

Ga Mashie Boxing Heritage

Jamestown Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow



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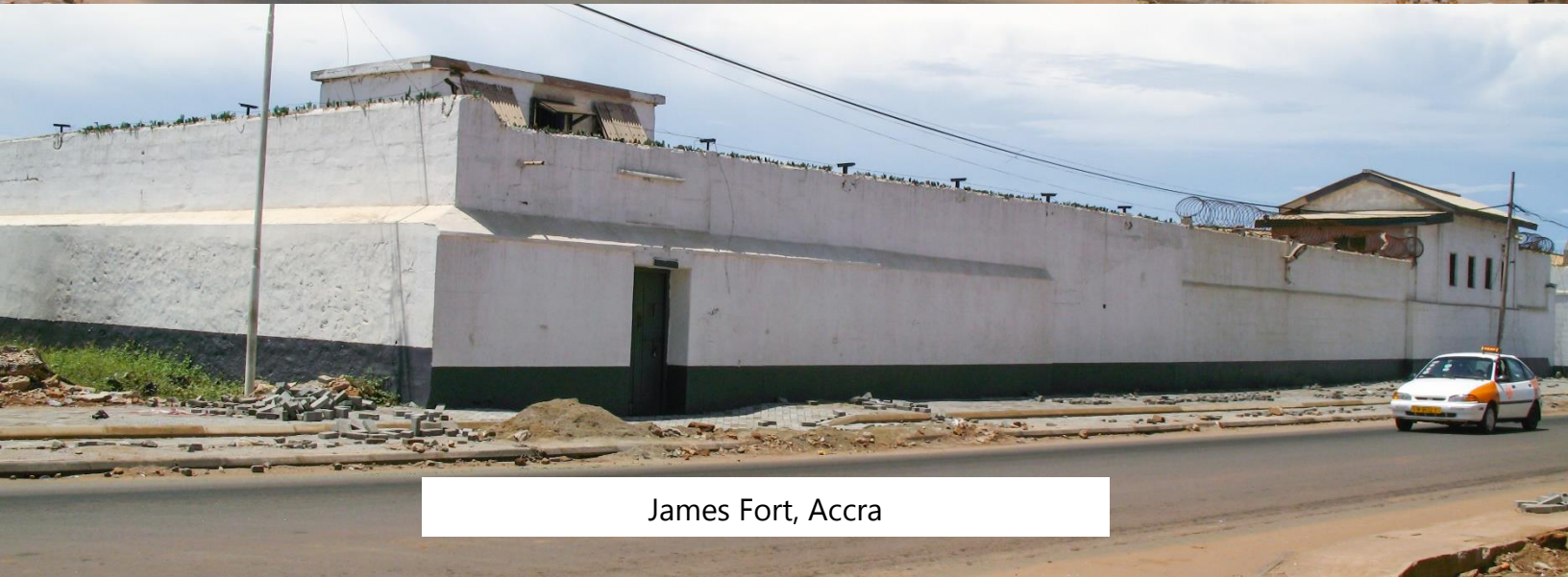
OVERVIEW

This photobook on Ga Mashie Boxing Heritage has been compiled by the Imagining Ghanaian Futures Team (Ghana Lab), the Imagining Futures Project (IF, imaginingfutures.world) in partnership with the Leventis Digital Resource Centre (LDRC, ugleventisrc.com) at the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, University of Ghana. It presents an alternative perspective to heritage discourse in Ghana that engages egalitarian archival resources to deepen the understanding of boxing as a vehicle for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in the Ga Mashie community of Accra, and among Ghanaians in general.

The book showcases photographs, accompanied by text, that vivify boxing as a means through which life is negotiated and transformed positively in Ga Mashie, beyond its commercial value. It tells the Ga Mashie boxing story from a public historical point of view to complement official histories that abound. The goal is to enhance knowledge production and sharing on boxing as an aspect of Ghana's cultural heritage and history that unites rather than divides citizens, and which can be harnessed towards realizations of social justice, peace, harmony, and sustainable development.



