ring. It's hard to fight going backward, and if (Dafney) goes to the ropes, he's going down."

The bell rings and the fight plays out exactly as Godber described. Stewart began the bout measured, even taking a couple of shots from the taller Dafney, before exploding into a fury of punches.

As round one progressed, Stewart continued his onslaught of punches, pushing Dafney back on his heels and into the ropes. Finally, Stewart broke down his opponent's defenses before connecting with a fierce right hook and sending Dafney to the canvas. No 10-count. Hughes jumps in and immediately stops the fight at 2:55 in the first round. It's over. Hughes lifts Stewart's arm in the air. McCain enters the ring to place the belt around the victor's waist.

Anthony Stewart is the *new* Alabama State Cruiserweight Champion. ●