

Family that fights together ...

Hamilton's first family of fisticuffs born with sweet science in their genes

Some trainers make boxers in the traditional sense. They take a young man with no experience and, through rigorous workouts, technical instruction and repetition, transform him into a warrior.

Bob Wilcox? He does it a little differently.

Back a few years ago when he was busy making children, one can only assume he spent his days gargling liniment and eating Muhammad Ali Crispy Crunch bars while repeatedly listening to the theme song from Rocky. Because boxing somehow got burned right into his DNA. And then into his kids' genes.



SCOTT RADLEY

Throw in eight-year-old Spencer, who doesn't fight yet but already trains, and you've got Hamilton's — and very likely both Ontario's and Canada's — first family of boxing.

Listening to Dad talk, it sounds like if this wasn't the plan all along, it wasn't far off.

Growing up as a little guy in a tough school, Wilcox started going to a boxing gym at 13, to learn how to take care of himself. What he found was the routine in the club was tougher than anything outside.

"It was a little harder back then," he says with a smile. "They would've thrown us in jail (if we did things now) the way they worked us back then. If you weren't one of their better fighters, you were used for their better fighters. You learned quick, or died."

He's exaggerating a bit. About the death part anyway. But when he had his own kids, he realized that while he'd love for them to try the sport, he wasn't going to put them through that same kind of treatment.

Not long after losing his first son to cancer, he began training Steven. The kid was a natural, and quickly picked up the nuances of the sport. Even though Dad was new at the whole coaching thing.

"He started not knowing an awful lot about it, but he learned," says McGrory's Boxing Club coach Vinnie Ryan.



JOHN RENNISON / THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

FIGHT FAMILY. Steven, 18, Bradley, 13, Spencer, 8, Sheldon, 11, and Jessie, 16, with dad Bob Wilcox at Steel City Boxing Club.

"He put a lot of hard work into it."

It began to show in Steven. Soon big brother's success intrigued Jessie and so on down the line. Pretty soon Wilcox had five boys in the Steeltown Boxing Club gym most nights, hitting the heavy bags and learning the craft.

"It was hard at first," admits his wife, Cheryl, who struggled watching her boys hit and get hit. Particularly with the background of having lost a child. Any big shot gave her chills because of the worry about what could happen. Years later, it still does.

"That's my fear," she says. "I never want to see a knock-down with my child. I never want to see it with another child either."

But she's learned to deal with it.

Sometimes the family business has led to some weird situations though.

Like having two of the boys in the ring at the same time facing off.

While not everyone would appreciate the idea of watching a pair of his or her own kids beating the tar out of each other, Bob just grins at the memory.

Mostly because he says the kids had learned enough that they knew how to fight without needing to destroy each other.

"It's a game of chess," Dad says. "It's a game of tag. Who can get hit and not get hit."

Besides, the atmosphere of the gym is intoxicating to him. Even

after nearly a decade coaching he still enjoys everything about the process of turning kids into fighters.

He has to. With his own quintet of fighters — and 40 others under his tutelage — he's at the gym more than 20 hours a week. Tournaments and travel are on top of that. It makes the millwright-by-day's schedule more than a little busy.

Some day it could get a little busier if his only daughter, two-year-old Amber, decides to give it a try. But will she?

"I hope not," mom laughs. "But if she wants to ..."

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BOB WILCOX, TRAINER

The proof? Not only is he Ontario's boxing coach of the year, but he's the proud father of Steven, Jessie, Bradley and Sheldon. All are Ontario champions. Steven, 18, and Bradley, 13, are Canadian champs. Sixteen-year-old Jessie's a Canadian bronze medallist. Sheldon probably will be some day, but at 11, he's too young to compete nationally right now.