

# YOUNG ONES IN THE GYM SAY 'THAT MAN'S NOT DEAF AND BLIND, NO WAY'

By CATRIONA STEWART

**J**AMES PELINE claims that if he'd met coach Tam Fraser when he was a lad, he might have been a champion.

The Govan boy grew up loving to box – but his life and career were brought to a sharp stop by a cruel disability.

James was born profoundly deaf, and grew up with British Sign Language (BSL) as his first language.

But, at school, his eyesight began to dim and teachers noticed there was a problem.

James, speaking through a guide/communicator from charity Deafblind Scotland, said: "Growing up my eyes were fine, but at school they started to get worse. Something was wrong with me and my teachers noticed that I was having trouble seeing."

"After school I went to work but my eyes were bad and started to get worse."

"I went completely blind when I was 48. I'm now 68."

James, who lives in Cardonald, worked as a stonemason before his eyesight failed completely.

He added: "At 16 I started working as a stonemason chiselling out the headstones – I trained for five years, it was hard work. After seven years in

total I finished up there.

"My eyesight is totally gone and the doctors don't know why. I can't see anything at all."

"There's no cure. I'm still waiting for a cure. All blind people, we're still waiting for a cure for our blindness but at the moment there's nothing."

James became involved with Deafblind Scotland around 17 years ago – and, with the charity's help, is now using sport to improve his life.

He added: "They take me to play golf, go bowling, boxing, to the shops and to church. I never miss church."

**He wouldn't stop until I stopped him. He doesn't want to be pampered**

"If it wasn't for Deafblind Scotland I would be fed up sitting in the house doing the same things, same, same, all the time."

"I would be doing nothing."

"It's really upsetting. I used to love watching TV and all of a sudden there was nothing."

"If I didn't have the guides to take me out I would be sitting at home doing nothing."

"I'm so lucky to have the guides. If I didn't, I don't know what I would do."

"I used to love watching the football – I loved watching all different sports. Sport was my

favourite thing. Now I can't see anything, watching that's all finished now."

For James, boxing is the one thing he missed most. And so Deafblind Scotland approached coach Tam Fraser to see if he could help out.

Tam said: "I train in another gym and met one of the Deafblind Scotland staff there."

"She asked me if I could help James, and they gave me a sheet with some very basic signs on it, but we've sort of developed our own signs now."

"James's strength has improved and his confidence has improved since he's started coming here."

"We work on a Wednesday and a Friday. Because he's deaf his balance isn't very good, so he could be quite hesitant at first – but now he's much more confident and it has been really good to watch that."

"It's been about building trust and reassuring him that if he punches then I will be there. He knows now I'm there for him and it's that trust we have."

"I used to let him punch me without the pads on but now I need the pads – he's getting much better and much more powerful."

Tam and James have worked out a routine and a silent language between them in the two and a half years they have been working together.

Tam will lightly press a thumb to James's shoulder and

Deaf-blind boxer James Peline

with his coach Tam Fraser, who describes him as "the most inspirational student I have ever had"

the pair know what that means. Tam added: "It's been made easier by the fact he boxed in his youth. Everything was there in his memory – it was just unlocking that."

"He's definitely the most inspirational student I've ever had. For a start, no-one can believe he's 68."

"I get young ones coming into the gym and they watch him and they say 'That man's not deaf and blind, no way.'"

"I get the most satisfaction from training James because he doesn't stop."

"He wants to train more and he wants to be pushed and he



with his coach Tam Fraser, who describes him as "the most inspirational student I have ever had"

wouldn't stop unless I stopped him. He doesn't want pampered."

In turn, James is full of praise for Tam, who he says has helped turn his life and his health around.

James added: "Tam is a good teacher, he teaches me everything. Tam is the best."

"If I'd met him when I was younger I would have been a champion, I would have been at the top of my game."

"I started boxing at the age of 14. I went to school in Ibrox and then went to boxing training with my brother."

"After the boxing in Ibrox I

started training at a gym at St George's Cross from the age of 18.

"But this is very different from what it was when I was young."

"Tam is perfect, he's great. He's a very clever man. He's different from anywhere else I've been and he manages to give me different things to do. He's a really, really clever man."

"He has me using my arms now and my elbows, which I never did before."

"In the past I would just sit at home and that's it."

"Now I can in the ring. It's amazing."

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

DEAFBLIND Scotland has bought land for its 'Field of Dreams' – a purpose-built home costing £1.3m – and has already raised £918,000.

To help raise the rest, the charity is selling raffle tickets for a Christmas Eve draw live on its website on. In exchange for a £1 ticket, you could have the chance to win a car worth £7000.

To lend your support to the life-changing project for deafblind people in Scotland, see [www.buytickets.at/deafblindscotland/35606](http://www.buytickets.at/deafblindscotland/35606) to buy raffle tickets and take part.