

Cut Me, Mick!

Boxer Bashir Ramathan takes on all comers regardless of skill level or weight class. He fights out of a slum gym in Kampala, Uganda but has ambitions of fighting in America. The middleweight slugger performs all the grueling training typical of his sport: pounds the heavy bag, shadow boxes, does road work.

What separates Bashir from other practitioners of the sweet science is that he is completely blind.

A dozen years ago he developed thumping headaches. A short time later his sight failed, first in the right eye, then in the left. His wife and family abandoned him and he lived on charity from the local mosque supplemented by meals from his neighbors. With nothing better to do, he decided to return to the ring. He now accepts all challengers, requiring only that sighted opponents wear a blindfold.

This leads to some interesting moments. Jeffrey Gettleman of the New York Times reports that during a recent sparring session Bashir and his competitor wound up standing center ring, heel-to-heel instead of toe-to-toe as each man whipped crisp combinations into the empty air.

I stand in awe of the courage of a blind boxer. I mourn the futility of effort expended without effect.

"I run in such a way," insists the apostle Paul, "as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air" (1 Cor 9.26). Raw heart and unstinting effort mean little when misdirected to an unseen target. Precision and power count for nothing if punches puncture only the woundless air. Many people fight life's battles blind or blindfolded, foot soldiers in ignorant armies that clash in a starless night of purposeless pursuits.

Paul, sometimes perhaps punch-drunk from the pummeling of persecution, ears cauliflowered and eyes slitted from the knock-out blows of whips and stones, battled bravely on because he understood what he fought and what he fought for. The cross provides Christians with a clear target and a higher calling so that life's sufferings work toward a worthy goal.

Too often we box with our eyes shut, willfully sightless in the face of life's threats. When weariness whispers that the time has come to throw in the towel, we do well to take a peak and see if we're facing the right direction, fighting the right foe, landing solid blows. Purpose sustains when victory delays. Calling replenishes what effort depletes. Take a moment to look around. Then get your gloves up and wade back in.

Eyes Wide Open,
Doug