

# Difference Maker: Joshua Young Empowers His Boxers Through Alton Community Boxing Club

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - Joshua Young never gave up on the Alton Community Boxing Club. Now, his vision is a reality.

Almost eight years in the making, the [Alton Community Boxing Club](#) finally has a permanent home at the YWCA in Alton, where boxers of all ages can come to practice their skills and build confidence. As a mentor, Young is a Difference Maker in the Riverbend community.

“ shows what the true nature of Alton could be and what it is,” Young said. “It shows the harmony amongst the demographics, and the interactions are genuine. They all kind of come in and grow to become family. They go through things as family goes through, but that’s all family. It’s really an honor to watch these young people and these kids do their thing.”

Young explained that the boxing club started informally in 2016 when a group of young people began boxing at the park. They called themselves “Fists Up, Guns Down” to “curb street violence and gun violence,” Young said. Former Police Chief Jason Simmons connected Young to the group and asked him to help it grow.

The “Fists Up, Guns Down” group eventually disbanded, but Young still had hopes for a boxing club in Alton. He collaborated with Benjamin Frank Stiff, a Hall of Fame boxer who Young trained with as a young man.

“He kept really the spirit of boxing alive for those decades in the city,” Young said. “It has so much potential to do great things and to go places and get new experiences. So we decided that we were going to give it a shot...I want to say last year is when I really decided, ‘Hey, let’s just go ahead and move on this. Things were kind of picking up with some social dysfunctions, I guess. Youth violence, youth dysfunction. And we figured now or never. We had waited so long. We had gone through so much.”

But Stiff’s health took a turn, and he had to step back. With Stiff now advising from afar, Young’s drive doubled. He began working with Coach James Patterson and Coach James Farrell, who Young calls his grandpas, and other Difference Makers to make the club a reality.

They started up at the park, with kids boxing every morning throughout the summer. As the school year approached, Young and his fellow coaches started looking for a way to keep the club going. Eventually, they found their home at the YWCA.

“When we announced that we were able to have an indoor location to the youth right at the beginning of school, you could see their eyes just exploded, like, ‘Oh, we got our prayers answered. We’re not going to have to quit boxing because we have to go back to school and we don’t have a home.’ So the YWCA was a lifesaver for us,” Young

explained. “We all want to see the same thing. We want to see progression. We want to give these kids opportunities. We want to give them different options besides what may be out there.”

Now, the Alton Community Boxing Club is going strong out of YWCA. Young noted that the young adults and adults have acted like “big brothers” to the kids, and more people have stepped out of the woodwork to [support the club financially](#) and emotionally. Young is thankful for these people, sponsors like Fast Eddie’s Chicken, and his fellow coaches.

“Coach James and Coach James, I share this with them. Any honors, any blessings and curses. It’s all together. Those guys have been instrumental,” he added. “We’ve been in the corners at these matches and we feel every punch from the corner and we share in the wins and losses.”

But Young doesn’t consider them losses; he calls them “lessons,” which empowers his boxers to keep going. Right now, the club is gearing up for a regional boxing match that will determine who will compete on a national level. Young has enjoyed watching the athletes improve, and he hopes to see more growth in the coming months.

“They don’t make sacrifices,” Young said of his boxers. “We always say sacrifices come from the ego, and eventually your ego will win out. But when you do things on purpose, that’s from the self. You’re purposely taking the time to come down and practice and to train and to look towards something better and to better yourself and your craft. If you’re making sacrifices, your all is not in it. And I think everybody down here, these young people, I don’t think they make sacrifices. I think they’re here on purpose.”



# Difference Makers

*of the* Riverbend