
LEONARD (LEN) JOHNSON

Constable #383, 1962-1989 Boxing / International Official

*Written by John Burchill, President
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Len Johnson was born in Winnipeg on July 28, 1939, but grew up on a five acre parcel of land on Henderson Highway in North Kildonan. At the age of ten he was introduced to boxing through his father and began training out of the Elmwood Boxing Club, before switching to the Madison Boxing and Wrestling Club in St. Boniface. At the time, the Madison club was run by Gordon Mackie, the long-time physical therapist for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. Mackie was also the therapist for the Winnipeg Goldeyes, the Winnipeg Warriors and St. Paul's Saints. Mackie was also a therapist at the 1972 Olympics in Munich and the therapist coordinator for boxing and weightlifting at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.

During his amateur boxing days Len was a ten time Manitoba Provincial Champion in the Flyweight and Light Middleweight classes. He had 150 bouts, winning 146 and losing only four. In 1960 Len represented Manitoba at the Canadian Olympic Trials in Montreal. However, he lost a 3-2 decision in the quarter finals and did not travel to Rome with Canada's Olympic team.

On February 19, 1962, Len joined the Winnipeg Police after the Imperial Oil Refinery on Henderson Highway, where he worked on the "proving grounds", closed to become a storage facility only. Len graduated from Police Recruit Class #60 on December 14, 1962.



Throughout his boxing career, Len got to know many people, including Patrol Sergeant Alan Wall who had joined the Winnipeg Police in 1950 and was himself an avid boxer. He would go on to form the Pan-Am Boxing Club in 1968. Alan would also become an international boxing judge, officiating at the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal.

At the time Len joined the Winnipeg Police, the headquarters building on Rupert Avenue had a gym with boxing and wrestling mats on the second floor where members could train. The gym remained for several years until the space was required for an ever expanding detective division. When the Rupert Avenue station was closed in 1966 and the new Public Safety Building (PSB) was opened on Princess Street, there was a large gym in the south end of the basement/garage.

As fortune would have it, the new gym space in the PSB was converted into three boxing rings for the 1967 Pan Am Games athletes (two other locations were set up at the Kapyong Barracks on Kenaston and HMSC Chippawa on Navy Way). Len was in the Traffic Division at the time and was assigned as an official runner between the three training locations.



Working alongside Al Wall, Len became a referee/judge with the Manitoba Amateur Boxing Association (MABA) in 1968 and would go on to hold executive positions within the MABA as President, Vice-President, Technical Chief Official and Recorder of of Boxer Records. In his capacity as President of the MABA, Len also sat on the Board of the Canadian Amateur Boxing Association from 1974-2002 where he was involved with Al Wall in drafting new rules for amateur boxing. Between 1980 and 2000 Len also operated officials clinics throughout Manitoba to help upgrade officials in the sport of boxing to the international level.

In 1972 Len became a national boxing referee/judge. In 1982 he obtained judge status on the international stage after completing exams for the *Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur* (AIBA), and in 1986 he obtained referee status with the AIBA. Len remained an AIBA international referee/judge for the next 13 years, retiring from the AIBA in 1999. He retired from amateur boxing completely in 2012.

During his time as an international referee/judge, Len officiated matches in the United States, Cuba, England, Scotland, Wales, Germany, Greece, Finland, Spain, and Denmark. He officiated at the Pan Am Games in 1987, the Commonwealth Games in 1994, the Pre-Olympic Tournament in 1992 (he was also an alternate official for the 1992 Olympics), and was the Technical Chairman for the Pam Am Games in Winnipeg in 1999. In 2006 Len was inducted into the Canadian Amateur Boxing Hall of Fame as a referee.





Len retired from the Winnipeg Police after 27 years on June 3, 1989. He was one of the original members of the Crowd Control Unit (“Riot Squad”), serving for over 20 years. He also served seven and half years in the Traffic Division, five years in the K9 (Dog Unit) and the balance of his service was in Patrol Division in East Kildonan, Transcona, St. Boniface and central Winnipeg.



Len was one of three members in the Winnipeg Police K9 Unit that began in 1971. While not one of the original members, he replaced Constable Don McLennan in 1973 and took over handling his dog “Aro” for the next four years until Aro was retired. Len was accustomed to dogs, having a number of hunting dogs. With his experience in dogs, Len would go on to own and operate Transcona Kennels, Guard Dog Leasing and Security Services from 1979-1999.

Boxers Find A Home

Manitoba's amateur boxers have kayoed their biggest problem – a place to train.

Len Johnson, president of the Manitoba Amateur Boxing Association, announced recently that boxers could now use the firehall located at Stadacona and Talbot in Elmwood.

Len stayed with the small boxing club he helped start for 14-years. Originally operating out of 325 Talbot Avenue, a renovated fire station. Built in 1906, the fire hall it operated until the formation of Unicity in 1972. It then became an ambulance depot with Pan-Am Boxing Club moving in in 1975 taking over the unused space vacated by the fire department.

Len would get the chance to train his son, Ken, at the Pan-Am Club on Talbot into a world class boxer himself – competing at the Junior Olympic Championships in Yokohama, Japan, in 1979. He was also a gold medalist in the Canada Summer Games, the Canada Winter Games and a Golden Gloves Champ.

Len is also an Honorary Member of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. He joined the Royal Canadian Legion in 1988, serving as Sergeant-at-Arms and the Branch Sea Cadet Liason for Crusader Pipes & Drums HMCS Chippawa for eight years.



Thank you for your service Len !

NOTE: Leading up to the World Police & Fire Games in Winnipeg this summer, anyone wishing to recognize a police member they feel made a substantial contribution to the world of sport in Winnipeg and its surrounding municipalities is asked to send me their name and a brief description of their accomplishments so we can profile them during the year.