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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

Bruins forward closely followed at Allston boxing club he trains at

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 14, 2011 10:38 PM

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(Barry Chin / Globe file)

In 2009, Bruins forward Shawn Thornton takes down another hockey enforcer and former teammate - the taller, heavier George Parros. Thornton won the Stanley Cup with Parros and the Anaheim Ducks in 2007 before joining the Bruins the next season.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

When Shawn Thornton skates with the Bruins in the franchise's first-ever Stanley Cup finals Game 7, the team's enforcer will have a dedicated fan base from an Allston boxing club cheering him on.

Shortly after coming to Boston four years ago, the 33-year-old fighting forward joined [The Ring Boxing Club](#) on Commonwealth Avenue after Bruins media relations manager Eric Tosi, who had been a member there for around a year and a half, introduced him to the boxing center.

"It's a different workout," than what hockey players typically endure during the season, "I think that's why he likes it. It keeps him fit," said club owner John Hazard at a next-door pub where he and other club workers religiously watch the hometown squad play.

Former amateur boxer Tommy "The Gooch" McNerney has nearly two decades experience in the sport and trains Thornton during the offseason. He and Hazard said Tuesday night they plan to return to the pub Wednesday to root on Thornton and their beloved Bruins for the final game this season.

"He's a workaholic," McNerney said of Thornton.

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The training certainly doesn't hurt Thornton's chances when his hockey gloves come off and he gets in an on-ice scrap, but he boxes primarily for the grueling full-body workout, McInerney said.

"He knows how to fight already. He's conditioning himself to give him a little edge," the trainer said.

"On the ice it's different," added Hazard.

Training is done in sneakers, not skates; with gloves, not without. And, while Thornton and McInerney will spar for three minutes, often "a hockey fight is maybe 10 seconds," before referees and other players break it up.

For the third straight regular season, Thornton led the Bruins in fighting majors exchanging blows with opponents 14 times, which tied him for 12th-most in the National Hockey League.

For the past two seasons he's also led the team in penalty minutes. This year he spent two hours and two minutes in the small solitary timeout box, around 20 minutes fewer than his career-high the year prior that included 21 fighting majors, fifth-most in the league last season.

This time a year ago, the Bruins bruiser was beginning his off-season boxing routine after signing a two-year extension to keep him in Boston. Though excited for his return to the club this summer, Hazard and McInerney certainly don't mind his delay. The Bay State natives and lifelong Bruins fans are happy he's busy trying to win the Bruins first Cup in 39 years.

"It's been a long time [between championships] that's why I think everyone's so excited about it. I'm nervous as hell [for Game 7]," said Hazard, 59, who relishes the days when Bruins legend Bobby Orr ruled the ice. "But I love when Shawn comes out on the ice. I think he brings a lot to the table."

Thornton had 10 goals and 10 assists during the regular season and has one playoff assist that came in the final game during the Bruins' sweep of the Philadelphia Flyers. He and fellow forward Mark Rechhi are the only two current Bruins who've ever held hockey's prized trophy before. Thornton won it all in 2007 when the US-based Anaheim Ducks defeated the Canadian-based Ottawa Senators.

Hazard remembered when Thornton was a healthy scratch from the lineup for seven straight postseason contests, including the first two games of the Cup finals series.

"He's had a hell of a year this year. I think everybody from our gym was pissed when he had to sit a couple games. When he's not in the lineup, they're not the same team. He's the energy of the team. They need him to win. He fires them up," said the club owner of the [physical forward](#), who returned to action for the Bruins' 8-1 Game 3 humiliation of the Vancouver Canucks.

He said the second-floor facility, where "everybody's a Bruins fan," is undergoing an expansion that will double its size, allowing room for more equipment to make the [8-year-old club](#) a one-stop gym and boxing center.

Though the color scheme decision is unrelated to the beloved hometown team,

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the club interior's black-and-gold theme seems fitting. Sandwiched between a pub and concert venue Paradise Lounge, the gym is open until 10 p.m. There are two TVs, but neither are connected to cable or satellite programming service, so Hazard and McNerney usually walk downstairs to the big-screen filled T's Pub to watch games.

The trainer and owner have been able to see Thornton play in-person at the TD Garden several times this season. They are amazed at his work ethic, both during and in between seasons, to stay in shape and improve his game.

And, "He's been a really good influence – a real role model," said McNerney, 36, of Needham, who trains Thornton at the club two to three times each week beginning a couple weeks after the regular season ends until a few weeks before the preseason begins.

"He's as friendly as can be. He talks to everybody. He's great," said Hazard, adding of both Thornton and B's media relations manager Tosi, "They're great. They appreciate what we do for them."

Hazard, who hails from Milford and now lives in Beacon Hill, recalled one day when his 7-year-old son Max was selling muffins for a fund-raiser. Thornton bought the entire batch but didn't take one muffin.

"[Thornton] told him to go sell them all again," Hazard said. "[Max] thinks Shawn is the coolest thing since sliced bread. He tells all his friends about him at school," where Max wears a shirt with the winger's jersey number -- 22 -- during gym class.

The owner said Thornton is also looked up to at the club by bigger kids: the city's many college students -- especially those who play hockey for their schools -- some of whom walk from nearby Boston University or take the Green Line from Boston College.

"Even the students who aren't from around here become Bruins fans," he said. "The locals you'd expect, but even the students – they all become fans."

"They know he goes there. They learn more about him, so they follow him a little more closely," added Hazard.

Thornton has become entrenched in the city. A native of Canada, though in a city far from Vancouver, the Charlestown resident, was [told last week](#) to stop wearing his Boston Red Sox hat during press conferences.

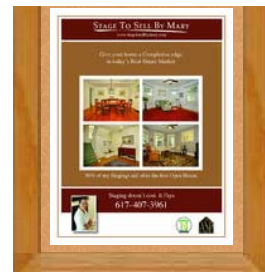
"He's a big Boston fan. He likes it here, so he likes to go to everything, to be a part of it," said McNerney, who Thornton keeps in touch with during the season.

Thornton is friends with other Hub athletes, including Sox slugger David Ortiz, whose wife, Tiffany, is a member at The Ring along with Bertha Lowell, wife of retired third-baseman Mike Lowell, the gym owner said.

Though the professional hockey player had some prior boxing training and was in great shape when he began his summertime Boston regimen four years ago, he admitted being surprised at the intensity and exhaustion of his first workout.



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“I had a lot to learn when I first got here, but Tommy [McInerney] has been a great teacher,” Thornton says in a testimonial on the boxing club’s website. “Sparring for three minutes straight is tough, but it’s conditioned me to the point where a one-to-two minute hockey fight isn’t a big deal anymore -- it doesn’t take as much out of me as it used to.”

“Boxing uses your whole body, and it’s just a better workout. I lost seven pounds in one day in here,” adds the 6-foot, 2-inch, 217-pound Bruins boxer, who has a [fan-created and run blog](#) dedicated to his colorful quotes. “And who the [expletive] wants to run on a treadmill? It makes me feel like a hamster.”

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