

0. MICKY WARD - BACK in the RING - Story Preface

1. THE BOYS OF LOWELL

2. DICKIE EKLUND

3. HIGH ON CRACK IN LOWELL

4. MICKY WARD

**5. MICKY WARD - BACK in the RING**

6. WARD-GATTI - FIGHT of the CENTURY

7. MICKY WARD and DICKY EKLUND - TODAY



Mickey O'Keefe, who became Micky Ward's trainer, ran a boxing-club gym in a Lowell neighborhood known as "The Acre." This image, by Emw, depicts part of "The Acre." Specifically, we see "North Common Village apartments, with Saint Jean-Baptiste Church in the background." The photo was taken from Clark Street. Online via Wikimedia Commons; [license CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

There was one cop in Lowell who had Micky Ward's best interests in mind. His name was [Mickey O'Keefe](#).

In 1993 - after Ward's right hand improved, and he dreamed of returning to the ring - his job on a road-paving crew took him to a fortuitous place. While O'Keefe was working in front of a Lowell fire house, Ward's crew was paving the street in front of the building.

Friends, the men talked about a gym which O'Keefe ran on [Mount Vernon Street](#). He called it the Lowell Boxing Club, located in a tough part of town (known as "The Acre").

O'Keefe, the police officer, had a soft spot for the young people of Lowell, and his gym gave them a safe place to work out. Soon it also provided a distraction-free zone for Ward to begin his much-desired come back.

At the time, Dickie was in jail (as was George Ward, Micky's father). Alice Ward, who had previously managed her sons' boxing careers, was out of a job on that front. With no familial urging (or interfering), Ward worked with O'Keefe - and made remarkable progress.

For six months, [Micky trained with Mickey](#) (who became a father figure as well as a coach). Years later, after he retired from professional boxing, Ward credited O'Keefe - more than anyone else - with his astonishing come back:

*I'm here because someone likes me for who I am. Someone who was with me from the beginning. Mickey O'Keefe ... Mickey didn't want control. All he wanted was what was best for me ... I know if it weren't for Mickey O'Keefe, there'd be no Micky Ward. People might not want to hear it, but it's the truth.* (Bob Holloran, quoting Micky Ward, in *Irish Thunder*, pages 273-4.)

When O'Keefe thought Ward was ready to fight again, he found the right match-ups. The fighter's confidence began to grow. He started to win ... and kept winning. ESPN invited him to fight in televised bouts. Spectators took notice. They liked Ward, and they *really* liked how he never gave up.

Then Micky got a significant break. In January of 2000, he was invited to fight Shea Neary in England.

Known as "The Shamrock Express," Neary - like Ward - had an Irish heritage. They would step into the ring at the Olympia Grand Hall in Kensington. HBO would broadcast the event, and Ward would get his first six-figure payday.

Micky was ready for the fight. He traveled to Britain with his girlfriend, Charlene Fleming, and with his brother Dickie. O'Keefe was no longer officially on Team Ward, but he was there in spirit.

Not only well-prepared to go the distance - 10 rounds in a welterweight match - Ward achieved a TKO in the 8th round. He had [defeated Neary](#) on Neary's home turf.

Dickie had always said his brother could become a champion, and now - with Dickie's help - he was. The ring announcer, Michael Buffer, made it official:

*Ladies and gentlemen! A round of applause for two Irish warriors who put on one [stunning] show here in London. The official time 2:55 of round number eight. Referee Micky Vann calls a halt to the fight. The winner and new WBU [World Boxing Union]welterweight champion of the world, Irish Micky Ward!*

Stunned at the results, Shea Neary ended his boxing career two fights later. Before his match-up with Ward, he'd achieved 22 wins and no losses.

With London in his rear-view mirror, Micky Ward was ready for the greatest period of his professional life - a trilogy of bouts with Arturo Gatti.

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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## Media Stream



### Mickey O'Keefe - Trainer of Micky Ward

Photo of O'Keefe at his Lowell gym, online courtesy *Nashua Telegraph*.

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### Mickey O'Keefe - On Training Micky Ward

Clip of Mickey O'Keefe interview, from the *Lowell Sun*. Online, courtesy *LowellSun* Channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

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### Micky Ward v Shea Neary - 8th Round TKO

Clip of the Ward-Neary fight, online courtesy HBO at YouTube. Copyright HBO, all rights reserved.

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