

10 Equipment Essentials for Boxing Success!

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I've carefully checked this report for accuracy. However, I'm human. I may have made mistakes. If you spot any, [please let me know](#) so that I can fix them in future editions.

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Choosing the 10 Essentials.....	5
1. The Heavy Bag.....	7
2. Hand-wraps/Bandages.....	9
3. Boxing Gloves.....	11
4. A Method of Timing Rounds.....	13
5. Skipping Rope.....	15
6. Mirror.....	16
7. Exercise Mat.....	17
8. Maize Bag.....	18
9. Motivation Aids.....	19
10. Pads/Focus Mitts.....	20

Introduction

Before we get into the detail of the report let's, for the purpose of clarity, outline a couple of definitions of 'boxing success':

- In competitive terms, 'success' means that continuous improvement is achieved. Being a top performer against any opponent in a competitive environment. This success is attained by effective instruction (coaching), correct use of equipment, consistent practice of the skills against peers and personal dedication to the sport.
- In basic fitness terms for non-competitive purposes, 'success' is defined as being comfortable with your basic understanding of the equipment and being able to use that equipment over a prolonged period of time in order to improve general fitness and make gains in the efficiency and power of your punches.

Boxing has always been a sport that has very few barriers to participation. Barriers in other sports can be social, geographical or financial. There continues to be many excellent boxing clubs and gyms that provide the space, the equipment and coaching resource to allow people full access to the sport. These gyms are most often 'pay as you play' and as such do not demand that a contract be signed. This is why people from all backgrounds can easily access boxing as a sport and is indeed why the sport remains very popular today.

For the experienced boxer, the equipment in this report is already well understood and no doubt used to great effect. For those who are new to the sport, some items of the equipment may be familiar but some more detailed, impartial information might be beneficial. For example you might like to get involved in boxing, but would like to get yourself in shape by setting up some equipment at home before taking the step of visiting a gym. You can build up a degree of confidence by developing an understanding of the skills and fitness methods in your home environment. Remember though, to be a competing boxer, you need to be in a gym getting coached properly!

It may be in fact that you are already involved in boxing (or any other combat sport), and would like some guidance on setting up additional facilities in your home environment to use at your discretion. It may be that you would like to work out at home, maybe with a partner or friend, and would like a variation from the often expensive option of treadmills, exercise bikes or multi-gyms. If you have the space available, be it in a garage, basement, spare room or attic, then you can establish yourself a functional gym where you can increase your fitness levels and learn and develop the technical skills of boxing. Learning a technical discipline provides variety and therefore helps to maintain interest in getting and keeping fit. This can all be achieved within a very modest budget, spending as much or as little as you like.

In line with the advice I give on www.myboxingcoach.com, for the purposes of competitive boxing, having some boxing fitness equipment at home can never and should never replace a boxing club/gym staffed with knowledgeable and qualified coaches. Boxing is an affordable sport, and local boxing gyms are beacons of this affordability! If you intend to exchange blows with someone, do so under the supervision of qualified coaching staff in a dedicated boxing

club or gym.

Within this report, I will not be covering personal protective equipment such as head-guards, low-blow protectors or mouth guards. Furthermore, I won't cover items of apparel such as boxing boots (a decent pair of trainers will do fine!), shorts etc. Looking good is not a pre-requisite to being 'successful', it's the equipment and how it is used that offers one of the core elements of success.

There are some basic items that I consider 'staples' of any gym, be it a boxing gym or otherwise. Items that I would include within this description are a drinks bottle, a bucket and layers of clothing to remove/add when warming-up and warming-down. We'll cover how some of the equipment and facilities are used, but won't get into any detail on fitness programs or boxing technique, this is covered on www.myboxingcoach.com.

An further obvious omission is a boxing ring. If you are attending an equipped boxing gym, then a ring will be available. Unless there is full-contact, open sparring taking place, a solid workout can be completed without the necessity of constructing a 22 foot ring in your attic! If you want to undertake open sparring, do so at a main gym!

On a final note, the title of this report is *10 Equipment Essentials for Boxing Success*. This means that whilst the 10 items I cover would indeed be constituent parts of a great gym and would support successful skills development, you may just as easily gain benefits from hanging a heavy bag from a rafter or cross-beam and having a piece of old carpet on which to do groundwork (push-ups, sit-ups etc.) and flexibility work. Boxing is a sport that requires dedication and hard work, not a bulging wallet!

