



Heavyweight Boxer

Hamed Sabri Dashti is a heavyweight boxing champion and kick boxing champion from Iran. He arrived in the UK in February 2008 and has been sent to live in Leeds. He is 27. (Interview conducted through a translator)

So, you're a heavyweight boxer?

Yes, I have been boxing and kick boxing since I was young. I have won competitions in cities all over Iran, and also in Malaysia, Turkey, Syria, Belarus, Armenia and Ukraine. I was selected for the Iranian Olympic Team for Athens in 2004.

What happened?

I didn't get to go to Athens because of corruption. The fundamentalists took their favoured people to Athens instead.

Is that why you had to leave Iran?

No, I ran two fitness gyms in Tehran and wanted to stay. Over a thousand people used my gyms. We had many students and pro-democracy people using the gyms. But the secret police came every day and made trouble, asking why were women there dressed in Western style, why were we listening to western music. It was the same kind of music that people work out to in gyms in the UK, but they said it was the music of Satan. Sometimes they would break windows and beat people there and they would padlock the door.

Did they beat you?

Yes, they attacked me as well, several times, hitting me with batons. They damaged my knees.

But you are a heavyweight boxing champion?

I couldn't fight with them; they had all the power and authority. I had the energy and skill to fight with seven police if I wanted to, but it would have brought big problems for us if I had. Anyway, a sportsman should be humble; I shouldn't fight with people away from sport.

In the end though I had to leave Iran because it wasn't safe there for me.

Are you still boxing now you are in the UK?

I only came to England in February this year and have lost weight and been under a lot of stress since fleeing my homeland. I have lost 25 kg in weight, I used to weigh 125 kg. I used to be able to lift 200kg but I have lost condition now because I can't afford to go to gyms in the UK. I want to get back in shape and box for England.

What about all your medals and trophies?

I had to leave them all behind when I fled from Iran. Now I only have some photos and my Olympic team card. The Home Office took my Olympic card, as evidence for my asylum claim. I just have a photocopy now.

Do you like British boxers?

Yes, Lennox Lewis was a big hero in boxing for me. Also, Dorian Yates, the great British bodybuilder, we were big fans of his in my gym in Tehran. We sent him a message of support and he sent us a video message thanking us, it was very nice.

