

INDUCTEE PROFILE



Tom Wilt's lanky frame and long reach helped spur him to six Pennsylvania Golden Gloves championships — a state record — before he turned professional.

Corner of the world

Commitment helped spur Wilt to boxing distinction

By **John Hartsock**
Altoona Mirror

The Blair County Sports Hall of Fame's 2014 induction class includes just the third boxer the Hall has ever enshrined.

Tom Wilt, 44, a 1987 Hollidaysburg Area High School graduate who lives in Duncansville, shares in that select distinction with the late Dick Conlon and Dave Stoop after having won 21 professional fights and carding a 132-47 record in an amateur career that included a Pennsylvania state-record

six Golden Glove championships.

Wilt fell short in his bid for a spot on the 1996 United States Olympic team when he dropped a three-round decision to David Reid, the eventual USA gold medalist that year.

There are different points of view as to why Wilt was so successful in the ring.

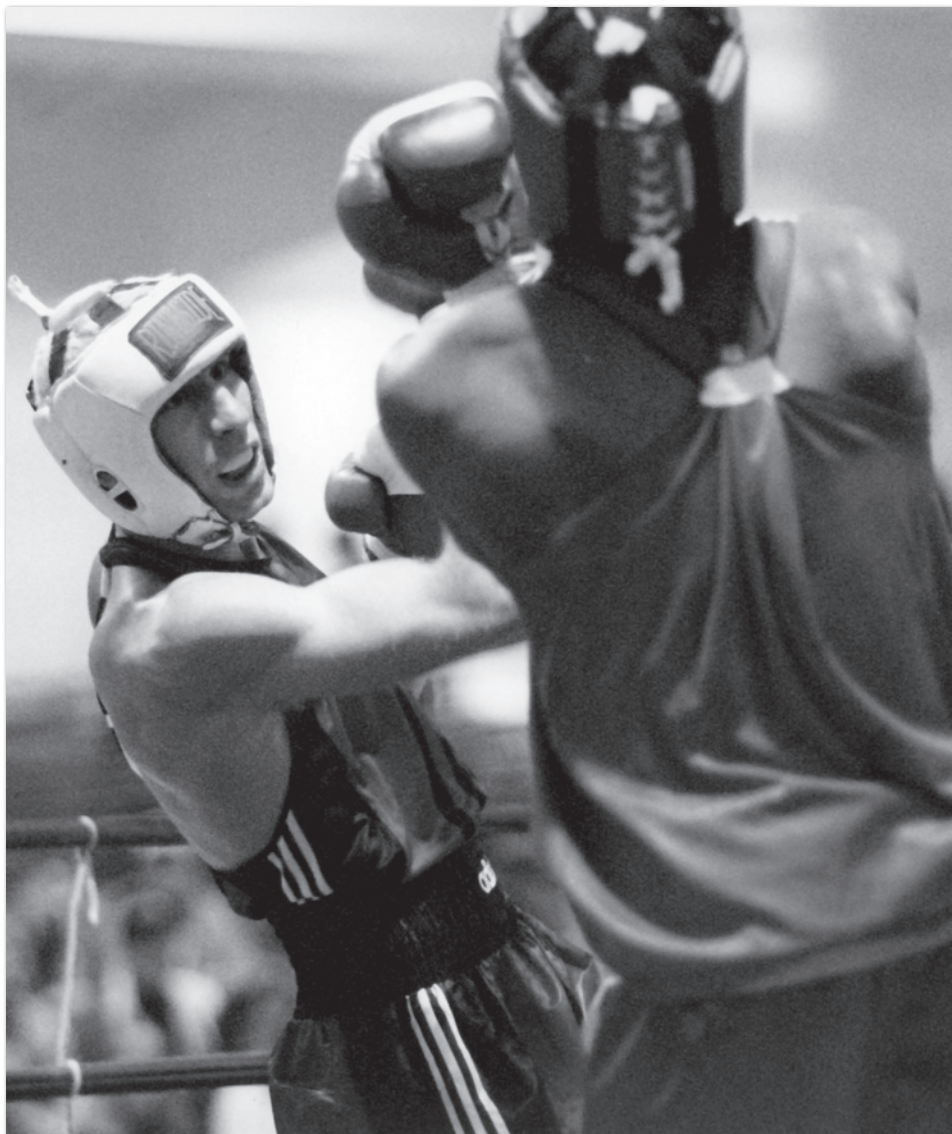
His dedication, perseverance and work ethic were cited among the biggest factors by community pillar John Robertson, Wilt's longtime coach with the Altoona Boxing Club.