Choosing the 10 Essentials

As with all things in life, I've been forced to make compromises in coming up with the *10 Equipment Essentials for Boxing Success*. There are items that I have left out that many will think as amiss! Most obviously missing is the speed-ball or speed-bag. This is an example of my logic, which may be flawed, but I'll leave it to you to come to a judgement. There are two key reasons that I have not included the speed-ball:

- 1) The only time I see a speed-ball being used is when a professional boxer is promoting an upcoming fight. In all the years I've been around boxing gyms, I very rarely see them installed, and where they are installed, I very rarely see them being used. As far as I can tell, they are a device for showing off! The counter argument to this would be that the speed-ball helps develop hand-speed. I would suggest that a floor-to-ceiling ball is far and away a better piece of equipment to develop speed and also provides excellent options for developing defensive skills.
- 2) Because the speed-ball is just TOO NOISY!!! Headaches can be an occupational hazard, so why add to your potential cerebral misery by having a speed-ball banging away!!! Other occupants in the gym (or at home) will I'm sure thank me for this omission.

My twisted logic aside, what are the criteria that I have used in devising the *10 Equipment Essentials for Boxing Success*? The following have been at the forefront of my mind during my deliberations:

- 1) I wanted to create a list of essentials that favours a balance of skill development and a strong fitness regime. Boxing requires conditioning to maintain form and technique throughout a bout and the strengthening of particular muscle groups that improve punching power. Achieving the balance is vital.
- 2) I wanted to provide equipment that maximises variation and therefore promotes the ability to maintain interest in skills development over a prolonged period of time.
- 3) I wanted to ensure that I don't promote a perception that purchasing key items of boxing equipment should be an expensive venture. There is a minimal level of equipment needed, and this is very important to understand. A punch bag, hand-wraps/bandages and gloves are an excellent start.
- 4) Having been active in the sport for many years, as a competitor and a coach, I wanted to distil the key items of equipment into the restrictive count of 10 (no pun intended). I could have gone beyond 10, and in many ways it's been difficult to work within this restriction. It has however had the effect of forcing me to really consider the use of the equipment and prioritise it's inclusion in order of effectiveness.
- 5) I wanted to provide a list that would maximise the benefits of both training alone and working with a partner.

So without further ado, the *10 Equipment Essentials for Boxing Success* are:

1. Heavy Bag
2. Hand-wraps/Bandages
3. Boxing Gloves
4. A method of timing rounds
5. Skipping Rope
6. Mirror
7. Exercise Mat
8. Maize Bag
9. Motivation Aids
10. Focus Mitts/Pads (for work with a buddy).

Over the following pages, I'll cover each of these items in some detail. I'd be really interested in your feedback on this document. If you have any thoughts, email me at fran@myboxingcoach.com and let me know, good or bad (help me out by including the word 'essentials' in the subject line.)

Finally, and in the interest of openness and honesty, I need to outline the basis of the links used for illustrative purposes. Throughout the document, there are many illustrations used. These illustrations are affiliate links to an equipment website. If you choose to buy any equipment from the site, then I receive a small commission. My priority is that you find this report useful and the use of images in my view is fundamental to achieving this.

1. The Heavy Bag

The presence of a heavy bag is what defines a boxing gym. Many gyms retain bags that have been 'part of the furniture' for many years, complete with running repairs administered with gaffer tape following years of impacts from the patrons. Unleashing big shots on a heavy bag has so many benefits for the user.

The bag allows you to use different styles and techniques, either moving side to side and pinging long-range shots, or stepping in close and using crunching short and mid-range hooks and uppercuts. The bag can be used to improve speed, strength and endurance by configuring the rounds, punching rate and punching style accordingly. It's also a great way to relieve the stress at the end of a hard day! As an additional bonus, you don't need much floor space for using a heavy bag, as you need never be any more than a few centimetres out of punching range.



There are a number of different types of heavy bag. Things have moved on a pace since ubiquitous free-hanging bag made famous on the old boxing films (except Rocky, where he used half a cow carcass...it takes all sorts I guess!) Modern punching equipment includes wall-mounted pad systems, angled hanging bags and even 'person' shaped high density foam free-standing objects complete with chiselled good looks and taught six-pack. But, do these additional choices actually offer any benefit beyond that offered by the old faithful heavy bag?



