



OUABC

Alumni Newsletter

Michaelmas
2024

Welcome to the Michaelmas 2024 edition

This alumni newsletter comes to you with my best wishes, as it is the last one I will be editing before handing over the reins to Peter Davies. I edited my first newsletter three years ago and I thoroughly enjoyed putting them together since, as it has given me the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and connect for the first time with fellow boxers I'd never met before. Almost everyone I've spoken to shares the view that being part of OUABC played a really important role in their lives, and a thriving alumni association not only helps us to keep those memories alive, but also to support the club today so that the current crop of students have similar opportunities to the ones we enjoyed.

Anyway, this edition brings you a welcome from the new President - Teresa Habib Meriggi, a couple of dates for your diary, a Q&A with someone who has done more for OUABC than most, memories of a famous alumnus who passed away recently, and a recommended podcast (rather than a book).

Mark Linehan

The OUABC Committee 2024-25

President - Teresa Habib Meriggi, Merton

Vice President - George Garner, Christ Church

Secretary - Kelsey Monteith, Keble

Treasurer - Gabriele Lukoseviciute, St Anne's

Women's Captain - Gabriele Lukoseviciute, St Anne's

Men's Captain - Adeoluwa Olugboji, Christ Church

Women's Vice-Captain - Kaya Axelsson, St John's

Men's Vice-Captain - Mathias Fagbemi, Lady Margaret Hall

Social Secretary - Thomas Ancill, Lincoln

Women's Welfare Officer - Leonor-Jo Barnard, St Edmund Hall

Men's Welfare Officer - Rory Mitchell, Balliol

IT and Alumni Officer - David Seiferth, Oriel

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

As the weather gets colder, I would like to extend warm greetings to you all as the new President of the OUABC.

I am a recent graduate of St Anne's College, having studied Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, and am now reading Contemporary Chinese Studies at Merton. I began boxing in my first year at Oxford, and in my final year of my undergraduate degree last year I became women's captain. For those of you who were present at the 2023 Varsity in the Town Hall, I won my first bout as part of the undercard there, and this year secured my second win against the President of the UCL Amateur Boxing Club. With the generous support of the alumni fund, in the past year I have also become an England Boxing certified coach.



Teresa after winning her first bout in 2023

There are so many things I am personally looking forward to in this 2024/2025 season, not the least hosting the Varsity match on March 14th, but I would firstly like to reflect on the past year. The 2023/2024 season was a season of resilience, determination and comradery for the OUABC; although starting off tumultuously, we are incredibly grateful for the support we have received and the outcomes they aided. On behalf of the OUABC, I would like to express my special thanks to some of the following people who I have been in contact with: Peter Davies, Mark Linehan, Tim Fell, Chris Mack, Fabio Quaradeghini, Tom Mitchell, and in particular Robin Duggan, who were all instrumental in helping the club navigate the changing coaching landscape and building on the club's legacy.

We are also as a club incredibly grateful for Coach Adrian. Despite the challenges of having to switch the coaching team so close to the Varsity match, those of you who were there will remember it was a night of fantastic boxing with all boxers having improved drastically since Adrian's arrival at the OUABC in January. This year, we have had to make some further changes to the coaching arrangement due to conflicting schedules and financial reasons, and so while Adrian will be continuing to coach our squad-only training sessions, we are very pleased to announce that Carl Ellis will be joining our team to be coaching our open club sessions. With Adrian's Olympic experience and history at our club, and Carl's experience as the head coach for England Boxing Home Counties and development pathways, this transition into a new coaching arrangement sets us up to maximise the OUABC's success in the short and long term.

This year, the club is working towards three main goals: firstly, to win Varsity; secondly, to expand women's varsity; thirdly, to increase fighting opportunities for our boxers, instrumental to us winning the Varsity match. This will come through our home show, traditionally called Town and Gown, which we will host on February 1st, and entering both a men and women's squad into the British University Championships in January. With regards to women's Varsity, we are currently in the process of working with the Sports Federation and Cambridge in order to develop a more long-term and robust matching system which will hopefully guarantee the representation of women at the Varsity level for years to come.



Captains Gabriele Lukoseviciute and Ade Olugboji at freshers fair, and trial session at Iffley Road

As usual with the start of term, we have been busy promoting the club at the freshers fair and hosting trial sessions for those wanting to join the OUABC - we had more than 50 newcomers join in on our Tuesday training session in week 1 and we can't wait to keep welcoming more. I am very much looking forward to the year ahead, and for a new set of fresh faces at our Saturday sparring sessions. If anyone would like to come and visit for one of our training sessions, or come and see the fantastic wall of squad photographs that Chris Mack organised in the GLD, please do not hesitate to reach out and we can organise something with the committee or the club should you wish. It would be a fantastic opportunity for me as well to meet some of you and to pick your brains on your experiences at the club, something that I look forward to passing down once I become an alumna myself.

