

# IWC FIGHT FOR PEACE



The sights, sounds and smells of the boxing gym in North Woolwich, England, are like any in gyms around the world—boxers pounding heavy bags; the slap of leather on skin; sweat and liniment. The difference here? The boxers, martial artists and workout fiends are kids, anywhere from six to sixteen years old. This boxing gym, you see, is where the London version of Fight for Peace calls home.

Fight for Peace is a program funded by Laureus, an organization founded by luxury watch brand IWC's parent company, the Richemont Group (along with Daimler-Benz). Especially championed by IWC, the program was started in the poorest areas of Brazil, by former UK boxing champion Luke Dowdney, and was phenomenally successful. As a result, Dowdney wanted to "port" the program over to his home turf of East London, and the result is right here, in one of the toughest neighborhoods in an often violent city. As soon as I heard that Dowdney and the program were giving kids something constructive to do with their time, I decided to visit and find out more.

Some might assume that teaching boxing to at-risk kids would encourage violence, but as a black belt with more than 35 years of experience, I understand the positive aspects of the training—building discipline and confidence, working toward a goal, finding a home away from home and a support system. So, I hopped on a plane for London City Airport to put myself in harm's way, or at least to get a little punch drunk on the success that is Fight for Peace.

The first Fight for Peace program was started by Dowdney in Brazil's Complexo da Maré, a complex of *favelas* (shanty towns) in Rio de Janeiro. "I boxed as an amateur in the '80s and '90s and was heavily involved in the sport," he explains. "I knew the potential of boxing in terms of accessing young people who are not interested in social programs, school, job training, etc. Having boxed in London, Ireland and Japan, I realized that a lot of boxing clubs are 'projects' by their nature. Often, clubs will attract kids that are having trouble at home, and the club gives them discipline and structure."



*The Pilot's Watch Chrono-Automatic Edition Laureus Sport for Good Foundation from IWC in a limited edition of 2,500 watches, benefiting the Laureus Foundation; caseback recreates the winning work from a foundation-sponsored art competition. opposite—Kids in action at the Fight for Peace Academy.*



“In Brazil it was really clear that we weren’t reaching the kids we needed to,” he continues. “The two or three percent that were getting into violence were not coming into the more traditional programs. So I thought, why not open a boxing club, which was explicitly, by its name, a social program?” Dowdney contacted people in the toughest areas, and the program grew. Currently, the program serves about 155,000 young people in Brazil, and Fight for Peace has been invited to deliver sessions outside of the academy, to children in different neighborhoods.

Fight for Peace has developed a prevention and rehabilitation model to confront the problem of child and youth participation in crime, gangs and gun violence in disadvantaged communities. This strategy is called the Five Pillars model, which breaks down as follows: 1) Boxing and other martial arts training and competition: “You are going to have to work for your success,” explains Dowdney. “It’s an opportunity for the kids if they are going to work hard. We are not charging money; we are expecting hard work.” 2) Formal and extra-curricular education programs and per-

sonal development sessions; 3) Access to formal employment through job skills training and referrals to paid internships; 4) Support services and targeted referrals for young people and their families; 5) Building leadership via participation in a youth council.

So far Dowdney’s plan has been successful in East London. There are more than 700 kids enrolled in the program after just one year, and between 70 and 80 come to the program every day. “It’s important to understand that it’s not about violence, that there is a difference between violence and sports,” Dowdney says. “Boxing is an Olympic sport, and it has produced some of the biggest icons in the history of the world, like Muhammad Ali. Boxing gives you respect for rules, a lesson in life that says if you don’t work hard or train hard, you cannot succeed.” Seven boys have developed the skills needed to enter competitive boxing, but Dowdney emphasizes that the training, itself, is the greatest accomplishment. “As a discipline for structuring young minds, boxing is brilliant,” he says. “Only about 1.5 percent of the kids who come to the program will ever box competitively, but we do

## From the Mouths of Babes—What the Fight for Peace Youth Council has to say:

**Razina Nsubuga, 10:** I started with the program when it opened. When I went to school, I saw the sign for Fight for Peace and was really interested. I love going to the gym, and I especially like using the treadmill.

**Amina Mbula, 12:** It's cool. When I don't have anything else to do, I come here. I have a lot of friends here. I like doing the gym program.

**Ben Tillett, 15:** I saw the advertising for the program in the shops, and I was curious. I like to take responsibility, help the staff. The personal development program helps

us avoid bad situations. If I have a problem, I can come here and talk about it. I have done the boxing. I get respect here, pure respect. They do their job proper. I like the gym too—cardio, weights and then a cardio cool-down.