I have used many different styles of bag over the years. The traditional type of [heavy bag](#), such as that shown above, is what we expect to see. The bag itself is generally hung from a wall mounted bracket or from an available cross-beam or rafter. Obviously, if you are going to use a [wall bracket](#) (left), it needs to be fixed very securely to the wall using the recommended fixings. After all, the more you hit a bag, the more developed your punching skill. The more you develop your punching skill, the more power you generate. I can imagine few things more embarrassing than to develop all of that punching power only to be knocked out by a falling wall bracket!

In terms of the type of bag, you should ensure that the leather hide is hard-wearing and that the weight is substantial enough to not move too dramatically from a single power shot. Bags are traditionally filled with cloth rags, packed in tightly to ensure an appropriate amount of resistance when the shot lands. Even though when using a bag

the hands should be well protected with bandages/wraps and gloves, it's important that there is some 'give' in the bag, however slight this may be. The high impact nature of punching a bag can cause degenerative problems if the bag is too hard and the hand protection is not appropriate.



So what about the other options that I've mentioned? In terms of the [wall-mounted pad system](#), (right), I feel that unless you are working to a generous budget and you have ample floor space available, these pieces of equipment should be reserved for a full-sized gym. A key benefit of this type of system is that it encourages the boxer to combine effective footwork with dynamic body movements and a varied range of punches. A drawback is that there is very little 'give' and as such is impractical for use for a prolonged period such as a session of 6 x 3 minute rounds, unlike a conventional heavy bag.

Another modern piece of equipment is the [free-standing 'human' target](#), made from high density plastics and rubbers and complete with life-like body shape and target areas (left). I've seen these pieces of equipment in gyms over the years. In principle, the idea is sensible, but what tends to happen is that people constantly strike the target under the chin with uppercuts. Over time, this focussed assault tends to lead to a partial decapitation and ultimately a complete decapitation, generating the rather disconcerting situation of a mock human head bouncing across the floor of the gym! My own view is that this piece of equipment is an expensive luxury that I feel adds little, if any, additional value to that provided by conventional punch bags.



There is one other type of bag that I haven't mentioned, and for very good reason. This is the Maize Bag and the reason I haven't mentioned it here is that I've nominated it as one of the *10 Essentials* because of the superb options that the bag offers.

2. Hand-wraps/Bandages

Okay, you've invested in a decent punch bag and now you're ready to start unleashing dynamite punches. Take notice of this golden rule; never, ever hit a punch bag without appropriate hand protection. Don't even be tempted to have a little pop as you walk past. The damage that you can do to the hands if you don't have them well wrapped and protected with gloves is immense. I'm not talking about nasty little cuts and abrasions here, I'm talking about disintegrated knuckles and shattered metacarpals where the damage is so grave that the hand is permanently disfigured and will never function to full potential again.

There are a range of options available when it comes to hand protection, none of which are going to break the bank, so there's no excuse for avoiding pain and problems. When you notice a boxer at the end of a big fight, they've taken off their gloves and underneath are very tightly packed, solid bandaging, gleaming white and trimmed to perfection. This is a special effort for the fight. In gym time, professional and amateur boxers alike tend to be much more practical. Hand protection is covered in the main by the following options:

- Crepe bandages
- Hand wraps
- Gel-filled under gloves.



[Crepe bandages](#) were for many years the standard. They are available at most pharmacies/drug-stores and are very hard-wearing. You can have any colour, so long as it's white (right), and avoid purchasing the basic cotton version as there is no elasticity in these and they really can become quite uncomfortable on the hand. It's helpful to make a small incision at one end of the bandage to allow the thumb to be threaded through; this makes the process of wrapping the hands easier.

The bandage should be about 7-10cm wide, but should be as long as is available, usually 4-5 metres. The length is important because the ideal way to wrap the hands is to feed the bandage in between the fingers and some way up the wrist. Feeding the bandages through the fingers prevents the bandages riding up the hand when hitting the bag, thus avoiding leaving the knuckle area unprotected. A key benefit of the basic bandage is that a layer of thin foam can be placed underneath the bandage, providing additional protection.

