

# Champion kickboxer and Irish balladeer

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Midwest Irish Focus

Many people meet Mick Doyle and think they've got the man pegged.

A kick boxer, with two world championships under his belt and coaching credit for producing at least a half-dozen protegee, most folks who meet him would characterize him as one very tough customer.

Which is precisely how Doyle wants any current or prospective student to view him at his martial arts gym in suburban Omaha.

Others, however, have a very different view of the man.

They see him as an inveterate Irish balladeer, quick to strum a tune on a guitar, mandola or Bouzouki that could bring tears to your eyes or rowdy pub tunes that make your throat cry out for a pint.

Which is precisely how Doyle wants his listeners to view him.

Yet, somewhere in the middle of this is Mick Doyle, the son of Robbie Doyle who would follow his Da around Dublin listening to session after session. And then it would be off to the gym where the elder Doyle, a boxing powerhouse in his own right, would teach the boy how to stay on his feet in the rough-and-tumble Ballymun neighborhood.

"I started boxing when I was about seven, I guess," Doyle said. "By the time I was 11, I had already started kickboxing and, soon after, I became the national champion."

But even as he began to blossom as a fighter, Doyle was also becoming more and more intrigued with the world of Irish music.

"I think it all started one day when I picked up a bodhran and convinced myself I could learn to play it," he

## Omaha kickboxing coach often surprises students with his love of traditional Irish tunes



Mick Doyle,  
Champion Kickboxer

said. "From then on I would go to sessions and play along as best I could."

As a teen, Doyle made the decision to emigrate, landing in Omaha, Neb., where his sister, married to an Air Force member, sponsored him and got him enrolled in a local college.

But the kickboxing was never far from Doyle's thoughts and he was soon back to training seven or eight hours a days and, by 1989, had made his way to his first World Championship.

"By then I was married and decid-

ed to retire to spend more time with my family," he said.

Not long after his retirement, though, Doyle admits he was "lured" out of his inactive status and, in 1994, was once again World Kickboxing Champion.

About this time, after being offered a chance to coach a national kickboxing team, Doyle began to seriously mull a future in guiding young fighters to championships of their own.

It was also about this time that the music came back into his life.

to form an improvised Irish musical group. But the group still had no name.

"It came to me one day that we were a pretty mixed bag, ethnically speaking," Doyle said. "So we decided the name 'Ellis Island' would pretty accurately describe the makeup of the band."

These days, Doyle and Marsh are the sole survivors of that initial quintet, but that's just fine with the soft-spoken Irishman.

"I remember the first time I met Dave," Doyle recalled. "He pulled up in front of my house and began unloading one instrument after another. I asked him how many people he had coming with him and he said it was just himself and those were the instruments he played."

These days Doyle splits his time between his very successful gym and the occasional chance to go on the road with Marsh.

"It's kind of funny when Dave and I play because we never really get a chance to rehearse because we live about an hour apart," Doyle said. "So I'll pretty much just send him an e-mail or something if I have a song I'd like to try or maybe I'll

Mick Doyle,  
Irish Balladeer



"It was the mid-90s and I got a call from one of the new casinos and they asked if I played Irish music," Doyle recalled. "I said I did but I wasn't a band or anything. Then they told me the kind of money they were willing to pay if I was a band and pretty quickly I got one together."

Doyle had heard about a folk musician by the name of Dave Marsh and a couple others, all of whom agreed

even tell him the night of a performance the name of the song and the key it's in and off we'll go. If it's good, maybe we'll do it again. If it's not, then maybe we'll try something else."

It's a flexibility borne of years gauging an opponent or an audience and an ability that sets Mick Doyle apart from all the other mere contenders.