An enclave of Jamestown in Ga Mashie, Accra



James Fort, Accra

GA MASHIE

Ga Mashie refers to a heterogenous group of mainly Ga-speaking people that comprises one of the inner-cities of Accra, Ghana. Fishing, fish mongering, production and sale of komi (steamed balls of milled corn dough wrapped in corn husk) and kenan (fried fish), dress making, and trading are among the major subsistence activities of the people. The settlement has two World Heritage Sites, James Fort and Ussher Fort, which the English and the Dutch constructed in the 17th century respectively. Ga Mashie is the boxing hub of Ghana. It has produced most of Ghana's world and national champions and hosts about 34 boxing gymnasia presently.



A Ga Mashie street scene



Komi and kenan production

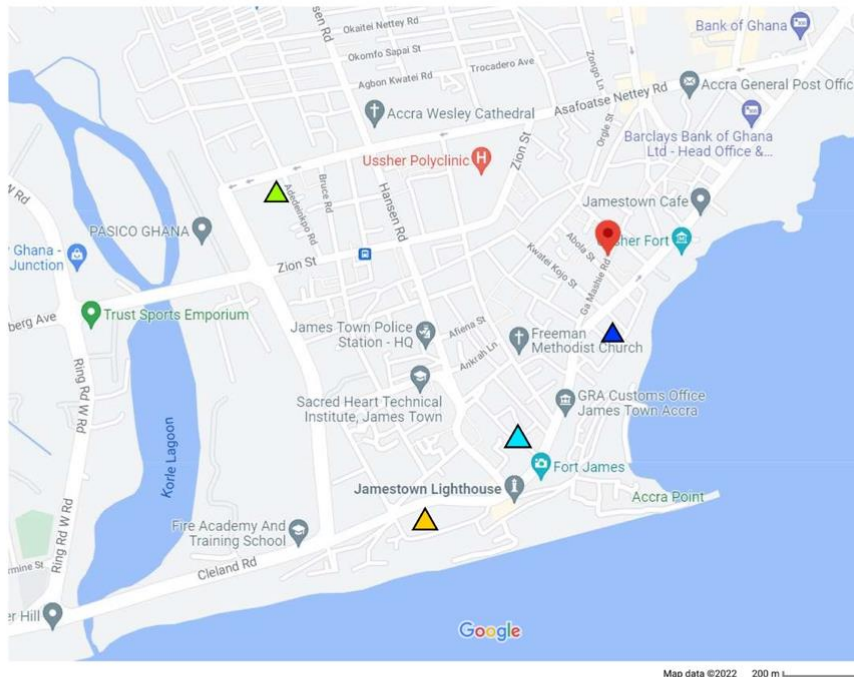


GA MASHIE BOXING IN RETROSPECT

The origin of boxing in Ga Mashie can be traced to the era of British colonial presence in the Gold Coast. Prior to the introduction of boxing, a form of competitive fistfight known as Akotoku was popular locally. Another form of fistfight in Ga Mashie was Asafo Atwele; a group fistfight which involved bare-knuckle street spars between two groups from any of the different Ga Mashie divisions, including Bukom, Tafo, Gbese, Abola, and Ingleshi.

"The Ga have always believed in Akotoku, which simply means fight, and we fight not for war but to test our strength against one another. We love boxing and we believe in pitching our horns against one another to see who reigns supreme. Boxing brings unity and entertainment to the people of Ga Mashie." - Mr. Mustapha Nettey
(Public Relations Officer, National Youth and Juvenile Boxing Team)

SOME PROMINENT BOXING GYMS IN GA MASHIE



Map of Ghana



(Not drawn to scale)

Legend

- Ga Mashie
- ▲ Wisdom Boxing Gym
- ▲ Black Panthers Boxing Gym
- ▲ Attoh Quarshie Boxing Gym
- ▲ Sea View Boxing Club



A Ga Mashie street boxing scene



FROM THE STREETS TO THE BIG SCREENS

Street Boxing

Street boxing in Ga Mashie mainly involves children between the ages of 5 and 12 practising and developing their boxing skills and abilities on the street with discipline and guidance from adults. Ga Mashie children, like their counterparts elsewhere, are usually influenced by what they see in their community and on the television. Hence, their keen interest in boxing as it is all around them. The stories of many Ghanaian world champions began with street sparring. Beyond the streets, there are two main levels of boxing. These are amateur boxing and professional boxing.