[Hand-wraps](#) (right) are a more modern progression of the crepe bandage. They are very tightly woven fabric and are available in a range of colours. Hand-wraps are specialised pieces of kit designed for combat sports such as boxing, Muay Thai and Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). Wraps include a loop or 'partial glove' at one end (to provide the anchor point to wrap the hands) and a Velcro



fastener at the other end, allowing a speedy application. Wraps tend to provide a higher level of protection than crepe bandages, and would not ordinarily require the addition of sponge layers to improve protection.



The final method of hand protection is the modern [gel-filled under-gloves](#). This type of hand protection has become more common in boxing in recent years following their traditional arena of use being other combat sports such as Muay Thai. They are the most expensive form of hand protection, and although their use has become more common, the hand-wraps and to a lesser extent the crepe bandages are more prevalent in modern boxing.

Under-gloves tend to be marketed as a convenient alternative to bandages or wraps, so there may well be compromises in terms of hand protection. I would suggest that if you are going to try these types of gloves, ensure that they fit the hand perfectly. If there is any movement of the glove across the hand, then it is highly likely that significant friction-type injuries will be caused to the knuckles. Whilst these injuries are not terribly serious, they can be very annoying and troublesome over time. I'd also be concerned that the many stitched joins could be a source of weakness where damage could occur.

On a final note, I will again emphasise the importance of protecting your hands, after all they need to last you for the rest of your life! Gloves alone cannot provide the necessary 'armour' for your hands. Repeated blows against a heavy bag (or the even more implacable maize bag) are going to put massive stress on your hands and wrists, so take bandaging/wrapping seriously and enjoy bag work without the threat of causing lasting damage to the 'tools of the trade'.

3. Boxing Gloves

We've covered the equipment that provides 'the thing to hit'. We've covered the primary method of protection that we provide for our hands. The final piece of the jigsaw is the gloves that we use to 'weave our magic'. There is a huge array of gloves out there to choose from. Gone are the days of Jack Dempsey where 4oz 'jaw-breakers' were the norm. When working in a home gym, there is no need to be constrained with what you choose, and indeed, it's common for boxers to wear different types of gloves depending on mood.

In boxing, there are 3 broad areas of gloves; competition gloves, sparring gloves and bag mitts. Competition gloves for professional boxing and amateur boxing have significant differences, although for the purposes of bag work both are perfectly valid to use. [Amateur competition gloves](#), such as those pictured on the right, are 10oz weight with the majority of the padding (and therefore weight) is at the knuckle part of the glove.



[Professional competition gloves](#) (left) are available in 8oz or 10oz, but the weight/padding tends to be more evenly distributed around the glove and the wrist section of the glove tends to be longer. This results in a thinner glove at the knuckle section. I tend not to use amateur competition gloves for bag work for 2 main reasons; 1) The thickness of padding around the knuckle area really does (by design) absorb a great deal of force and can often dull the sensation of power and 2) they are much more expensive than the alternative options.

In my opinion, professional competition gloves give a better 'feel' whilst using the punch bag, but again are at the expensive end of the market and may not actually be practical in terms of getting them on or off (avoid laces if you are working at home, go with Velcro fasteners if you go for a competition style glove as tying laces with your teeth is pretty much an impossible task!)

[Sparring gloves](#) (right) are always heavier than competition gloves and therefore offer more padding and protection. Boxers tend to spar very often, based upon the logic that the more you do something the better you get at it! Top professional boxers when preparing for a fight may spar up to 200 x 3 minute rounds of sparring, so heavier, more padded gloves make a big difference in terms of the potential for injury. Sparring gloves tend to be 14oz to 18oz, and indeed some of the bigger pro boxers are likely to use this type of glove for working the heavy bag.



In terms of day to day use, I'd probably consider sparring gloves alongside competition gloves in terms of use at a home gym; they are expensive but do provide additional

padding and excellent wrist support (although this support can equally be achieved with effective bandaging). Using this type of glove on the heavy bag can be out of necessity, such as when recovering from a hand injury and seeking to reduce the shock from impact, or a simple matter of mood; sometimes a change is as good as a rest!



The final type of glove I will cover is the bag glove or bag mitt. Bag mitts tend to go up to 10oz to 12oz in weight and are available in a range of colours that will suit any taste. Bag mitt options have moved on significantly over the years from the traditional style [bag mitt](#) (left) to now cover a range of hybrid gloves that take design elements from the competition glove range and combine these with the characteristics of the traditional bag mitt.