**Rima Nsubuga, 14:** I heard about the program from a friend. I like to do the fitness, and I box from time to time. I work on the youth council, and if the little kids have ideas and are scared to share them, they will come up to me. Bringing ideas to the staff, that's one of our big responsibilities, for example,

dance programs, recycling programs, etc. More and more people are coming into the program. It's making us better and giving the neighborhood a good name. It's a safe place to be and hang out with friends.

**Bruma Faria, 13:** It's fun. If you have problems at home, you come here and just forget about them. I learn to handle my problems. I do games, cardio and weights.

**Nelson Pita, 14:** Boxing helps me get my anger and frustration out. What's not to like about boxing? I come here three times a week to train. ❖

the training because that is the most important element.”

“Fight For Peace shows kids that the rewards from sports can translate into other areas of life,” says Louise Brown, project manager, Fight for Peace. “Boxing is an individual sport, so everything is up to you. I like the way we are based in the community. The community has accepted us, as well. I can see the changes in the kids. Everything Fight for Peace is about is all for the kids, and we tailor everything to them—it's their program.”

Darrin Reece, who once fit the at-risk category himself, is the youth programs coordinator for Fight for Peace. “I got into a lot of problems with the police when I was young,” he admits. “There was a lot of illegal activity at home. The person I looked up to was the local drug dealer, who had money and a nice car. I decided that I needed to get out of that life. I went to school in sociology in South London, and I was accepted as Darrin the student, not Darrin the criminal. After earning my degree, I wanted to give back. I want to make a difference with kids.”

“The great thing is that the kids really buy into the culture of the program,” he continues. “It's their project; we consult with them. On Mondays, everyone who is in the program has to participate in personal development—we talk to them about the problems they are having (school, bullying, abuse, drugs, domestic violence). I create a lesson plan, give them situations, give them choices, then challenge their choices. I make it personal, and I focus on empathy and compassion. I make them see that they are not making the right decisions. If the kids don't go to personal development, they can't box or go to the gym, period. As a result, they get hooked on the program—it's fun, but they also learn things. In fact, some come just for the personal development program.”

To experience the program first hand, I decided to train with the kids, to get a sense of what they go through. It was tougher than I expected. When I arrived, fitness training was in progress.

Kids rode exercise bikes, ran on a treadmill, did calisthenics, stretched, lifted weights and more. I was impressed at how the kids stuck to the routine, following directions and staying focused. I've seen adults who couldn't do what they did. After meeting with the Fight for Peace Youth Council, I got into my workout clothes and laced up the gloves.

Following a 30-minute warm-up, the boxing training began. We worked first on blocking and evading, then on combinations. I was assigned a partner for these drills, a 14-year old who was four inches taller than I am with Evander Holyfield's shoulders and arms. He was gentle with me, but I got the feeling that if I moved the wrong way, he might just knock me out.

Then came the round work, nine two-minute rounds with one-minute rests in between. Dowdney held the targets and yelled out the punches I was to hit. Sounds easy, but it was pretty difficult. Determined to get the most out of me, Dowdney goaded me to hit harder, in combinations, and to stay protected (or he'd whack me in the head).

About ten young people participated the night I trained with them (other classes for younger kids and for martial artists had been held earlier in the day), and they were focused and dedicated to the work. Skill levels were across the board, with the more experienced boxers helping the less experienced. For example, my partner, who is being groomed to compete as an amateur, was stuck with helping me out. There were two girls in the group, rank beginners, and the instructors spent as much time with them as anyone. The atmosphere was welcoming and open, even though Dowdney is a tough taskmaster. He was forever barking out orders to hit harder, react faster, move quicker, push harder. It was a nice combination—a serious and demanding program in a friendly and unintimidating atmosphere.

The Fight for Peace program works on so many levels. First, it

offers the kids structure and life skills acquisition through personal development programs. Second, it offers alternate activities to drug dealing and violence. Third, kids involved with any of the programs increase their self-confidence because they are acquiring skills that require hard work, dedication, perseverance and discipline. And, lastly, the Fight for Peace program gives these kids some place to go.

IWC is happy to participate—sponsoring programs and producing watches that directly benefit the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, because the worth of the programs and their impact

on kids around the world is significant. I like stories with a happy ending, and seeing the smiles on the faces of the kids involved with Fight For Peace makes me certain this program will continue its positive impact on their lives. I now completely understand IWC's willing support of this program in particular and the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation in general. IWC's motto, "Doing well by doing good" is absolutely in evidence in Fight for Peace. ❖

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*At the Fight for Peace Academy kids get involved.*