Scenes from a street spar in Jamestown, Ga Mashie

"Some of the kids who love the sport try to imitate their heroes on the streets where coaches identify and pick them for training. Coaches bring the kids to the gym where their skills are developed over a period until they become stars" - Alex Ntiamoah (Promoter, Box Office Sports Promotions)

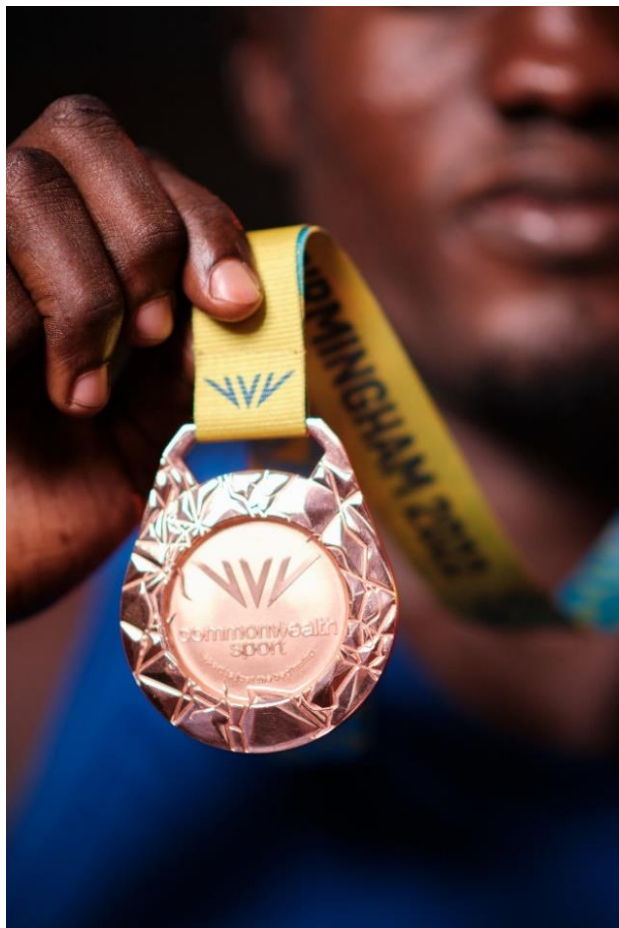
"I used to fight by the roadside until I was discovered by Coach Ofori Asare who is the Head Coach of Wisdom Boxing Gym. Now, I am his assistant. He introduced me to boxing and later in 2000, he prepared me to become the first female boxing coach in Ghana while I was still boxing." - Coach Amerley Turkson (Assistant Coach, Wisdom Boxing Gym)

Amateur Boxing

Amateur boxing in Ga Mashie involves young male and female boxers. Boxers between the ages of 13 and 17 are classified as junior or youth amateurs while those between 18 and 40 may be referred to as senior or elite amateurs. Juvenile boxers are below 13 years. Currently, training is provided for amateur boxers at the Bukom Boxing Arena towards international events like the Commonwealth and Olympic Games. The trainees practise boxing alongside schooling and working.



Some Ga Mashie juvenile boxers



Abdul Wahid Umar, a bronze medallist of the 2022 Birmingham Sports event.



Training activities of the National Juvenile and Youth Team

Professional Boxing

Professional boxing in Ga Mashie is engaged in for the purposes of entertainment and earning a living. Male boxers fight from four to twelve rounds for a duration of three minutes each. Females, however, fight for a duration of two minutes up to ten rounds. Each round is followed by a one-minute break. Ga Mashie has produced several professional boxers including world champions such as David Kotey (D.K. Poison), Azumah Nelson (Zum Zum, The Professor) and Ike Bazooka Quartey (refer to list of world champions on the page 34).



A professional female boxer defending with a counter jab



A professional male boxer breaking through an opponent's guard with 'Uppercut'

BOXING-RELATED PROFESSIONALS

Coaches

Ga Mashie coaches work to develop the physical and mental capacities of boxers. They identify and work on the strengths and imperfections of boxers and are responsible for their training and progression. Providing them with technical advice, coaches develop the offensive and defensive strategies of boxers to enhance their preparedness for bouts.