The common characteristic across the range of bag mitts tends to be a reduced level of padding in the knuckle area. The reduced level of padding in the knuckle area really allows you to 'feel' the impact of the shots, very important for self-confidence purposes. Remember, as explained in the previous section effective bandaging/wrapping of the hands is the primary method of preventing injury, so don't compromise, especially when using thinner gloves like bag mitts!

If I were restricted to owning only one pair of gloves for working a heavy bag, I'd go with a conventional set of bag mitts. I would avoid the style that has no thumb or allows the top of the thumb to protrude. Again this is a personal choice, but I always feel better with my thumb inside the glove!

If I were to get really extravagant and own two pairs of gloves for bag work, to cater for moods or to provide extra protection for my hands in order to perform a piano concerto (I wish), then I'd add a 'hybrid' type or [moulded bag glove](#) (right) that offered more padding and shock-absorbing protection to the knuckle area and support to the wrist.



4. A Method of Timing Rounds

Throughout the sections of this document, I have and will continue to stress the importance of variation in your options for using the home boxing gym. A key factor for why people don't follow through on their plans to 'get fit' is the boredom generated by ploughing through the same old routines day in, day out. The same can be true of boxing (although learning a skill element does help to maintain interest), but being able to have a dynamic range of options in terms of timing structures and variances can be a real positive. A basic example of this option is the fact that 3 minute rounds (with one minute rest periods) at a steady rate is great aerobic work, whilst 1 minute rounds with 15 second rest periods working a maximum rate is great anaerobic work.

Something I often see (and it never fails to disappoint me) is somebody working a heavy bag until they are tired, and then taking a rest until they are recovered. It is vital that the structure of the rounds is maintained. If you set off on a 3 minute round, then you must see the round through to the end, no matter how tired you are! Results will not be achieved if you decide to stop working whenever you tire!

Before we get into the range of options available, I want to suggest a very simple solution that whilst not ideal is perfectly adequate; an analogue clock with a second hand! As long as the clock is in the correct location i.e. when working your heavy bag it requires only a quick glance to see where the second hand is up to, then you should be able to get by perfectly well. It can be a little distracting to keep track, but as a boxer you are expected to process lots of information as you move through a round anyway!

So, aside from the good old fashioned wall clock, what other options are available? In general terms, there are 3 options:

- Gym timer
- Personalised timer
- Pocket timer

A [gym timer](#) (right) are at the top end of the market in terms of price. They have a range of timing programs, commonly 1 to 5 minute round times and 15 second to 60 second rest times. They have the option of an audible (and visual) signal of the round status (active/inactive) and of the last 30 seconds of the round. If you can find a gym timer that suits your budget, go for it as they are the ideal option. Be aware though, the audible tone can be very loud and very high pitched, so I'm not sure you'll win a popularity contest if the timer is intended for domestic use!





The next option is the [personalised timer](#) (left). This piece of kit is a development of the wrist watch (which would not be an option for obvious reasons) and is designed to be worn around the upper arm. The digital device tends to offer very simple round options e.g. 2 or 3 minute rounds with 30 to 60 second rest periods. There is an audible tone and vibration for notification purposes. I've never tried this type of device, but must admit to having one main reservation. Given that the arm muscles, including the biceps, will extend and contract regularly during the round, I wonder how likely it would be that the device would work loose thus providing an annoyance that would lead to the device being flung across the floor!

The final type of timer is the [pocket timer](#). There are many basic versions, and some fully digital with the Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) offer the full spectrum of round and rest period timings, all for a cheap price. Given the general size of the device, it's likely that the audible tone will not perforate any ear drums within the confines of your garage. If I were operating on a budget, I would investigate the options given by pocket timers.



5. Skipping Rope

Skipping is a staple activity of any boxer's training regime. As an activity it provides benefits including:

- Can be used as part of a warm-up or as a core element of the gym session
- Great options for aerobic and anaerobic workouts
- Excellent toning of muscle groups across the chest, shoulders, back and legs
- Reinforcement of the arms and upper body working in synchronisation with the legs, in particular allowing the boxer to remain on the balls of their feet.