Forever in the dark blue corner,
Teresa Habib Meriggi

Q&A WITH CHRIS MACK

There aren't many OUABC alumni who have done as much for the club as Chris Mack - both for current and future boxers and members of the Alumni Association. Chris has worked tirelessly to build up a near complete list of former boxers along with their contact details, he has curated the collection of team photos on show at Iffley Road, and his crowning achievement was his extraordinary fundraising of over £300,000 to ensure the Gallie-Lewis-Dean Gym could be built, serving Oxford boxers for decades to come. <https://www.development.ox.ac.uk/news/bannister-bell-rings-to-open-the-gallie-lewis-dean-gym>

I first met Chris at my first training session as a freshman in 1984 and we boxed together in the 1985 Varsity Match. We were in the squad together the following year, although I had to withdraw after breaking my hand. As you all know, you spend a lot of time with your team mates - morning runs, gym sessions, training camps - and get to know them pretty well. Chris has always been one of life's "nice guys", even if the things his then-girlfriend and now wife, Jean, used to exhort him to do to his opponents from ringside aren't printable. He's also a proud Yorkshireman, although his order of a pint of lager shandy with a dash of lime ("it's a hot day, Mark") last time I had lunch with him, is probably enough to deny him entry into his county of birth for many years to come.

With this being my last newsletter, I can't think of anyone more fitting to do the Q&A...

What was your boxing experience before going up to Oxford?

That's easy, none. About my only association was an A4 photo montage of boxers I had on my pinboard as a lad aged about 10. My Dad brought it back from a dinner he'd been invited to and he'd got it signed by a couple of the boxers at the dinner whose photos appeared on it. By pure chance I came across it in the loft during Covid. It had been a testimonial evening for the boxing manager, Jim Wicks, and I realised one of the signatures was none other than that of Percy Lewis. Extraordinary!

How did you get involved with OUABC?

That's also easy. Through my great friend Reed Morgan. We met at Sandhurst as we both did a Short Service Limited Commission before Oxford. We were also both allegedly studying engineering (very little work required in those days). Reed was one of the most talented people I have ever met - charismatic, highly intelligent, witty, incredibly handsome, and a supreme athlete. He had been encouraged to box by fellow Balliol man Paddy McGuinness and I saw him fight in the 1984 Varsity match. I had never seen such a partisan, adrenalin-fueled, gladiatorial event in my life. I had huge

respect for everyone who boxed but never imagined myself in the ring. Unlike Reed, I had little talent though played many sports for Pembroke and later that year Reed persuaded me to come down to the club. I can hear his words now “You can just use it as a way to get fit for all your other sports.” So down to Iffley Road I went, not knowing how Reed had just changed my life. After a few weeks it turned out I was really enjoying it, particularly having such a nice guy to coach us as Percy. I was also incredibly lucky as Alf Gallie spent ages with me at every training session - he must have thought I needed serious help!

Do you remember your first bout for OUABC?

I remember it very well indeed. I was incredibly light in those days, my natural fighting weight was about 9st 4lbs, and it turned out there weren't that many others at Lightweight. It came as a bit of a surprise when I realised I might have a chance of making the team. I trained really hard and indeed my first fight was at Cambridge in the 1985 match. I lost on a split decision. More galling was the fact the team lost 5-4. Reed won his bout of course, as did your editor, Mark Linehan (he invariably did). Our best boxer, light-middleweight Femi Oguntokun, had been suffering from flu and really shouldn't have been boxing. Not only that, it turned out he broke a bone in his hand in the fight. Despite everything he was well ahead on points against their captain when towards the end of the final round he got caught with a right cross. Oh, we were so close.

What did you enjoy most about being part of OUABC?

Probably the camaraderie and team spirit, which was largely down to Reed and our fantastic coaches. Many of those I fought with are good friends, and we have become even closer over the years. For the 85/86 season Reed was captain and I was secretary and, though I say it myself, we were a pretty good team. Well, he was an outstanding leader and I helped him along. Reed encouraged many more to box and numbers at the club swelled. We organised many events including the GB and Eire Universities & Hospitals Boxing Association Championships. I went down a weight to Feather (surprisingly hard to lose 4 lbs when you weigh so little) and even managed to win the title - though largely because there were again so few competitors that light.



Chris (right) on his way to winning the Universities and Hospitals Boxing Association title

But everything focused on the 1986 Varsity Match in Oxford. Sadly Alf had died late in 1985, on the day we were fighting Sandhurst, and Percy had brought in Henry Dean as assistant coach to help alongside stalwart Peter Coughlin. We had a huge squad, fantastic team spirit, and were desperate to win.

