

Wheelchair boxer Charles Wilton set for first career fight in England

Mississauga man fighting through cerebral palsy

IAN COLPITTS

icolpitts@mississauga.net

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Charles Wilton is further proof that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

The Mississauga man may be confined to a walker due to spasitic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, but he really packs a punch.

He's unofficially recognized as the first wheelchair boxer in Canada, and while he hasn't been in a sanctioned fight yet due to a lack of competitors nearby, he's preparing to travel to England for his first bout on March 3.

"I saw it on YouTube and I loved it," the 33-year-old said while training at the UFC Gym on Monday, Feb. 5. "I was always an athlete. I used to be a runner."

Wilton has a number of tattoos, including a wheelchair racer on his arm that he proudly points to when describing his athleticism.

He'll take part in an Adaptive Boxing Organization (ABO) tournament in Leicester. He's scheduled to fight Danny Higgins of the U.K.

The ABO is still relatively new, but wheelchair boxing has expanded since the first official

wheelchair boxing match in 2015. There are more than 30 countries that participate in the sport, according to Wilton's manager, Sean Morris.

In wheelchair boxing matches, the chairs are locked and boxers use their upper bodies to weave and duck.

Wilton has been training for three years and he has gotten offers to fight in California, Dubai and Dublin this year, but needs a sponsor in order to make any of those trips.

Just to help alleviate some of the costs associated with the trip to England, Morris is organizing a fundraiser for Feb. 24, which also happens to be Wilton's 34th birthday.

Once they get back from England, Morris has a feeling that wheelchair boxing will be better received in the community thanks to Wilton's influence.

"It's not like just a crazy UFC, beating people up type of thing. It's an actual sport that's very focused," Morris said.

Wilton has grown up with a fighter's mindset. He was raised through a number of foster homes and faced abuse as a child. He got into a lot of fights as a result.

Even though he has cerebral palsy, doctors have cleared him to fight, but are still very stringent in their criteria. For example, if he had a history of head injuries, he wouldn't be cleared or

would only be able to box without head shots.

Wilton boxes because he enjoys it, but he also has a five-year-old son he fights for in order to make him proud.

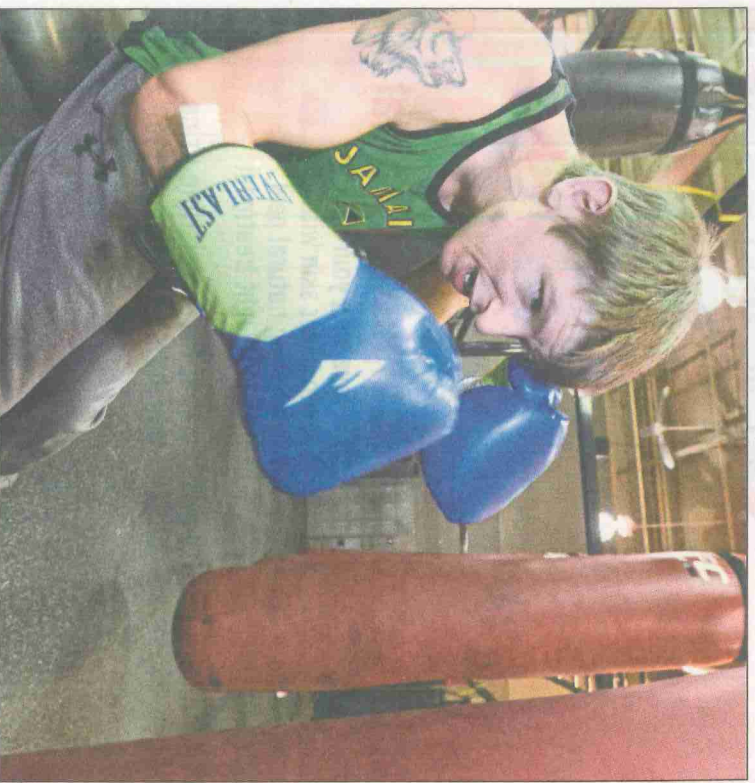
So far, Wilton has had trouble getting his career off the ground

because of a lack of competition, as well as the expenses involved with competing.

He doesn't have a proper wheelchair required for the sport and trains using an ordinary chair. And while it's difficult finding fighters for him to

match up against, he has no problem training since friends are willing to sit in chairs and go head to head with him.

For more information or to help Wilton reach his goals, visit makeachamp.com/charleswilton.



Charles Wilton, a local wheelchair boxer, is training at the UFC Gym for an upcoming tournament in England this March.

Rob Beintema/Metroland