"I worked with Tom for 20 years,

and he'd always go the extra mile to be successful," Robertson said. "Tom did well because he put in the time. He devoted his time to boxing, and he stayed (at the gym) and worked the longest."

The 6-foot-1 Wilt's ability to assess his strengths in the ring was pinpointed as another key to his success by Wilt's longtime pal and fellow Altoona Boxing Club member Brian Hallinan, who, like Wilt, fought on both the professional and amateur levels.

"He learned about the tools that



Tom posted a pro record of 21-10 and fought on ESPN.

he had to have to succeed, and he got progressively better at honing his skills," Hallinan said. "He's tall and lanky, and he learned how to use that to his advantage. He was an aggressive fighter in the ring, but he didn't have to be, and because with his reach, he could make (his opponents) come to him rather than going after them."

Wilt said that such reticence in the ring really wasn't his style, though.

"I really liked to get in there and mix it up," Wilt said. "I knew I was in good shape, I was real aggressive, and when the bell would ring, I would start throwing punches until the bell would ring again. That was my thing — throw and throw and throw."

Wilt, a bachelor, started boxing as a young adult and realized as a Gold-

en Gloves fighter that the sport could open some doors for him.

As an amateur and later as a professional, boxing gave him the chance to see parts of the United States that he said he would

have never otherwise visited. The sport also afforded him trips overseas to places like England and Italy.

"I was active in boxing for about 22 years, and after the first five or six years, I started stepping it up and decid-

ing that I was going to be good at it," Wilt said.

He paid the price that is necessary to achieve success. For years and years, Wilt would work his eight-hour shift as a welder at the Union Tank Car Company in Altoona, run two miles after work, get into the gym at the Altoona Boxing Club to train for his next fight, then visit the Summit Tennis and Athletic Club at night for swimming and rope-jumping sessions.

"I realized that if I wanted to do well in boxing, I would need to commit myself," he said.

Wilt won six Golden Gloves championships from 1994 to 2001, including two in the 147-pound division (1994-95) and four (1997-98, 2000-01) in the 156-pound division. He advanced to the semifinals of the National Golden Gloves championships at 156 in 2000.

Wilt remained an amateur until he was 32 years old, then turned professional in 2001 in the middleweight division. Two of his pro fights were televised on ESPN.

"I was on there twice," Wilt remembered. "One time, I got knocked out and the other time, I knocked somebody out."

Wilt wasn't phased by being on the big stage.

"I just wanted to win the fight and do the best that I could do," he said. "Afterward, people who I knew came up to me and said that they saw me on TV, and I thought, 'Well, that's cool.'"

Wilt also had a big moment in his tryout for a berth on the United States Olympic team in 1996, but lost a three-round decision to Reid, who wound up



Wilt bio

Sport: Boxing

High school: Hollidaysburg Area

Hall of Fame achievement: Set a Pennsylvania record by winning six state Golden Gloves championships before turning professional. Had more than 200 amateur and pro fights combined.

Current residence: Duncansville

eventually winning an Olympic gold medal that year.

"He had knocked everybody out the whole way through the tournament," Wilt said of Reid. "I wanted to last the whole three rounds with him. He didn't knock me out. I was the only fighter to last the whole three rounds with him."

Wilt learned a lot about tenacity from Robertson, who will present Wilt for induction at the Hall of Fame banquet. Those are lessons that Wilt is paying forward to the current members of the Altoona Boxing Club, an organization that he now serves as a coach.

"He was a great coach," Wilt said of Robertson, a past recipient of the Hall's Community Service Award. "He was real strict, he pushed us to the limit, and that's how I am now with the fighters who I coach. I've picked up where he left off, making the fighters who I coach work very hard."

The hard work has paid big dividends for Wilt.

"He accomplished a lot for himself and for the Altoona Boxing Club," Robertson said of Wilt. "I'm proud of him."



These days, Tom assists with young talent at the Altoona Boxing Club.

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