

Cathy Brown is one of the most recognised female boxers in history. In 1998 Cathy was only the second woman to acquire a professional boxing license in the UK before going on to win both the English and European titles and rank number three in the World.

www.cathybrown.co.uk

Now Cathy works as a personal trainer, boxing coach and cognitive behavioural therapist at The Third Space Gym (www.thethirdspace.com). She aims to use her own life and sporting experiences to help women to improve their physical and mental strength.

We speak to Cathy about how she reached the top of professional female boxing and her secrets to health and fitness.

What inspired you to become a professional boxer?

I initially started kickboxing as I needed to learn how to protect myself after being in an abusive relationship when I was 16. I was hooked on the training as it gave me the self-confidence and self-worth I never had when I was younger. After six years of competing in kickboxing, I wanted to take my career further so I applied for my professional boxing license and gave up my full time job as a Forensic Photographer for the Metropolitan Police. I also qualified as a personal trainer - a career move I have never looked back on.

Was it tough being one of the first women to get a professional boxing license in the UK?

Sexism in the UK in 1998 and throughout my 10 year career was extraordinary. No company wanted to sponsor me as a female boxer so I had to gain qualifications in personal training and strength and conditioning so I could work in the gym at the same time as training for World titles.

A lot of UK professional boxing promoters didn't want to put women on their shows. I had to get on small promotions with the promise I would sell enough tickets (about 5k worth!) to cover the purse of my European opponent (as there weren't any females in the UK at the time to fight). I had to sell tickets as well as train and work full time.

Not many boxing gyms would allow women to train as professional boxers, so I was lucky to be able to get Adam Booth to train me

throughout my career. I eventually made a name for myself and fought for five World titles in three different weight categories. Just for the record: I never got knocked out and I was fighting over 10 rounds.

Do you still take your health and fitness seriously?

I am still very aware and careful of my diet and training. It helps me keep strong through stressful times and keeps my self-esteem at its best. I train 4 – 5 times per week but I am flexible if I have a busy week and don't get upset with myself if I only train 3 times some weeks. When I was boxing it was 6 - 10 times.

What does your typical workout involve?

I mix boxing, sprints, weights and circuit training. I change my weights program every six weeks so I don't hit plateaus mentally and physically. Variety is important. Too many people stay on the same routine for years and wonder why they never advance or change.

Do you focus on nutrition to help you keep fit and healthy?

Yes, what we eat plays a huge part in how we feel. Nutritional plans need to go alongside extensive research into the individual, taking lots of things into consideration, including the way we digest food, our different intolerances and our build etc. I get all my clients to stay clear of any 'diet' fads and instead promote a healthy balance of a variety of foods.

It's sometimes not possible to get all the vitamins and minerals our bodies need in food alone, especially if you live in a city full of toxins and lead stressful, on-the-go lifestyles. We need a little help from additional supplementation to go along with our diet. That's why I take Pharma Nord's (www.multivits.co.uk) nutritional supplements on a daily basis.

For example; not many of us eat enough oily fish and that's why almost everybody should take an omega 3 fish oil supplement. I use Bio-Fish Oil from Pharma Nord. The oil is from the flesh of the fish which is purer than oil from the liver.

Omega 3 benefits so many areas of our body, including our heart, immune system and brain. It also plays an important role in energy production. This is particularly important if you have a stressful lifestyle and are training hard at the gym.

Are there any other supplements you'd recommend?

Our bodies need coenzyme Q10 to create energy. It's produced naturally but we aren't as effective at doing this from our mid-twenties. Also, intense exercise can reduce our natural Q10 levels so topping up with a supplement makes sense. Bio-Quinone Active Q10 (www.q10.co.uk) helps me to feel more energised throughout the day and I love that it's a natural energy boost, unlike sugary snacks and caffeine, which I always have a crash from.

I also take Bio-Vitamin D3 from Pharma Nord. Vitamin D is really important for the health of our bones and also to support our immune system. I don't have time for colds and flu so it's important to help boost my immunity.

Bio-Magnesium also helps me with my energy levels as if we are deficient in magnesium we can feel fatigue and muscle weakness. If we are active and exercise a lot, this can have an impact on our magnesium levels. Stress and too much alcohol or caffeine can lead to magnesium deficiency too.

What do you look for in supplements?

Before choosing a supplement I like to know about the science behind it and that it has been proven to be properly absorbed and used by the body. Lots of supplements are not manufactured in a way that makes them easy for us to absorb. That's why I take Pharma Nord supplements.

What is the most important lesson you try to pass onto your clients at the Third Space Gym?

BALANCE – in training, work, diet and your social life. Too many people are obsessive in one or more and it's not healthy mentally or physically. I work with a lot of my clients using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy alongside boxing and strength/conditioning to achieve this balance, which is a powerful combination.

What do you think it takes to be a good personal trainer?

Not treating one person the same as everyone. We all have different needs, goals and lifestyles and should be treated uniquely. Unless my clients are training for a specific sporting event and have a strict 'short term' regime, I have set programs but I am also flexible with what we do in the sessions. A client may come in stressed, tired or depressed and a great personal trainer will be able to tell what the best training to do is. You need to take the client's mental and physical welfare into account at all times.

Also, variation is the key to keeping the body guessing and the mind fresh, so you need to have many tools in your box. Every client I have is on a different program or style of training. I have clients who have been with me for over 10 years and I still have great results, whether they are old, young, training for specific events or just to feel good about themselves.

We've heard about your Bitch Boxing® workshops aimed at empowering women. What inspired you to do this?

I have been running workshops, presentations and public speaking about my journey through life and sport for a few years now and I have presented to Mental Health Foundation, Telefonica, Twitter, Reebok, Arts Council England and Size Zero Opera. I am continuing to move around the country visiting companies and charities to encourage women to use sport and activities to increase self-confidence, self-worth and self-esteem.

I also work with a charity called www.boxing-futures.org.uk working with young women in prisons and young offender institutes to mentor them into a more positive mindset. The abuse and rape I experienced when I was younger pushed me to start boxing as it helped me build my self-esteem and I got an incredibly positive and strong effect in my life from sport. I want to share what a powerful influence it has had on me with other women in the hope of inspiring them to be strong.

What has been the highlight of your career and your proudest achievement to date?

Gosh there are so many; in my boxing life, fighting in front of a 5000 strong boozing German audience against a German for a World title, standing proud to the British National Anthem, fighting strong and walking out to a standing ovation.

In other sporting achievements – sailing across the Atlantic from USA to England in an attempt to break a World record in a gutted out Yacht with Emma Richards. We hit ridiculously heavy Atlantic storms and JUST made it home in one piece after 13 days instead of 8. We had to conquer sea sickness, live on minimal food and sleep and I was horrendously scared of the sea. I transferred the mental resilience I learned through boxing to sailing, with only 4 months to train.

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sporting
journey
”

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