

## **FORMER BOXING CHAMP PAUL WILLIAMS SPEAKS @ CHARLESTON BOXING CLUB**

By Danny Reed

CHARLESTON – “You can play football, basketball or baseball...you can’t play boxing. It’s for real.”

Paul “The Punisher” Williams was certainly for real in the ring. The Aiken, S.C. resident packed quite a punch and an exceptional reach within an unusually tall 6’2” frame, while competing as a welterweight, light middleweight and middleweight.

The southpaw accrued an eye-popping 41-2 record with 27 knockouts and won three world championships, dispatching the likes of Sergio Martinez, Antonio Margarito, Winky Wright, Carlos Quintana, and Verno Phillips.

Paul Williams is now confined to a wheelchair. But he is still for real.

Over the course of a passionate 60-minute speech he served up at the Charleston Boxing Club on Monday night, Williams discussed about boxing-specific topics: sparring, defense and winning his first world championship.

But the chief theme of his enthusiastic talk was about staying true to yourself, having a passion for life and letting nothing stand in the way of it.

“Take your life’s blueprint and run with it,” he delivered with greater poignancy than his strong left hand once carried. “Go hard in life, or go home.”

He established the Paul Williams Foundation in June, and so far, has spoken to groups in Sumter and Charlotte in spreading a message of hope, persistence and personal discovery. He also has a four-day trip to New York planned for next month.

The opportunity to speak in Charleston was a no-brainer.

“I got a phone call from his people a few weeks ago asking if he could to my gym and talk to the kids,” said Al “Hollywood” Meggett, who has operated the Charleston Boxing Club for 31 years. “My response was ‘That Sounds Beautiful’.”

Williams and Meggett first connected more than 15 years through the late Lee Wells, Williams’ former trainer as an amateur at the Aiken Boxing Club and a student of Meggett’s when he served as a boxing trainer in Harlem in the late 1950s.

“Paul is funny guy and a good kid,” opined Meggett. “We have always had a nice relationship.”

Known for his relentless punching assaults and infectious energy, Williams not only became a fan-favorite but one of the most feared and undesired opponents in the sport.

He was set for perhaps the biggest match – and undoubtedly the biggest payday – of his career against Canelo Alvarez for the WBC junior middleweight belt in a bout set for September 15, 2012.

On May 27 - less than a week after the match was announced -Williams was involved in a motorcycle accident outside of Atlanta while en route to his brother’s wedding, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down.

Remarkably, Williams may be more active now than he was as a professional boxer.

In addition to being an avid hunter, fisherman, and philanthropist, Williams has also delved into real estate as a property manager. He might not be “The Punisher” anymore, but he has facetiously dubbed himself “The Landlord.”

Either way, the man behind both sobriquets is still Paul Williams, the gregarious, uber-personable, perpetually positive 33-year old who gained great fame from humble beginnings.

Three weeks ago, he hit the heavy bag for the first time since the accident.

Yes, Paul Williams is still very much for real.

“True champions will roll with the punches,” he concluded. “Stay in your own lane. Never change.”

Williams will also be speaking on Tuesday at 6 p.m. at the School of Hard Knox - home of the Summerville Boxing Team – located at 1130 Boone Hill Road directly across the street from Summerville High School. For more information, visit [www.svilleboxing.com](http://www.svilleboxing.com).