If you are totally new to skipping, then it is something that will take lots of practice to perfect, but fitness benefits will be gained from this practice. Before you know it, the rope will blaze away and the skipping section of your gym workout will be something that you really look forward to. A word to the wise though, schedule your skipping for after your bag work so that you can quickly remove your hand wraps prior to picking up the rope. Wearing bandages during skipping can become uncomfortable fairly quickly.

In terms of the options available for skipping, we have 2 main choices (not counting the beaded rope); the leather rope with wooden or steel handles and the plastic rope. Skipping ropes that are made from conventional rope are not particularly well suited to boxers as they don't have the weight to allow high speed skipping, basically the revolution of the rope can't keep up with your ability to jump!

The traditional choice would be the [leather skipping rope](#), (right). Leather ropes are hard wearing and provide enough weight to really ramp up the revolutions! If the rope is slightly too long for you, then knots can be tied at each end to reduce the length. Leather ropes tend to be more expensive, but in my opinion are well worth it.



The next type of rope is the [plastic skipping rope](#) (see left). These ropes are quite common and are a cheaper alternative to the leather rope. The plastic rope is not as hard-wearing as the leather option, and doesn't have ball-bearings in the handle like the leather rope (these ball-bearings reduce the risk of the rope warping during use).

Some boxers do favour the plastic rope as it can offer greater speed, making a very impressive noise as it cuts through the air... not sure you needed to know this but I'm just covering all the bases! A skipping rope is a cheap enough commodity to allow you to own both, but in terms of what the best option is, I always go with the slightly more expensive leather option.

6. Mirror

Mirrors are present in all kinds of gyms and studios, and a boxing gym is no different. There are very good reasons why mirrors are so beneficial during physical exercise, especially exercise that incorporates a technical discipline. Technical development and the fact that watching ourselves working hard provides motivation are to my mind the main benefits of using mirrors in a gym.

Whilst a little posing around the gym does no harm, the presence of a mirror is not strictly for the purposes of vanity. If your aim is to consistently improve your boxing technique, then it is vital that you have the use of a mirror. From the very first skill element of learning your stance and on-guard, looking at your position and form in a mirror allows you to ensure that none of the common faults are creeping in. Main uses for a mirror include:

- When shadow boxing, the mirror can be used to ensure that both attacking and defending phases work well with efficiency and speed. The mirror acts as a proxy opponent, allowing the boxer to examine their style with a critical eye. This process has the added benefit of improving the thought processes of the boxer and promoting a greater understanding of ring sense.
- Used as an aide to performing drills. This might include using taped lines on the mirror and floor to provide axis to work around thus ensuring that the feet and body move in the correct way during passages of boxing, building workable attack and defence sequences.
- When completing 'groundwork', performing various exercises such as plyometrics, press-ups, and abdominal work, the mirror can be used to ensure that appropriate exercise technique is being applied.
- As a method of motivation, such as when skipping or lifting free-weights (if you choose to use weights). Many boxers find that it helps when 'digging deep' during a hard session.

Ideally, the mirror should be large enough to be able to see the entire body, with some space to spare on either side to allow some movement 'across' the mirror. Modern gym mirrors can be fixed to the wall and incorporate backing to minimise risks of shattering, and ideally it would be better to go with the safety-conscious option in the home (although in over 30 years around gyms, I've only ever witnessed one mirror get broken by one butter-fingered boxer who accidentally let go of a hand weight during shadow boxing!)

If you don't have the room to accommodate a larger specialised gym mirror, then a full length domestic mirror would provide benefits, with the main characteristic being that you can see the full body. The reason I'm fairly fixed on this requirement is that the ability to co-ordinate upper and lower body movement when performing boxing skills (particularly when executing complex sequences) is more readily attained with effective use of a mirror.

7. Exercise Mat

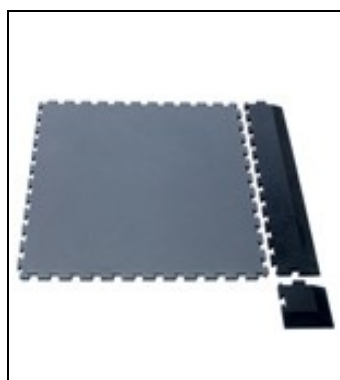
During the introduction to this document, I mentioned that the most basic elements of a boxing gym at home would consist of a heavy bag and a piece of carpet for groundwork. Boxers tend not to thrive on groundwork and flexibility. They would much rather involve themselves with the more stimulating activities of sparring, bag work and pad work (using focus mitts). The fact is though that in terms of developing all round fitness, completing appropriate groundwork and flexibility exercises is undoubtedly a key component of success.

