

I was introduced to the Manchester YMCA in 1973 by Richard Baraclough, a lecturer at North Trafford College who was also my judo instructor. I had already gained a black belt in judo and Richard thought that wrestling would improve my groundwork.

Since then I have never looked back. I have competed in three Olympic games, three commonwealth games and three commonwealth championships. Over the years I have made many lifelong friends at the YMCA. It is not only the place I train but also where I socialise.

Fitz Lloyd Walker



THE MANCHESTER YMCA

THE MANCHESTER YMCA Wrestling Club

The Manchester YMCA wrestling club, founded in 1912, has produced numerous British and Olympic champion wrestlers, many of whom still train here.

Being a YMCA member has been a life changing experience for many.

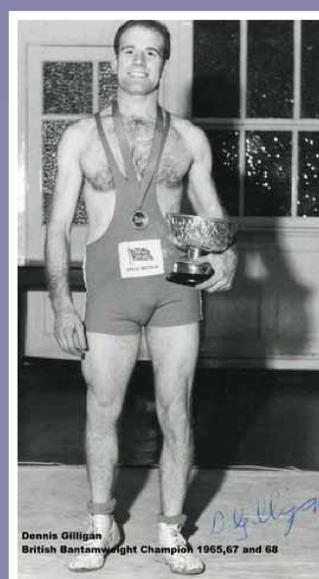
Here are some of their personal stories...



1982 Commonwealth Games Brisbane. Back Row: Brian Aspen, Fitz Lloyd Walker, Stef Kurpas, Mark Dunbar, Joey Gilligan Front Row: Keith Peach, Bert Jacobs, Kenny Dawes.

I had thus far in life led a somewhat chequered existence. I had been a member of various Skinhead gangs and was at a very impressionable age. Fancying myself as the next Rocky Marciano I was coaxed by Trevor to accompany him to the Y.M.C.A. The wrestling class had an assortment of the handsomest gathering of men I had ever seen tearing into each other like hungry wolves!! The basement skylights many of which were missing acted as a vantage point for onlookers from the main street outside. They would leer in total bewilderment. It was slightly daunting but joining the YM was to prove to be the smartest move I made in my life. At last I had a sense of belonging; I was to enjoy a sense of camaraderie that has thus far in my life been unequalled. I had joined the biggest and best gang in Manchester - THE YMCA!

Stef Kurpas



Dennis Gilligan
British Bantamweight Champion 1965, 67 and 68

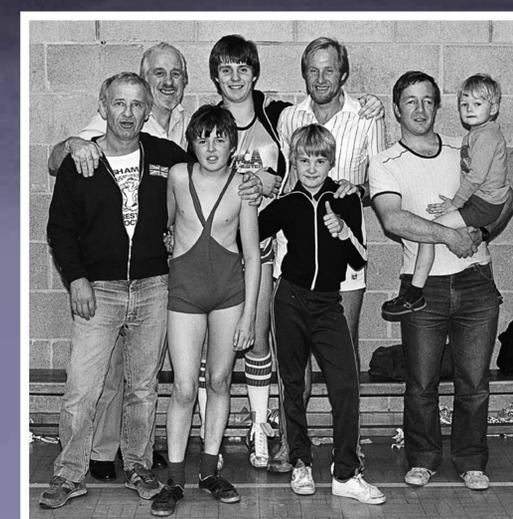
Dennis Gilligan



Stef Kurpas

I'm the only person in Salford that's won the British (wrestling) Championships. I won it 3 times. My brother Stan got me into wrestling. Me and him both went to the World Expo 1967 in Canada together. He was a lightweight and I was a Bantam weight. I joined the YMCA when I was 20 years old in 1950. I got murdered for a few years until I learnt it, then once I started winning I couldn't go wrong. Sometimes now I look at the wrestling and I wonder how I done it, you know it's that long ago. But it's a nice feeling.

Dennis Gilligan



Bill Cooper in competition team photo holding Sam Cooper 1981

'At the time (1960's) the YMCA wrestling club was probably the best in Great Britain; they had a lot of Olympians. In those days, the term that they used to use if they were asking if you wanted to wrestle was, "Do you want a pull?"

So this guy comes over and says, "Do you fancy a pull?" I went, "Well, I've never done any before," and he says, "Neither have I". So I go on, and this guy throws me all over the place, and it turned out that this was a guy called Tony McConnell, who was one of the top judo players in Great Britain at the time. He went on to represent Great Britain. So that was my first introduction into wrestling!

Bill Cooper