Coaches instil in boxers the self-discipline and resilience crucial for success. Head Coaches of Ga Mashie origin, such as Ofori Asare, Ebenezer Adjei, Gabriel Allotey (Zico), Vincent Akai Nettey and Charles Quartey, have continuously trained, groomed, and mentored several boxers to achieve their full potential.



Coach Ofori Asare in action



Coach Charles Quartey in action



Some Ga Mashie coaches in action

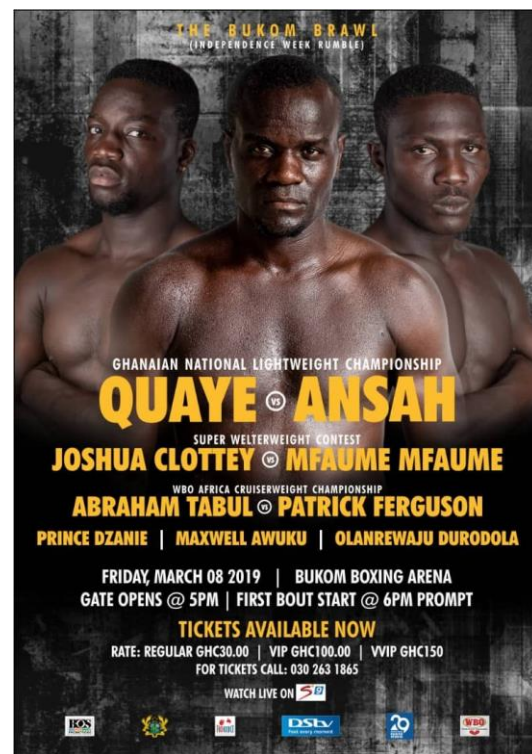
Administrators

In Ghana, the business of boxing is administered by two major organisations: Ghana Boxing Authority (GBA) and Ghana Boxing Federation (GBF). The GBA and GBF have oversight responsibility for professional and amateur boxing in Ga Mashie. They supervise and promote good health and safety standards and also ensure effective communication among stakeholders.

In Ga Mashie, there are also boxing gymnasia and coaches' associations that ensure the welfare of boxing and boxing-related professionals. These associations are also responsible for the proper organisation of boxing-related events such as seminars, health talks, workshops, sparring sessions, among others. They appoint/elect members to administrative positions as secretaries, organizers, and chairpersons or presidents. These functionaries also serve in other fields of endeavour. For example, Sarah Lotus Asare, Executive Secretary of the World Boxing Council Cares, Africa Chapter, works as an administrator at the Wisdom Boxing Gym and as a tour guide.

Promoters

Amateur and professional boxing tournaments in Ga Mashie are organized mainly by boxing promoters. Promoters are licensed by the GBA. They raise funds to organize boxing events, scout venues, employ security, arrange for other relevant logistics. They also advertise the events and are responsible for remunerating boxers, referees, doctors, ring announcers, and photographers.



Posters advertising boxing events

Referees

Referees in Ga Mashie officiate bouts and may engage in coaching and other activities. They initiate the start of bouts, prompt breaks and bring rounds to an end. During bouts, referees enforce regulations to ensure the safety of boxers in the ring. At the end of a bout, they lift the hands of winners to symbolise victory.



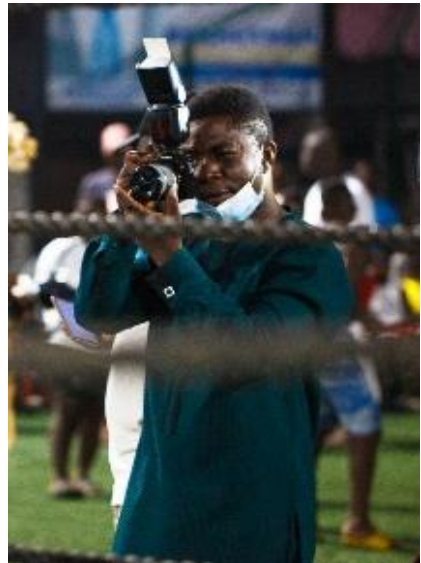
Referee Amerley Turkson in action



A Senior Ga Mashie referee in action

Photographers

Photographers tell the boxing story using their cameras. They capture boxing action in real time to memorialize events and scenes in and around the ring. Among the popular boxing photographers in Ga Mashie is Nii Otoe Bruce-Tagoe, an award-winning photographer and owner of 29 Photo Studio.



