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Photo: Sean Curran

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**by Kathy Masterson**

NEWLY crowned WBO middleweight boxing champion Andy Lee fulfilled a lifelong dream when he raised his world title belt to the skies at Shannon Airport on Wednesday afternoon.

The Castleconnell man was greeted at the foot of the aircraft and embraced his mother Ann – his father Tom having already travelled over to London to meet him on Monday – in what was an emotional family reunion.

Andy said: "It's a dream come true to be back here in Shannon. I've always had this dream to be standing here with a world title belt and it's almost surreal now it's happened. To see all the media, all the fans here, it's incredible."

Andy's mother said she could now finally believe it's true. "It was no bluff when he said that he wanted to come back to Shannon as world champion. That's what he dreamed of and he's achieved it."

"We go on to Limerick from here for a civic reception. It's unbelievable. I'm so proud," she said.

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EDITORIAL

Limerick Post

WORLD CHAMPION

Limerick's  
Lee-ding man

IN THE early hours of Sunday morning, Limerick celebrated a world champion as Andy Lee emerged victorious from his WBO middleweight world title boxing match.

His Russian opponent Matt Korobov was considered by many to be favourite for the bout, but those who have followed the career of the Castleconnell man will not have been one bit surprised that he is now on top of the world.

Ever since his family returned from London 16 years ago and he went on to make a name for himself at Limerick's St Francis Boxing Club, Lee has always been destined for greatness.

His star ascended even further in 2004 when he competed at the Olympic Games in Athens, his stellar performances opening the gates to becoming a professional boxer.

In his first seven years as a boxer, he lost only one fight and in 2012 he was primed for a world title fight with Julio Cesar Chavez Jr, only to lose out to the Mexican.

That happened in the same week as the death of trainer/manager Emanuel Steward, a double whammy that would break the resolve of many sporting competitors.

Not Lee. Quite literally, he took the blows but picked himself back up to fight on, and the end result is that, on December 14, 2014, he became a world champion.

Lee's aggression in the white heat of battle, which was evident in the fateful right hook that he landed on Korobov in round six of last weekend's fight, is in marked contrast to his benevolent persona outside the boxing ring.

He has not lost the work ethic that drove him as a youngster at St Francis to ultimately becoming king of the world.

Modest in victory and undeterred in defeat (something he rarely experiences), he is the epitome of a sportsperson whom aspiring young hopefuls should seek to emulate.

Andy Lee, the boy from Castleconnell, is a world champion.

Christmas has come early to Limerick.

## Best in the world



by Alan Jacques  
alan@limerickpost.ie

AFTER knocking the previously undefeated Russian Matt Korobov out in the sixth round in Las Vegas last Saturday, Limerick's new WBO middleweight champion Andy Lee now wants to defend his title in Ireland.

Thirty-year-old Andy from Castleconnell, who formerly worked under famous trainer Emanuel Steward, has now realised his boyhood dream. The former Athens 2004 Olympian stunned his opponent in Vegas' Cosmopolitan Hotel last weekend with a right hand and then moved in to finish the job in the sixth round.

In an impressive sixth round, Lee stepped up and unleashed a ferocious right hook which stunned Korobov to his boots. The Limerick boxer moved in and unleashed a barrage of heavy punches forcing referee Kenny Bayless to stop the fight at 1.10 into the round.

It was an emotional victory for the Irishman and he was elated to have his name added to the boxing record books alongside champions such as Marvin Hagler, Sugar Ray Robinson and Carlos Monzon.

"I am a champion and I want to defend my belt in Ireland and I will fight the best in the world," Andy said after the fight.

He also paid homage to the two most influential people in his boxing career, the late Emanuel Steward and Adam Booth.

Lee signed with the legendary

boxing guru Emanuel Steward on December 15, 2005 and left the comfort zone of Ireland to live with Emanuel in Detroit and pursue a professional boxing career. He served his apprenticeship and learnt his craft at the famous Kronk Gym in Detroit and obtained valuable experience in numerous training camps.

Emanuel and Andy lived like father and son looking out for one another. Sadly Emanuel passed away after a short illness on October 25, 2012.

Lee relocated to London and teamed up with another world class trainer and manager, Adam Booth. In the past two years Adam has made adjustments to Andy's game enhancing his boxing skills and ability both mentally and physically.

After the title bout, Lee said: "I would like to say thank you to my manager and trainer Adam Booth, who has done so much for me over the last couple of years, but it's also for the man who made me, Emanuel Steward."

One of the first to offer congratulations to the new world champion was Limerick Fine Gael TD Kieran O'Donnell.

"His skill and hard graft has paid off and he has brought great honour to Ireland, Limerick and his home of Castleconnell. His family must be immensely proud of him," said Deputy O'Donnell.

"Andy wants his first title defence to be in Ireland and would be great if this could happen here in his home city of Limerick," he concluded.

WORLD CHAMPION

## Andy takes his place among the greats

by Alan Jacques  
alan@limerickpost.ie

LIMERICK boxer Andy Lee fulfilled his sporting dream this Wednesday when he landed in Shannon Airport to a hero's welcome after being crowned WBO Middleweight World Champion.

Andy now joins such boxing greats as Jake LaMotta, Sugar Ray Robinson and Marvin Hagler to lift the exalted middleweight title belt.

The Castleconnell pugilist said during

the press conference for Limerick's first ever-professional fight at UL Arena in 2008 that he dreamed one day of being World Champion. His then trainer, the legendary Emanuel Steward predicted: "Trust me, Andy Lee is the future of boxing and I truly believe that Andy will become a world star and make the people of Limerick very proud."

After landing a barrage of unanswered blows on the heavily favoured Russian fighter Matt Korobov in a stunning sixth round stoppage in Las Vegas last

weekend, the stars have now aligned to fulfil Andy's dreams.

On his return from a State visit to China, President Michael D Higgins, who was recently honoured as Freeman of Limerick, offered his sincere congratulations to Andy Lee on attaining the WBO World Middleweight Title. The Irish President said that the 30-year-old champion's outstanding performance "bears testament to his strength of spirit, many hours of training, determination and

commitment".

"I also wish to pay tribute to his coaches, his family, friends and fans who were so loyal in their belief that Andy Lee had the skill and tenacity to become a world champion. Everyone in Limerick and in Ireland is rightly proud of this exemplary sportsman," said President Higgins.

A civic reception also took place in Andy's honour at Limerick City and County Council offices on Merchant's Quay this Wednesday to recognise his

achievements before a memorable public homecoming on the steps of City Hall.

Mayor of Limerick City and County Cllr Kevin Sheahan commented: "Andy Lee is our first world boxing champion and we're thrilled with his success. Since his early days as an amateur boxer with the St Francis Boxing Club in the city bringing home the WBO Middleweight World Champion title from Las Vegas over the weekend, we are immensely proud of his achievements."

## WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS

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