



# **MSGR. FRANKLIN M. KELLIHER**

**BOXER / PROMOTER / TRAINER**

**1938-1973**

Franklin Kelliher was born early in the 20th century. Throughout his life, sports were always a very important part of his life. He was a star athlete in high school. He later matriculated at Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. While there he starred on the basketball and baseball teams. He was also the school's heavyweight boxing champion for two years. In the 1920's he was one of the top amateur boxers in the New England area. While at Holy Cross Kelliher decided to study for the priesthood. In June of 1930 he was ordained a priest and soon after was assigned to the Buffalo Diocese.

While studying in Montreal he met Robert "Bibber" McCoy one of the top professional wrestlers in North America. McCoy then began preparing the young, burly priest for a part-time career as a professional wrestler. From 1928-1932 he had a very successful and prosperous career as the "Masked Marvel" and later the "Red Devil." He wrestled exclusively in Montreal, Toronto, Cleveland and occasionally in Buffalo. In a 1932 match against Sam Cordovano, a well-known football player and wrestler, Kelliher's mask came off. Soon the identity of the "Red Devil" reached Bishop Turner of the Diocese of Buffalo and Kelliher's mat career came to an abrupt conclusion. Although his career was quite short he was able to save enough money to buy a home and a Packard for his parents, a lodge for himself in Ridgeway, Ontario and save money that would later be used to help fund the Working Boys Home.

In mid 1936 Father Kelliher was an assistant pastor at St. John the Baptist Church on Hertel Avenue when Monsignor Edmond Britt asked him to take over the directorship of the poorly disciplined Working Boys Home. The young priest readily accepted this position and held it for the next 39 years. He already held the position of chaplain at the Erie County jail and morgue, a job he had accepted in the previous year and would hold until 1972. Kelliher would use strong discipline through boxing and other sports to maintain total control of the 50 boys that normally lived at the home.

Beginning in 1938, Father Kelliher began entering a team of boxers in the local Golden Gloves Tournament. He also promoted amateur boxing cards on a regular basis. Profits from these shows were used to constantly remodel and refurbish the Working Boys Home that was located on Vermont Street and later on Busti Avenue after a fire at the original site.

In 1960 The Buffalo Courier Express dropped their sponsorship of the Golden Gloves. Kelliher acquired sponsorship of Buffalo's premier amateur boxing event. He continued this relationship till the mid 1970's, when poor health forced him to give it up as well as cutting back on most of his other activities. Monsignor Franklin Kelliher passed away on February 22, 1985.

Monsignor Franklin Kelliher certainly possesses the qualifications for entrance into the Buffalo Veterans Boxing Hall of Fame, as he is already a member of the International Golden Gloves Hall of Fame, the American Amateur Boxing Hall of Fame and the Canadian Amateur Boxing Hall of Fame.