

From: <https://06880danwoog.com/2019/12/16/floyd-patterson-and-westports-kids-gloves/>

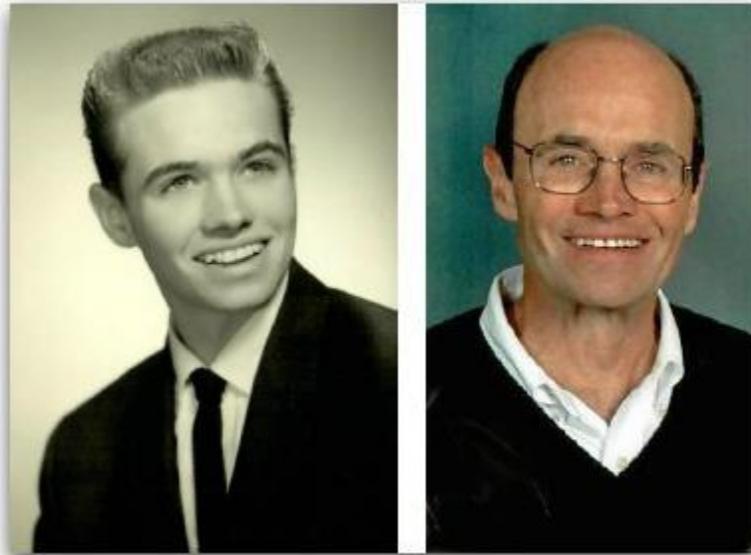
Floyd Patterson And Westport's Kid's Gloves

Posted on [December 16, 2019](#) | [15 Comments](#)

If you live in this town long enough, you hear everything.

But it's taken me my entire life to learn about Westport's boxing club, Kid Gloves. And one of the men who trained there: Floyd Patterson, heavyweight champion of the world.

The story comes thanks to alert "06880" reader Franklin Mason. A 1960 Staples High School graduate who earned a Ph.D. in chemistry, taught college for 10 years and then became a technical writer in Silicon Valley, he emailed me recently with this fascinating tale.



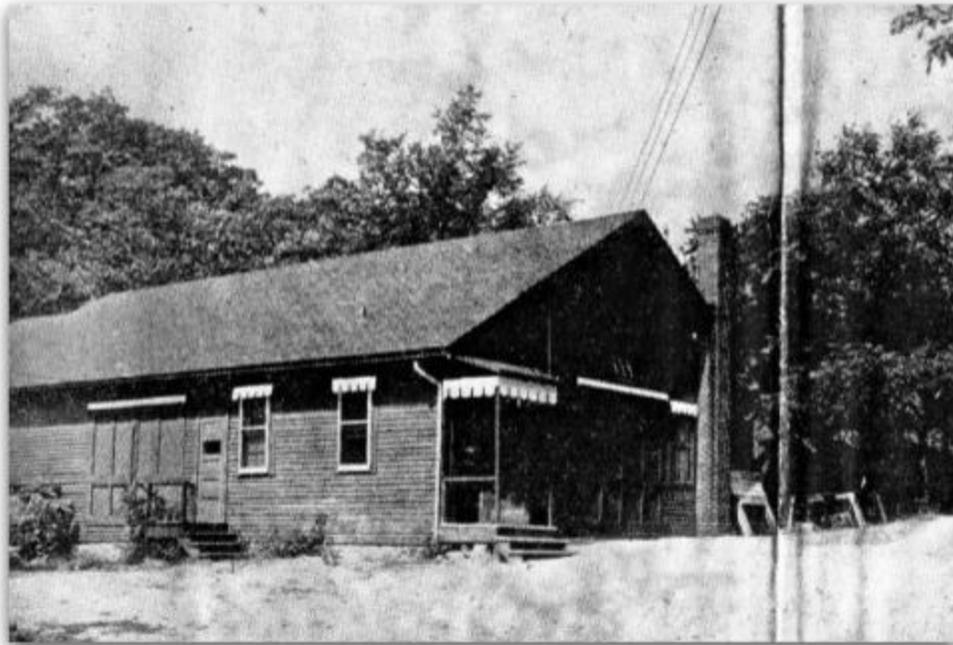
Franklin Mason: 1960 and 2010.

Mason sent news clippings and photos too. There is no hook or angle to this; no upcoming title fight, demolition of the boxing club building or anything else. It's simply a fascinating tale, about a long-buried part of Westport's past.

In 1958, a few prominent Westporters started an after-school gym. The focus was on boxing and bodybuilding. (There were also "figure control classes" for ladies.)

Seven years earlier, the group had helped start Westport Little League. Now they were doing something else for boys in town.

