

Irish Boxer Punched, Prayed Her Way to Victory

Like a warrior princess from ancient days, Irish boxer Katie Taylor proudly carried her nation's flag after scooping Olympic gold. But she carried her Christian faith into the media spotlight, too.

"I'm here because of the grace of God," she told journalists after her close 10-8 victory against Russia's Sofya Ochigava. "Thank you, Jesus," added Taylor, who takes every microphone moment to mention her beliefs.

She went on to become 'Best Women's Boxer' of the Games. An award usually went to male boxers, but it was decided a similar honor should also go to women boxers on this, their Olympic debut.

The 26-year-old fighter, who's been boxing since childhood, is a member of St Mark's Church, Dublin, a Pentecostal congregation in the heart of Ireland's capital. Her sister-in-law Kimberley is worship leader there.

Part of Assemblies of God Ireland, the church is located near fashionable Grafton Street and Trinity College, which is home to the early medieval Gospels, *The Book Of Kells*.

Some of St Mark's 750 worshippers joined the masses of other Irish fans at London's ExCel Center for the fight. More than 200 devotees watched back at the church.

In Taylor's hometown of Bray, 10,000 fans followed the match on a big screen. Locals told Irish broadcaster RTE they were proud of the little girl who'd become the big name in women's boxing.

Proclaimed as "Warrior Hero" by the *Irish Independent*, Taylor

won not only the women's lightweight boxing final, but also the hearts of her nation—and, it seemed, much of the world—as the news swept from Boston to Brisbane.

“Katie Taylor has lifted the spirit of the nation,” said President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins. Taoiseach Enda Kenny described Taylor as “a force of nature.” The Taoiseach—Irish for prime minister—paid tribute to her parents, Peter and Bridget, who had been “her guiding light.”

The Taylors had gone to church before setting off for London. “We had them up on the platform and prayed blessing on them,” said Pastor Sean Mullarkey, 42. “We’re so blessed to know them—they honestly are a lovely family.”

Mullarkey said at the time he believed God would use Katie as “a vessel of hope and good news” as Ireland stumbled in the grip of recession. That came true.

As one spectator put it in a Web report, “Everybody forgets about the recession when she fights.” Taylor’s victory had an explosive effect on the arena audience. “It just erupted,” said an RTE reporter on the radio.

The feeling transferred to the streets. Grown men wept at home, Dublin motorists sounded car horns and neighbors shouted with joy across their garden fences. Workplaces had closed early. One media worker in Dublin said the city had “just stopped” for the fight.

Mullarkey found himself being quoted by the BBC. “It was a fantastic day for the church,” he told *Charisma*. “In one day we’ve gone from a level of obscurity—to a church that everyone has heard about.”

But away from the applause, who is Katie Taylor? “She has fought the good fight in more ways than one,” her pastor explained. “She has grown as a person in her faith and just the way she carries herself.”

Few people see the grueling routine behind her success, such as jogging on cold winter mornings and doing a six-hour training day. "It has to be faith with action," said Mullarkey, "and she epitomizes that."

Preparation for fights includes praying with her mom—and training with male boxers. On one occasion, she gave a sparring partner a black eye. "I didn't mind," said the male fighter, "because it was Katie."

Such respect is earned through hard work and heavenly assistance. As a Scripture text at her training facility says, "He makes my hands ready for battle." Those who receive Taylor's blistering punches wouldn't argue with that.