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DEAL: Joel Embiid

Embiid feeling joy of Sixers

■ Dan GELSTON

ALREADY an NBA MVP and an Olympic gold medalist, All-Star center Joel Embiid now has until the end of the decade to try to win his first NBA championship with the Philadelphia 76ers.

With another maximum contract secured, Embiid wants to chase that title in Philly - and remain a Sixer for the rest of his career.

"Philadelphia is home," Embiid wrote on Instagram.

A seven-time NBA All-Star, Embiid and the 76ers agreed to a €173 million extension with a player option for the 2028-29 season, a person familiar with the deal said. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the terms have not yet been announced.

Contract

The 30-year-old Embiid, who graduated from a Florida high school and played a season in college at Kansas, broke his own news early Friday morning when he posted a photo on Instagram of him signing a contract alongside team owner Josh Harris.

"I want to be here the rest of my career. I love this community and everything you've given me and my family," Embiid wrote.

"There is a lot more work to do. You guys deserve a championship and I think we're just getting started."

Embiid - still in the second year of a €176 million extension he signed ahead of the 2021 season - became the third cornerstone player this offseason to sign a massive contract with the 76ers. The team hasn't won an NBA title since 1983.



SUPPORT NETWORK: (l-r) Michael Keely, Christina Thomas, Craig Ryan, Roddy Collins, Martha Kelly, Sinead Johnston and Dean McKeown at Sankalpa



ENGAGED: Mark McCadden with (l-r) Christina Thomas, Michael Keely and Sinead Johnston at Sankalpa, Finglas

MICK KEELY has a dream.

"I'd love a boxing club in Finglas," he says. "There's none. There's nothing for the kids in Finglas South, no playground, nothing."

"We are going to try to see if we can get something going with boxing in the community."

Mick has been in recovery for seven years. Seven years free of cocaine. He boxed a bit in his youth, then drifted away from the sport.

We are speaking in Sankalpa, a drug and alcohol treatment centre providing services to the Finglas and Cabra communities.

Mick and his partner Christina Thomas, once a substance user too, are a poster couple for the centre.

Living in an estate where "no-body comes in, not even the police, it's that bad", the parents of three children, Kayden (17), Adysen (14) and Esmé (8), have transformed their lives.

Inspiring

Now they work with Sankalpa as Recovery Coaches, inspiring others in their community. A boxing club, Christina says, would draw in a hard-to-reach demographic.

"That's where you'd get the 14 to 16-year-olds. That's where you'd bring them in," she says.

But as Mick acknowledges: "That's down the line. But that's the goal."

Behind Mick and Christina is the office of Mick Williams, the manager of Sankalpa.

A Finglas boxing club may still be a dream, but Williams has found another way to make the sport front and centre of a programme for people in recovery.

He has developed Fight For Change, designed to "attract cer-

FIGHTING FOR CHANGE



Mark McCadden EXCLUSIVE
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Roddy backs initiative to help people in recovery

lin champion and a three-time kick-boxing champion. "Boxing seems to be the place where they have found peace of mind. In that boxing ring is where they have felt at one."

Finesse

"Boxing is about finesse. It's an art, it's a skill, it's a discipline. It's a very hard discipline to get if you are not willing to put in the work, not willing to listen. "Boxing has a bit of a reputation - you have to be tough. But it's not about toughness, the toughness is the training, because it is head-to-toe physical work. "I have worked with GAA footballers, hurlers, soccer teams, the Gardai; fit, fit people. Every time they do a boxing session, they say there is nothing like it. "It really tests your character and spirit, and how tough you really are. Stepping into a boxing ring, there is nowhere to hide, so everything comes out. People learn about themselves in a boxing ring. "You can say what you want and throw shapes on the street, but when you're in there it is totally different, you have to be yourself. "People who have never even thrown a punch at a bag or a glove get great confidence from walking into a boxing gym and getting that training." Fight For Change has an educational element to it too, with a Level 4 QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) Health-related Fitness module included as part

of the programme. Williams has used boxing in the past, and has brought members of the Gardai, Olympian Kenny Egan and Dublin footballer Philly McMahon to talk to participants. This time around, for the first Fight For Change course, he has brought former footballer and manager Roddy Collins, brother of world champion Steve Collins, on board. Roddy was in Steve's corner when he ended Chris Eubank's long reign as WBO super-middleweight champion at a packed Millstreet in March 1995. PJ, one of the participants, dropped out of college when his substance use got in the way of his studies. He recalls his first meeting with Roddy. "He's a character anyway," says PJ. "He's a funny guy, very encouraging. "I was looking into his career as well and it's very impressive. And then his brother as well, he took the belt off Eubank, which