Kid Gloves was located in Nash's Barn, at the head of Nash's Pond on Kings Highway North. Built before the Revolutionary War, in the early 1940s it had been converted into a theater. Then it was a dance studio, with a hardwood floor.



Nash's Barn, 1952.

[*Sic*: The building no longer exists. It's been replaced by a handsome private home — the one owned by singer Michael Bolton.] Nash's Barn is still at 17 Kings Highway North. Michael Bolton's house is next door.

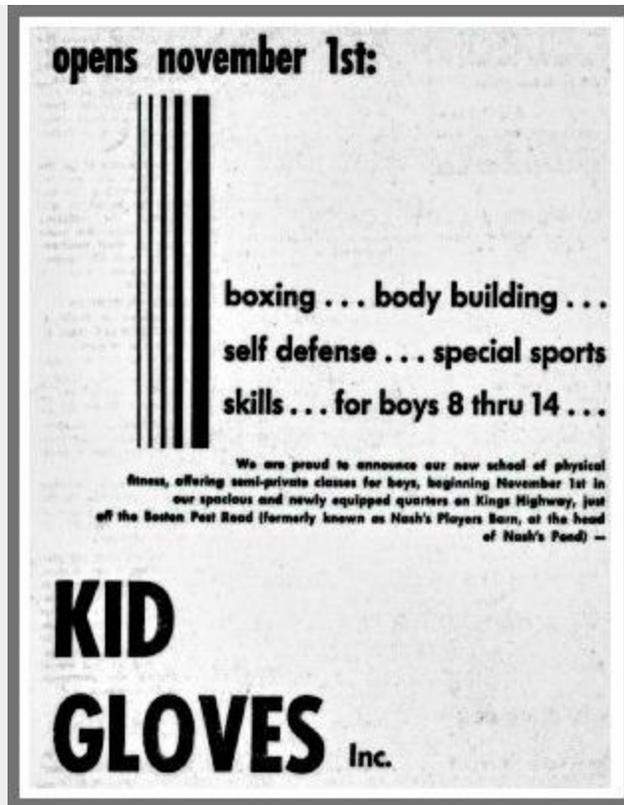
But in 1958 it hummed with activity. Jim Freeman — a boxer in the 1928 Olympics, World War II pilot and boxing referee, manager, and promoter — served as Kid Gloves' director and "heart," Mason says.

He should know. Though just 16, scrawny and out of shape, his neighbor Virginia Mercier — Kid Gloves' office manager — hired him as an instructor.

Freeman taught Mason how to teach the boys how to work out — including 14-year-old Westporter Michael Douglas. One day, his father — Kirk — came to visit. He strapped on gloves and sparred with his son.

The actor knew what he was doing: In 1949 he'd starred in "Champion," a boxing movie (based on a short story by Weston's Ring Lardner).

Other young boxers at Kid Gloves included Daniel, Max and Peter Shulman. Their father, Max Shulman, wrote "Rally Round the Flag, Boys!" about the Westport Nike missile site. In 1958 it was made into a film starring Paul Newman. Soon he and his wife, Joanne Woodward, moved here.



Westport Town Crier ad, October 16, 1958.

In 1959, Floyd Patterson needed a spot to train for his rematch against Ingemar Johansson — the man who had recently taken the world heavyweight title from him.

He wanted a place with “peace and quiet.” A special, regulation-sized ring was ordered. Patterson’s smaller-than-usual speed bag was sent too.

Patterson arrived with his manager Cus D’Amato, and sparring partner Tommy “Hurricane” Jackson. Jackson spent several nights at Mason’s home.



Floyd Patterson, on the speed bag.

Ed Mitchell's oldest son, Jack, was a football player at Wesleyan University. That summer, to get in shape for the upcoming season, he ran around the track at the old Staples High School on Riverside Avenue (now Saugatuck Elementary School). His younger brother Bill was with him.

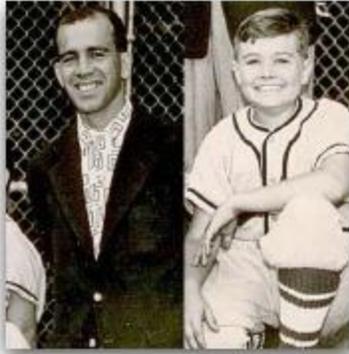
D'Amato saw Jack, and asked if he wanted to work out at the gym. He brought the Mitchells across the Post Road. There was Floyd Patterson. They did some pullups and other exercises together.

Patterson asked Mitchell if he'd run on the track with him. "I was never a runner. He wasn't either," Mitchell recalls. "But we ran together."

The brothers were told not to tell anyone that Patterson was there. They kept quiet.

But word got out. When it did, the *Westport Town Crier* ran this headline: "Boxing Gangsters Invade Westport."