Photographers in action during boxing bouts in Ga Mashie



Some action shots captured by Nii Otoe Bruce-Tagoe



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL VALUES OF BOXING

Social Cohesion

From the streets to the professional level, boxing in Ga Mashie is incomplete without fans who are also known locally as 'supporters.' The support of fans, some of whom organize themselves into unions and engage in dance and music performances, add to the ring ambiance. Supporters usually perform Gome, Kolomashie, and Kpanlogo, some of the popular vernacular music genres of the Ga people, to stimulate boxers into action. They comprise people of variable backgrounds who are united by the common desire to promote their favourite boxers and communities. Different groups of supporters occasionally tease each other and may engage in minor conflict at the end of bouts. However, they quickly overcome their differences and come together to celebrate irrespective of the outcome of bouts. Boxing is, therefore, a peace-building medium through which friendships, networks and bonds are established and strengthened in Ga Mashie. In the words of Coach Frank Addo of Wisdom Boxing Gym:

"Being a boxer and winning high-level fights give you some kind of respect in the community and it brings people together. Although supporters sometimes break into fights, they mostly come together for jubilation. Some people may initially not be in good terms but once they support the same boxer, share in a procession, sing and dance together, they end up forgetting about their issues."



A street procession of Kolomashie performers



Ringside scenes at Ga Mashie

Women Empowerment

Boxing in Ga Mashie is not the preserve of boys and men alone. Women and girls actively participate in the activity. They perform as boxers, referees, coaches, and secretaries among other professions and are not restricted at any level. The number of female boxers in Ga Mashie has increased from 3 in the 1980s to about 30 presently. Boxing has enabled Ga Mashie women and girls to break down barriers and stereotypes, increase their self-worth and to improve their self-esteem and confidence. It has also helped them to gain access to educational facilities and jobs and to be community leaders and mentors. There is great respect and admiration for women and girl boxers in Ga Mashie.



Ms. Sarah Lotus Asare

Mentorship

Boxing contributes to the personal and social development of boxers. The training and support services provided by coaches go beyond the sport. They offer opportunities for young boxers to develop socially acceptable behaviour and character and to achieve their full potential. For example, in November 2019, Mr. James C. Nortey initiated the Besesaka Project to reduce the rate of school dropout and teenage pregnancies in Ga Mashie and improve education. The project identifies talented juvenile boxers, mentors and grants them scholarships.

"Boxing keeps our children busy. Training from Monday to Saturday will not allow them to have time for bad company. We don't teach them boxing alone but we also teach them life skills and we have the support of parents; because they know if their children do well in the future, they will change life conditions of the family."- Coach Charles Quartey (Charles Quartey Boxing Foundation)