is kind of nuts. I had no idea. "I'm delighted that he's here, he has done a lot for us in terms of encouraging us. He is very good to us." Roddy explains how a meeting with Sankalpa team leader Sinead Johnston at a concert saw him come onboard. "I was listening to Ciarán Moran and Sinead approached me," he says. "She asked me if I would get involved, come up and have a talk with them, or just come in and meet them. "I went in once and I got a great feeling out of it, probably better than they did. I felt very satisfied when I was leaving. "I love it. I went there last year as a guest speaker but got there late and Mary Lou (McDonald, Sinn Féin leader) was speaking. Mary was in floods of tears, because of the realisation of what's not seen in our city. "People look upon addiction as... they don't really treat people very kindly and it's wrong. "But I just love to see people

that have recovered taking on a new life, walking down the street full of confidence. It's brilliant." "Boxing is a sport of the deprived areas. We all know that. Look at Kellie Harrington," Roddy says. "Look at all the other boxers who have come through the system where it was either the boxing club or crime. "In the inner-city, there have always been ways of getting out of deprivation and poverty - crime, sport or education. "Crime was at the top, boxing mainly in the sport and then the bottom rung on the ladder was education. "The biggest climbers of that system were the boxers. You only have to look around Dublin's inner city to see the amount of champions from there. "You only have to look around the suburbs of Cabra, Finglas, Crumlin and Drimnagh; the champions that come out of those places. "Anyone who goes into a boxing club will learn discipline of their body, obviously, because

you can't participate in boxing if you are abusing your body. "But you will also learn the discipline of society, discipline of rules, rules of law and order, and they will learn respect of their peers in the club and of the public outside." Williams finishes with a story from his time working at the Tallaght Rehabilitation Project, when he introduced a course called Box Smart. "After six weeks a lad came up to me and said, 'Mick, I was short-changed in a shop," he explains. "He said, 'Do you know what I did? I usually walk away. I wouldn't have the confidence, but I asserted myself.' "He didn't get aggressive, didn't walk away, he just explained he was short-changed and got his money back. "I asked what the dif-

ference was and he said, 'I had the confidence to use my voice.' "He only got that from walking into a boxing club. To say how emotional I was at the time... it was the first programme we ever did, the first time we did Box Smart in Ireland. "These are the moments, these are the messages, that's why we do it.

Small

"If that guy never did anything else in his life, that was his moment. For me and you, that might sound like a small thing, but for this guy it was a huge thing. "To assert himself without getting aggressive, to pick himself

up and not be a walkover was a huge thing for him to do. And he could see that. "The Fight For Change model is very similar to the one we did in Tallaght. I have modified it a little bit to suit here. "We just want to promote Finglas and Cabra in a good light. "And if it's not boxing it's GAA. If it's not GAA it's soccer. There are a lot of programmes working with people, trying to keep people in a healthy mindset. "That's all it's about. That's what sport is about. It's not competitive, it's not about winning. It's there to keep people on the straight and narrow." Meanwhile, Mick Keely can't wait to start Fight For Change. "I'll dust the cobwebs off, see if I can relive my youth," he says. "All the stuff I lost out on as a kid, you get a little bit of it back here. "Then there's the dream to have a boxing club in Finglas, it would save loads of kids. I know that. Boxing saved me for years." For more information on Sankalpa's programmes, visit www.sankalpa.ie.



ACHIEVEMENTS: Irish boxing legend Steve Collins



DRAMA: Shohei Ohtani

Dodgers' Ohtani's a 50-50 for MVP

■ Beth HARRIS

SHOHEI OHTANI keeps showing a flair for the dramatic during his historic first season with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Japanese superstar became the only player in major league history with 50 home runs and 50 stolen bases, doing so with a slew of firsts.

Ohtani had the first three-homer game of his career - all after the sixth inning - his first six-hit game and a franchise and career-record 10 RBIs in Miami on Thursday. He finished the night with 51 homers and 51 steals.

Quality

"Going for a home run is not the ideal way for me to hit a home run, so I try to focus on quality at-bats," Ohtani said through an interpreter.

His previous bests were 46 homers and 26 stolen bases in 2021, when he won the first of his two American League Most Valuable Player awards while playing for the Los Angeles Angels.

Now he's the favorite for NL MVP honors. He was the fastest player to reach the 40-40 mark with a ninth-inning grand slam against Tampa Bay in his 126th game on August 23.

The Dodgers clinched a postseason berth for the 12th consecutive season with their 20-4 rout of the Marlins. Ohtani has played 865 games without making a postseason appearance.

Ohtani made it clear in signing a €625 million, 10-year deal with the Dodgers last December that competing for a championship is what drives him.

"The No 1 goal is to get to the postseason and win the World Series," he said.