That was a reference to D'Amato's alleged association with organized crime. When Patterson saw the headline, he left for another training facility, in Newtown.



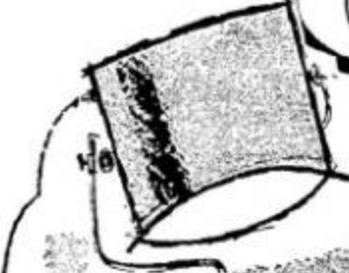
Lou Dorsey and Franklin Mason, 1954

Freeman soon left also. But Kid Gloves added staff members. Lou Dorsey — a popular Saugatuck Elementary School phys. ed. instructor — took over as boxing coach. Derek Shelton taught dance to all ages; Edwardo Enrich was a judo instructor for boys and adults.

One of the dance students was Amy Vanderbilt — the famous etiquette expert. One day, waiting for a friend outside the building, Mason honked his horn. She rushed out and reprimanded him. Sixty years later, he says, he still remembers — and has never done that again.

But Freeman's departure was crucial. In January of 1960, Kid Gloves was sold. New owner Anthony Iannone of Stratford renamed it "Anthony's Health Center & Gym."

By that time Freeman [*sic*, should read "Mason"] could easily do sit-ups and chin-ups. He was adept on the free rings and trapeze.



RE-OPENING

**MONDAY,
JAN. 4**

**ANTHONY'S
HEALTH CENTER & GYM**

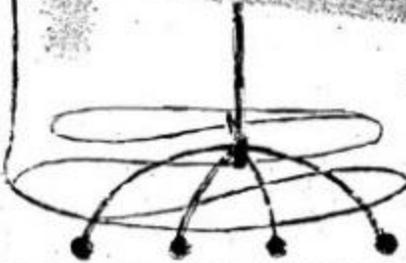
(Doing Business as Kid Gloves, Inc.)

Offering a full program dedicated to physical fitness, this famed Westport establishment is now under new management. Anthony Iannone a protege of Charles "Doc" Barrett, has acquired ownership of Kid Gloves, Inc.

COMPLETELY RENOVATED, AND FEATURING MacLEYY EQUIPMENT, ANTHONY'S HEALTH CENTER & GYM OFFERS

- Figure Control
- Judo Instruction
- Boxing
- Weight Lifting
- Physical Fitness
- Massage
- Businessmen's Club

"KEEP IN GOOD HEALTH"



Mr. Anthony Iannone, Manager

27 KINGS HIGHWAY WESTPORT
(Behind New Volkswagen Co., Port Road, Westport)
CA 7-0016

Bridgeport Post ad, January 3, 1960.

In June of that year, Floyd Patterson knocked out Ingemar Johansson. For the first time ever, a boxer had regained the world heavyweight title.

Four months later, Anthony's went out of business.

Comments:

Tom Kretsch | [December 16, 2019 at 9:41 am](#) |

Your story about boxing and Floyd Patterson brought back some memories from my days growing up in Newtown. Floyd Patterson did come to train in Newtown for his rematch with Ingmar Johansen. He trained at this former goat farm turned into a restaurant on Orchard Hill Road called the La Ronda. It was big news for a sleepy New England Farm Town. I went out to watch him train and then when he won the fight (I believe it was a rematch as Patterson was knocked out in the first fight) there was a big rally at the Edmond Town Hall for him. I had a copy of Sport Magazine and he signed it for me. Unfortunately, that disappeared along with my Mickey Mantle cards!

For our fiftieth reunion at Newtown High School (79 graduates) I did a slideshow and went to the library to see what pictures I could get about the town in those years. I copied this picture of Floyd Patterson for the show room the Bee among other stories connected to our class.

NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT, FRIDAY, MAY 13, 1960

Floyd Looks For Return Of Boxing Crown



I found another bit on google about the place he trained, and I will send it to you.
I can't remember where my keys are most mornings, but these things live in your heart.

Mark Bachmann | [December 16, 2019 at 11:43 am](#) |

I am right now in the middle of reading Mike Tyson's book *Iron Ambition*, which is his adoring account of his life with Cus D'Amato, who legally adopted Tyson as a young teen and gave him the both the training and fatherly guidance he needed to put his life on track and accomplish what he did in boxing. The book also contains a fair amount of biographical information about Floyd Patterson who, along with Tyson himself and Jose Torres, were D'Amato's most famous pupils. There were indeed several references to Patterson's training camps in Connecticut and specifically the one here in Westport at this gym. I suppose there's no significance to this other than my own sense of serendipity when this posting appeared on almost the same day as I read the relevant portion of Tyson's book.

I've lived in Westport now for 30 years and, thanks mainly to Dan, the secrets of his history and its famous residents keep revealing themselves.

This is a great story.