What did you enjoy least?

Very little. Probably the only thing was getting up early (by student standards) for those morning runs. Though in all those years I think I only missed one session. Oh, and regularly getting hit by the likes of Steve Diggle and Dollar Rattakul.

Which was your toughest bout

My second varsity. I was favourite but got hit hard in the second and never got back in it, losing unanimously. I remember putting my arms around Percy in the corner, hanging my head and apologising. I felt so badly I had let down both him and the team.

That feeling, however, was soon replaced by elation when we won the match 5-4. Personal victories included those by Reed and the current Alumni Chairman, Robin Duggan. We also won the Tiger Panthers 3-1. We had been working so hard for this moment, and for so long, but suddenly it was all worth it.

There was another silver lining. A few days later I went to New York for a final day's worth of interviews with an investment bank barely known in the UK in those days, Goldman Sachs. Despite looking about 15, knowing nothing, and up against Harvard MBA types, I was hoping to be only the second hire in the division with just an undergraduate degree. I am still in touch with the first person who interviewed me, at 7.30 in the morning. He later told me he knew I would get the job the moment I walked in the room and before I had even spoken. "How could we not hire a kid looking like a street fighter with that black eye." Would I have got the job without the black eye from the Varsity Match? Who knows. Would I have traded that black eye, and possibly the job, to win my bout....



The 1986 team photo, courtesy of Gillman and Soame, with Chris sporting his famous black eye!

The other great news came in retrospect. Through his leadership, Reed laid the foundations for another 15 wins in a row. 16 in total, a record in any Varsity sport. Yes, Percy, David Holmes, and of course Henry, were outstanding coaches but I don't think it would have happened without Reed.

Apart from the above, what is your abiding memory of boxing at Oxford?

Too many to mention. But I love this one. ITV made a TV programme about Blues sports in which OUABC featured heavily. Light-welterweight Sam Neaman was interviewed and asked how an intelligent man such as him felt about hitting people. Sam paused for a moment and replied thoughtfully with the now immortal phrase "The satisfaction of hitting an opponent, I have to admit, is there. And if it's a Cambridge student so much the better!"

Did you box after you left Oxford?

The guy who interviewed me for the Goldman job got me to take him to the famous Gleason's Gym in New York a couple of times which was fun. And when I came back to London a few of us started training down at the Angel ABC. But I had a desk job now and was so unfit I was getting totally beaten up in the ring...even more than before.

What are you doing these days?

I had a great time at Goldman but was lucky enough to retire fairly early. So I do what I've done for years but now on a full time basis - i.e. whatever my wife tells me!

It did mean, however, I had time to organise the fundraising for the Gallie-Lewis-Dean Gym which was opened by Percy and Henry, in the presence of the Chancellor, in 2018. Also, the photo display of Varsity teams going back to 1946. So I hope I've done our club, our outstanding coaches and their families proud by leaving a physical legacy in perpetuity.

If you could give one piece of advice to boxers at OUABC today, what would it be?

Have as many fights as you can, there is no substitute for experience in the ring. And box at Oxford for as many years as you can, the memories and friendships will last a lifetime. Plus any employer will know you are smart as you have been to Oxford, they will want to know what other qualities you have. If you have shown consistent commitment to a sport like boxing it tells them a lot.

Who is your favourite boxer of any era?

Obviously Percy Lewis, but after him Barry McGuigan. Percy got tickets for a group of us to see Barry fight for the WBA Featherweight title at Loftus Road in the summer of 1985. It was the best sporting event I have ever been to. Barry fought Panamanian Eusebio Pedroza who was defending his title for the 19th time. The atmosphere was like nothing I have ever witnessed before or after. Barry won on points but when the Clones Cyclone knocked Pedroza down in the seventh the roof came off the place. Reed was stood next to me shouting at the top of his voice - I couldn't hear a word he was saying!

Any other thoughts?

Tragically Reed is no longer with us. But I think of him often and am so grateful he persuaded me to 'get fit for my other sports'. Boxing for OUABC was one of the best things I have ever done.



Chris with Barry McGuigan at the 100th Varsity Match in 2007, and with the newly unveiled collection of team photos at the Gallie-Lewis-Dean Gym

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY AND SUPPORTING THE CLUB

As Teresa mentions in her introduction, OUABC will be hosting two matches in the coming year - the Town v Gown fixture on February 1st and the Varsity Match on 14th March. Put them in your diaries for now and more information will be released a little nearer the time.