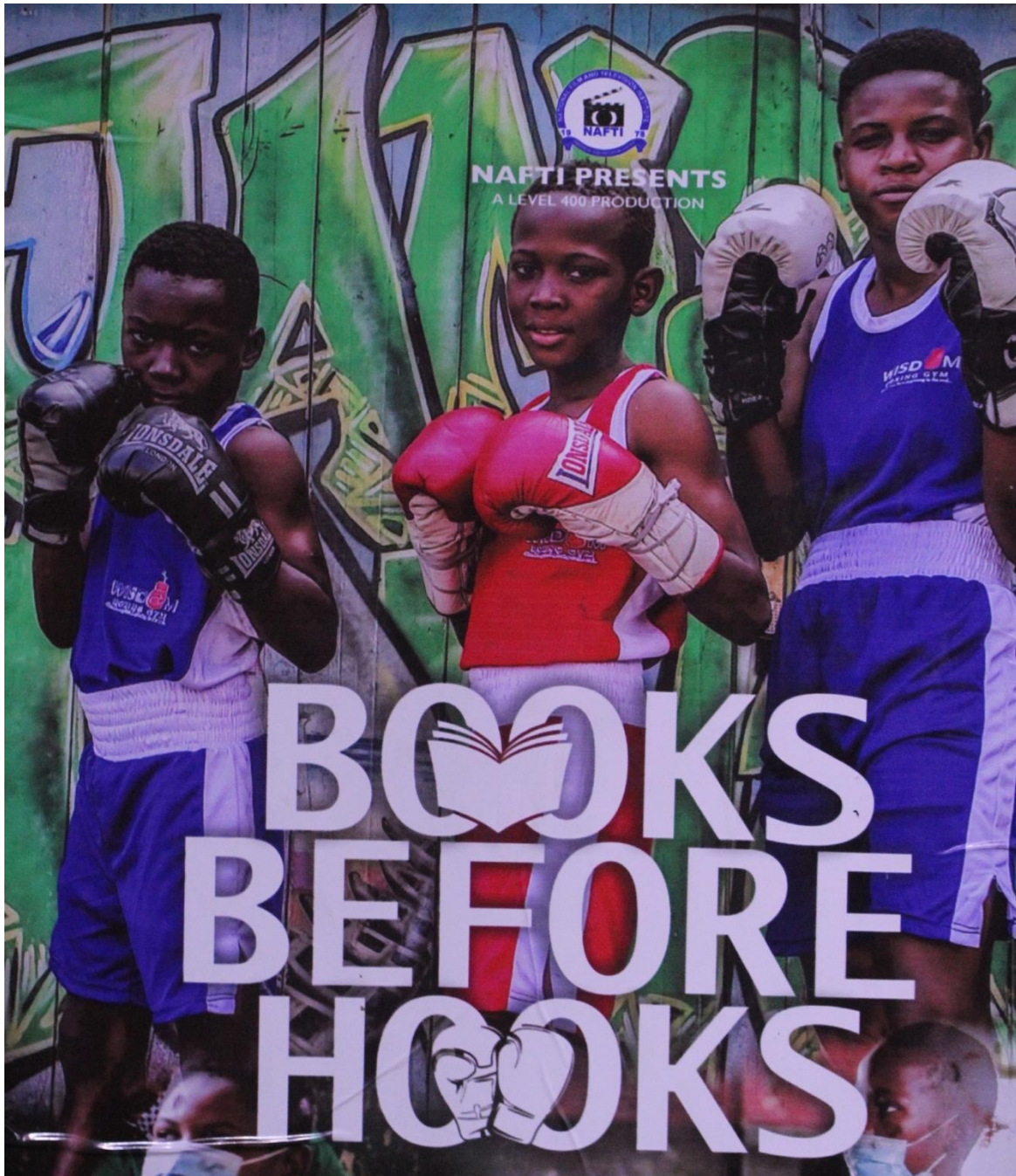


Jamestown Gbekebii pupils

The Future

Ga Mashie, the boxing hub of Ghana, has produced several world champions of whom the community and nation are proud. Many of these champions have embarked on community building activities and established businesses to provide employment. Boxing in Ga Mashie is motivating young Ga people to remain in school and progress to higher heights. Ms. Sarah Lotus Asare, for example, who earned a Master of Arts Degree in Heritage Studies at the University of Ghana is actively engaged in organizing a female only boxing tournament.

Other young ladies are becoming photographers and filmmakers who work with researchers to document aspects of Ga Mashie heritage. Many members of Ghana's juvenile and amateur teams are drawn from basic and second cycle educational institutions in Ga Mashie. Some of them have the ambition of joining the Ghana Armed Forces and others aspire to be lawyers, teachers, and boxing world champions.



A List of Ghana's Boxing World Champions

	NAME	TITLE	YEAR
1	Alfred Kotey	WBO Bantamweight Champion	1994
2	Azumah Nelson	WBC Featherweight Champion	1987
		WBC Super-Featherweight Champion	1988
		WBC Super-Featherweight Champion	1997
3	David Kotey 'Poison'	WBC Featherweight Champion	1975
4	Emmanuel Tagoe	IBO Lightweight Champion	2016-2018
5	Ike Quartey	WBA Welterweight Champion	1994-1998
6	Isaac Dogbe	WBO Super Bantamweight	2016
		WBO Junior Featherweight Champion	2018
7	Joseph Agbeko	IBF Bantamweight Champion	2007, 2011
8	Joshua Klottey	IBF Welterweight Champion	2008, 2009
9	Nana Yaw Konadu	WBC Lineal Super Flyweight Champion	1989
	Yeboah	WBA Bantamweight Champion	1996
10	Richard Commey	IBF Lightweight Champion	2019

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