

# Local amateurs out in cold as far as training facility

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**1997-10-19 04:00:00 PDT SAN FRANCISCO** -- ALL THEY WANT is a building. Almost any kind of building, anywhere in San Francisco.

Even with the aid of some people high in The City's hierarchy, they haven't been able to find one. So amateur boxers from San Francisco - once a flourishing fight city with three full-fledged gymnasiums - are having to train in non-boxing facilities, or seek sites in other Bay Area cities to hone their skills.

That's a major concern, from those working at the grass-roots level of the sport to USA Boxing administrators like [Chris Campbell](#) and [Ernest "Sonny" Marson](#).

"I hope it's realistic to think that a facility can be found in San Francisco," said Campbell, a San Rafael labor lawyer who recently was hired as executive director of USA Boxing, which is based in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"Boxing is mostly inner-city kids, poor kids. This sport is about the only one they can go into and have a shot at competing in something like the [Olympic Games](#). Having a gym - a place to go to - in San Francisco would represent something very positive. It would emphasize [education](#) and develop discipline and dedication. That's what boxing teaches. So many good things can happen when you get kids off the streets and into the system."

"If we had a gym and got it all together," said Marson,

"I guarantee that within a month or two, we'd have 50 or 60 kids participating. I get calls from kids every day asking where they can go train."

Marson is the primary local force behind amateur boxing. He's the chairman of the Northern California Region of USA Boxing, director of the San Francisco Golden Gloves and runs [M and M Boxing Club](#), The City's major training ground for youth and developing boxers.

But his club has had no permanent home since Newman's Gym on Leavenworth Street closed several years ago.

Through the help of the San Francisco District Attorney's office, Marson was able to use surplus space at the Hall of Justice for almost three years. But that stay ended in September 1996, when The City took the space back.

"Now we have to borrow facilities and utilize municipal recreation centers and other organizations' facilities to conduct training," Marson said. "We're grateful to the San Francisco

Recreation and Park Department and other organizations that have allowed us to temporarily borrow or use their facilities. But those are not specialized boxing facilities, and there's no substitute for training in a boxing setting - especially for young and developing boxers."

Marson notes that he has all the necessary equipment, along with a million-dollar umbrella insurance policy to cover the young fighters.

He also has a commitment from Howard Fine of Armstrong Painting Roofing and Windows to bring any facility up to par, free of charge.

But there's still no building.

"I can't handle this myself, financially," Marson said. "I'm retired and on a fixed income."

Campbell is trying to help find a location. So is San Francisco attorney [Donald Collins](#), a consultant to USA Boxing.

"The best thing might be for a corporation with a gymnasium or surplus space - even warehouse space if it was readily accessible - to step forward," Collins said.

San Francisco District Attorney [Terence Hallinan](#), a former amateur boxer himself, and [Maggie Lynch](#) of his staff have offered support, too.

"I think it's doable," Hallinan said. "We're going to keep trying. This is a vital activity for young people in San Francisco. There is a program under way now at Ocean View playground, a small room and a boxing ring. But it's really not adequate in terms of being what everybody else wants."

"We've looked at several sites," Lynch said, "but unfortunately, all of them have strings attached."

Marson, who believes a facility of about 3,500-4,000 square feet is needed, is getting frustrated. He worries that when he puts on the Golden Gloves next March at the Cow Palace, there will be few if any San Francisco fighters participating.

He keeps talking, he said, but he wonders whether some of the right people are listening.

"I wrote to the mayor," he said, "and got no response whatever."