In order to be motivated to complete the exercises, groundwork and flexibility, then the presence of at least some degree of firm padding on the ground will make the prospect marginally more appealing! As well as the tough grind of the groundwork, then a decent exercise mat will allow appropriate warm-down time and effective relaxation options, taking 5 minutes out at the end of a session to lay down and do some breathing exercises is always a bonus.



If you have the option of including an [exercise mat](#) in your home gym, what should you bear in mind? There is an extensive range of colours, sizes and materials available, but if you keep the following couple of points in mind then you should source the most appropriate option for you:

- If you have the space, then look to purchase a mat that is large enough for you to lay down without your head and/or feet dangling off the ends. Mats can be easily stored against a wall when not in use, so it need not interfere with other gym activities when not in use.
- Try to obtain a mat that is substantial enough and possesses the rigidity to not move during some vigorous exercise e.g. it doesn't 'concertina' and stretch when doing squat thrusts. Bear in mind though, for certain exercises you could simply have your hands resting on the mat and your legs working off the mat (the type [below left](#) should suffice.)



Abdominal exercises are a fairly standard offering in a boxing gym, crunches, trunk curls, leg-raises and so on. It is not a good idea to be hammering out serious loads of sit-ups on a hard surface; the level of discomfort you would suffer early on would I'm sure invoke a sense of desire for something more padded on your backside! Providing yourself with these simple levels of comfort will reduce the chances of encountering the dreaded apathy for completing the groundwork. Any fitness and skill development can't always be the 'glamour' work, so provide the basic comforts and you are more likely to maintain a more balanced fitness regime.

8. Maize Bag

Maize, as well as being a food product and being produced in the hundreds of millions of tons per year by the USA, makes an amazing filling for a punch bag. It may seem peculiar that I didn't include the maize bag as an honourable mention within the heavy bag section, but there is a good reason for this. If you want to develop infighting techniques, then the use of a maize bag is so much more effective than a conventional heavy bag, although the heavy bag is in general terms more practical, for reasons we'll cover.



A [maize bag](#) is a pear or tear-drop shaped stitched leather bag, as shown on the left. It comes in a range of colours and sizes, although traditionally tend to be classed as be small (approximately 15kg) or large (30kg+). Due to the shape of the bag and the nature of the filling, it has a unique response and 'feel' when hit with a shot. When a heavy shot is landed, the bag absorbs power without the 'spring' that is present with most heavy bags. The shape of the maize bag means that there is a much greater range of hooks and uppercuts available to the user. Short and medium range hooks and uppercuts, combined with body movements and footwork techniques, provide the backbone of any infighting tactics.

A maize bag is a much more 'solid' object than a heavy bag. When assaulting the maize bag with short, explosive hooks and uppercuts, it really does create some very high impacts on the hands. Even with appropriate hand protection in the form of bandaging/wraps, the stresses and impacts mean that the bag is not so practical to use for too many rounds in succession. Aiming to complete say 6 x 3 minute rounds on a maize bag is going to be tough going and with the best will in the world could prove counterproductive. It is more beneficial to mix in a couple of rounds on a maize bag into you're the main bag routine, maybe a 3:1 ratio of rounds. It is for this reason that I see the maize bag as a definite luxury within the *Top 10 Equipment Essentials for Boxing Success*.

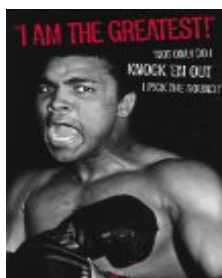
If you can spare the floor space, and your budget can withstand the cost, owning both a heavy bag and a maize bag would offer a very dynamic, power-biased home gym set up. The use of pivots and sidesteps to generate leverage for short and mid-range hooks and uppercuts means that the bag is excellent when focussing on developing the 'punching' muscle-groups. Something to be aware of is that the bags are very heavy, and require chains to hang them. As with the heavy bag, use a cross-beam or wall-bracket as a secure fixing. Lifting a maize bag on to the chains is a two person job. It is not really practical to alternate a heavy bag and a maize bag on the same bracket or cross-beam. If I were restricted to one bracket/fixing, then I'd go with the heavy bag.