There will be plenty of opportunities to support the club. For many of us, the Varsity Match is a once-a-year chance to catch up with old friends, usually to have a drink or two and a bite to eat, before enjoying the hostilities. Next year, Peter Davies will be organising a pre-Varsity Match meet-up for alumni at Vincent's from 4.30pm and is kindly covering the cost of the canapes, meaning all proceeds from "donations" for the event - enhanced by gift aid - will go to support the club. Details of how to register and donate will be with you in good time.

And don't forget that all bouts at matches hosted by the club are available for sponsorship - again, we will send those details as the matches approach.

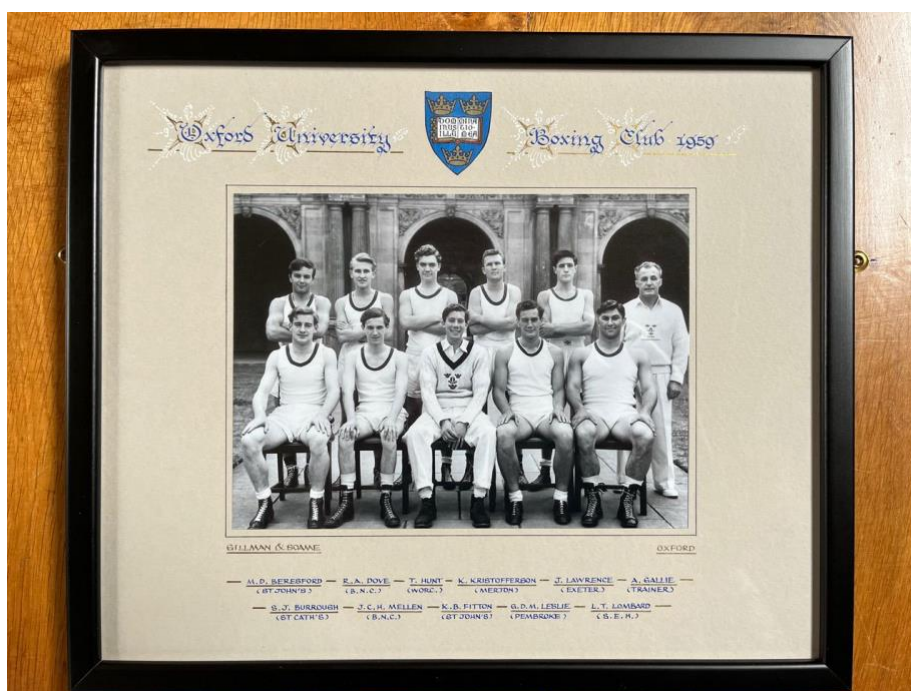
OBITUARY

Kris Kristofferson: 22nd June 1936 - 28th September 2024

Much has been written about Kris Kristofferson since his passing last month, and many of the obituaries mentioned his time at Merton as Rhodes Scholar and winning his Boxing Blue at light-middleweight in the 1959 Varsity Match. There is little point adding to these obituaries here, but there is one story that will interest OUABC alumni courtesy of Trevor Faber who shared it via the Vincent's newsletter, who I hope won't mind me quoting him:

“Alf Gallie was a top drawer coach and an absolutely delightful man. Each year he would invite a member of the boxing team to come and have digs at his home at 6 Kineton Road, and be looked after by his wonderful wife Lena. In 1961-62 (my brother) Malcolm did just that, and as a result our family became very close to Alf and Lena.

When I was lucky enough to go up to Merton in Michaelmas 1965 I went straight to the boxing training group because like Malcolm I had boxed at Clifton and wanted to continue at Oxford. At the first session Alf came smiling over to me and said “there’s no difficulty in recognising who you must be; you will come and live with Lena and me in your last year won’t you?” How wonderful was that! Obviously, I came to know Alf and Lena as family, and I remember Alf telling me that Kris Kristofferson had, out of the blue, sent him a cheque of a not inconsiderable sum of money which indeed Alf used to buy 6 Kineton Road outright.”



The 1959 team photo with Kris in the back row, third from right

PODCAST RECOMMENDATION

Not so long ago I recommended the book “The Life and Crimes of Don King” by Jack Newfield, and received some positive feedback from people who took up that recommendation. That has prompted me to recommend a podcast rather than a book in my final newsletter. Steve Bunce can be a “love him or hate him” kind of boxing journalist, but there is no denying both his passion for the sport and his extensive knowledge. His podcast “Powerplay - the house of Don King”, presented with Lennox Lewis, runs over eight episodes and traces the history of the promoter from his early days, his criminal past, his rise as a promoter, right up to the present day.

It's currently available on BBC Sounds <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/p0dfg11h>

This newsletter is for you, the alumni of OUABC. If there are any stories, news or updates on past boxers that you would like to share, please drop me an email at marklinehan64@yahoo.com and I will pass them on to Peter Davies as he takes over the editorship.