

TOWNSEND, Homer "Red" (con't)

If a student had a dispute with Homer "Red" Townsend they could always put the gloves on and go a few rounds with him in the ring.

Townsend was a teacher and coach at Belleville Collegiate Institute from the 1930s until his retirement in 1972. Students called him Red because of his flaming red hair.

He is remembered for two things, his constant involvement with sports and his disciplinarian style. Townsend backed up his mouth with muscle. Boxing gave him the ability to do so. He started around the age of 10 and continued into university until "a fella from McGill taught me a lesson."

Later, Townsend would impart some knowledge of his own to students in a similar fashion.

Townsend maintained that if anyone had a dispute with him (and wanted it settled badly enough) they could don boxing gloves and settle it in the ring. Most students knew better, but on one occasion the challenge was accepted. Townsend and an over-sized student climbed into the ring with six ounce gloves on and gave it their best. Despite the considerable disadvantage in size, Townsend cleaned the haughty lad's clock.

Townsend's rough style worked best with students from the area he calls "Stoney Lonesome" or the north-east part of Belleville. He recalls the time a student in his gym class was peering through the keyhole of the divider separating the girls' side of the gymnasium from the boys' side. After some time elapsed and the boy remained slouched over with his face to the keyhole, Townsend picked up a hockey stick and whacked him on the rump. He gestures with his fingers to show the size of the blisters that appeared on the poor boy's behind. But there was a measure of respect between them as Townsend received Christmas cards from the boy years after he left high school.

On another occasion the coach called a bothersome student to the front of the class where he said to him, "You're so stupid you can't touch your toes." When the naive young man bent over to show him otherwise, Townsend made his point by promptly kicking the boy in the rear and breaking his own toe in the process. A

lesson learned for both of them.

Now approaching 85, Townsend's red hair is white and he uses two canes when walking. His vision is poor even with glasses, but his mind is clear.

Besides a reputation, his days at B.C.I. left a legacy. The Ken Colling Run was a 5½ mile race from B.C.I. to the front of the former city registry office (now gone) on Church Street. It is an annual race started by Townsend and named after former *Intelligencer* sports editor Colling.

Townsend fired the starting pistol for the first Colling race and continued to do so for 17 years after his retirement. Failing eyesight kept him from last year's race but the athletic spirit is still with him. Explaining why he stayed teaching and coaching for so long, he

says, "I enjoyed kids. Still do. I just love to see kids out playing."

Townsend was inducted into the Belleville Sports Hall of Fame in 1987.

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Nov 17, 1991