



The former No. 9 for Notre Dame and current Baltimore Raven Tom Zbikowski is also a professional boxer hoping his team allows him to step back in the ring again as he did at the Celtic Boxing Club in Mt. Greenwood. (Review photo)

## Zbikowski shows off skills for boxers at local gym

by Patrick Thomas

It was only slightly more than two weeks ago that Tom Zbikowski was playing in the AFC Championship game for the Baltimore Ravens, but he was soon back home and work-

ing out in a Mt. Greenwood gym. But it wasn't merely football he was concentrating on. The 23-year-old rookie safety, known locally for his (See Zbikowski page 16)



The Celtic Boxing Club, 3020 W. 111th St., allows young athletes from the neighborhood and beyond a chance to exercise for free, train for the ring and on some occasions get up close and personal with an NFL player and professional boxer. Tom Zbikowski (front, center), who sparred with the young fighters, is one of many NFL players using boxing to prepare for the gridiron. Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher is said to train, and the New York Jets have in the past brought in renowned boxing trainer Teddy Atlas to conduct an off-season strength and conditioning program. Zbikowski, however, is a professional who earned \$100,000 in his 2006 debut at Madison Square Garden. (Review photo)

## Zbikowski

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Hoynes Ave.

In 2007, the park district began charging a \$10 per month fee to use park district boxing facilities. Recognizing a fee might give inner-city youths second thoughts about boxing, Joyce convinced Zbikowski to cut the park district a check for \$5,000 to sponsor the program, and boxing again became available to all youths.

Zbikowski, who now lives in Palatine, has since opened up an athletic center called Tommy Z's PureSpeed Sports Clinic. On his visit to Mt. Greenwood, he helped area teens and Golden Glove and Celtic Boxing Club boxers like Jimmy Murphy, 18, prepare for an upcoming fight on Feb. 11.

Brendan Cloney, 15, a sophomore football player from St. Rita, had the courage to step in the ring with Zbikowski and

spar with a professional. Cloney said Zbikowski had the quickest jab he had ever seen.

"Look how hard he trains. He's a professional fighter and a professional football player. That says something about you," Cloney said. "To be so good in two sports, he's really someone to look up to."

This is one of many opportunities the Celtic Boxing Club is trying to provide. The Celtic Boxing Club, sponsored by the Police Athletic League, allows boxing athletes from across the city to come in free of charge and work out with dreams of one day competing in Madison Square Garden like Zbikowski.

Murphy, 18, who attends Loyola University, travels all the way from Rogers Park three days a week to work out with Joyce and other trainers at the Celtic Boxing Club.

"I don't know any gym like it," Murphy said.

As for Zbikowski, some of his dreams have already been

accomplished, but he knows there is more awaiting him.

"[The football] season is already over. So I have to start looking at what I have to do to crack the starting lineup and get more playing time," he said.

Zbikowski said he has the itch to box again soon, but realized the decision was out of his hands. If he had to choose boxing or football, all salaries and contracts aside, he said it would be a difficult decision.

"Money aside, I don't know. I couldn't tell you. It's not for publication."

The Celtic Boxing Club is scheduled to take on the Trumbull Park Boxing Club on Feb. 11 at 7 p.m. at the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame. Special guests include legendary boxing writer Burt Sugar and boxing great Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini.

Tickets are \$100 and support local charities. For tickets, call (312) 226-5566.