9. Motivation Aids

A boxing gym has a special mix of qualities that combine to provide an atmosphere that is seldom found in other gyms. Whilst a boxer can own top line equipment, can go through the rituals of bandaging and mentally preparing for a gym session, and work alongside top quality coaches, working in a gym that provides an atmosphere conducive to top performance is very much a vital ingredient; boxers always refer to the great atmosphere present in the top gyms. This atmosphere is generated by a number of elements:

- The sounds – high speed skipping and the percussive ‘thwacks’ against the heavy bag and the nasal grunts of the boxers
- The boxers – the enjoyment of showing off their skills, the interaction with sparring partners and other gym users.
- The history and provenance of the gym and the boxers who the patrons hold up as beacons of performance. This is often demonstrated in the form of posters, often the promotional posters from great fights in history.
- The often eclectic mix of music, played at varying volumes, that offer a rhythmic guide when shadow boxing, hitting the heavy bag and skipping.

Motivation is crucial during any activity, particularly sporting activities. Everything possible should be done to generate and maintain motivation. Hanging a few fight posters around your home gym are an effective way to improve the atmosphere and therefore assist with motivation.



Posters of those boxers who may be of particular interest to you are good, particularly if the poster relates to a defining fight or may demonstrate a defining moment in their career, for example Muhammad Ali standing over Sonny Liston, or Rocky Marciano landing his ‘Suzy Q’ right hand on Jersey Joe Walcott. So go ahead and hang a poster, it might provide the inspiration to get you through that final minute of the last round.

If you’re a fan of music, then it’s likely that my suggestion of playing some whilst working out is wasted typing on my behalf. If you’re not particularly a fan of music, then take a leap of faith and find something that suits to play. The reason I say this is that music in the gym can help in two ways:

- Favourite pieces of music can be associated with positive experiences (and great fights; *The Final Countdown* reminds me of Hagler versus Leonard!
- Music can provide a tempo, very useful for skipping but also helpful during shadow boxing and bag work when seeking to find a rhythm.

Posters and music are simple and effective steps to improving the ambience and atmosphere in your home boxing gym.

10. Pads/Focus Mitts

When undertaking any physical exercise, having a friend, partner or buddy working alongside you is a real positive. On the face of it, boxing is an individual sport. The reality though is that boxers are no different than other human beings in that in the majority of circumstances they like to have people around them. In the gym environment, having others around you provides benefits in two key areas; motivation and technical development.



In terms of the *10 Essentials*, the inclusion of the [pads](#) (also referred to as focus mitts or jab and hook pads) is dependant on the assumption of having someone who is willing to wear them! Pads are worn on the hands, come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and when used properly are the closest a boxer can get to contest conditions without the head-shots.

When a boxer uses the heavy bag, or shadow boxes, they are in control. The boxer decides when punches are going to be thrown, the boxer decides how and when to move, the boxer is under no mental challenge at all. When using the pads though, all of these elements are controlled by the person wearing the pads (usually a coach). This means that the boxer's work rate can be controlled and that the boxer has to continually think and adjust in order to respond to the instructions given. This increases stress and makes the activity much more beneficial.

When starting out with the pads, it is enough to hold them up and request that the boxer whacks away with straight punches. Given time though, you can really vary the type and quantity of shots thrown. Phased attack sequences, combination punches utilising body and head strikes and high load anaerobic work all combine to make the pads a really top piece of gym equipment.



When choosing a pair of pads, I tend to favour a smaller pair. I find that I need to 'cup' my hands inside the pad in order to make me feel that the pad is secure or isn't going to fly off my hand at the first hint of an incoming shot! Some pads, like those [above right](#), have an extended length that offers some protection to the wrist area. I have always found though that the larger type of pad available is more difficult to wear and is by and large a more arduous endeavour for the user than the smaller pad.

Whichever type you opt for (again prices vary), it will be a very wise investment if you're working as a pair. It adds much more dynamism to the work out and provides a platform to think about some more advanced technical development activities such as 'touch' or conditioned sparring.