



RIVALS REUNITE

THE KNICKS AND THE SIXERS ARE BOTH CARRYING GREAT MOMENTUM INTO THE NBA EASTERN CONFERENCE SEMIFINALS, WHICH TIP OFF TONIGHT IN NEW YORK. **IN SPORTS**

PHILADELPHIA

From fiction to fixture, Rocky gets a museum reckoning



Visitors pose in front of the Rocky statue at the Philadelphia Museum of Art last month. *Tassanee Vejpongsa, Associated Press*

A new exhibit examines how a fictional fighter became a real-world symbol and a part of Philadelphia's identity.

Tassanee Vejpongsa *Associated Press*

Every day, visitors from around the world make their way to the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art — not necessarily for the galleries inside, but for a statue of a fictional boxer from Philadelphia.

The bronze figure of Rocky Balboa — arms raised in victory, clad in boxing trunks and boots — has become a point of pilgrimage for people around the world.

For decades, the museum kept an uncomfortable distance from this kind of devotion. Now, it is embracing it — and inviting Rocky in.

“Rising Up: Rocky and the Making of Monuments,” which opened April 25, examines how a fictional fighter became a real-world symbol, placing the statue within the sweep of art history and Philadelphia's identity. The exhibition is the brainchild of guest curator Paul Farber, who spent years exploring the meaning of the statue and public monuments — including through his NPR podcasts — before bringing the conversation into the museum.

The exhibition spans more than 2,000 years of boxing imagery, tracing a thread of human struggle that Louis Marchesano, the museum's deputy director of curatorial affairs and conservation, said helps explain Rocky's enduring pull.

“The common theme that runs throughout 2,000 years of boxing imagery is that people respond to the body under struggle, a conflict in much the same way today as they did 2,500 years ago,” Marchesano said. “It's not simply about watching two people beat each other up — it's about endurance, internal fortitude and internal struggle.”

When the bronze statue was left on the steps after filming the “Rocky” movies, the museum fought to have it removed. It was eventually relocated to South Philadelphia before returning to the bottom of the steps in 2006. It was welcomed back, but never fully embraced. The city owns the spot where the statue sits — not the museum.

“The museum has had — and I hate to say this, no pun intended — a rocky rela-



Banners for the “Rising Up: Rocky” exhibition hang outside of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

tionship with the statue,” Marchesano said.

“It took us decades to come to terms with it,” he added. “But I'm glad that we did.”

According to the Philadelphia Visitor Center, about 4 million people visit the steps each year — rivaling the nearby Liberty Bell in annual foot traffic.

David Muller, a wrestling coach from France who recently brought his students to the steps, said he thinks Balboa's trials and travails are “good for the next generation.”

“The movie ‘Rocky’ is important for the mind of sport and the mind of life,” Muller said, after running with them up the steps as they raised their hands at the top, smiling and punching the air like boxers.

Kate Tarchalska traveled from Poland with family and made the statue one of their stops.

“He was my hero when I was younger,” she said. “And now I am so glad I could be in the same spot as him.”

Suraj Kumar, visiting his aunt in Philadelphia from St. Louis, made a point to photograph the statue to share with his father, who first introduced him to the films when he was growing up in Bengaluru, India.

“When I got to know this statue is here, I was like, I really have to come down here,”

he said.

One gallery places Rocky in the global boxing fever of the 1970s, featuring works by Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol — all created during a time when boxing had the world's attention.

“In the 1970s, we knew minute by minute who the heavyweight champion of the world was,” Marchesano said. “The artists in this gallery are responding to that global frenzy. Sylvester Stallone, in ‘Rocky,’ was doing the same — thinking about internal and external struggle.”

Another gallery turns to Philadelphia itself, presenting photographs of the Blue Horizon boxing gym and a section on Joe Frazier, whose real-life story at least partially inspired Rocky.

“Without Joe Frazier, Rocky doesn't exist,” Marchesano said.

When the exhibition closes in August, the statue inside will move to a permanent home at the top of the museum's steps — a place it has never officially held. The statue currently outside remains on loan from Stallone.

Rocky's longtime spot at the bottom of the steps won't be empty — a statue of Frazier will replace it.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Pa. Democrats think a tax on big tech companies could help deficit

The proposal would implement a 5% gross receipts tax on digital advertising platforms.

Ian Karbal *Pennsylvania Capital-Star*

A proposal in the state House would place a tax on companies that serve digital advertisements to Pennsylvanians through their phones and computers.

The chamber's Finance Committee held a hearing last week on the measure.

Bill sponsor Rep. Elizabeth Fiedler, D-Philadelphia, said it targets “some of the biggest companies in the world — Google, Meta, Amazon, Microsoft — and calls on them to simply pay their fair share for doing business in our commonwealth.”

It would do this by imposing a 5% gross receipts tax on revenue from digital advertising services in Pennsylvania. Many major tech companies make the bulk of their revenue selling targeted ads.

According to a report on the industry by the consulting firm Pricewaterhouse Coopers, in 2024, just over 80% of all internet advertising revenue went to the top 10 companies. Another 11% went to the top 11th through 25th.

Proponents say the tax would help offset the state's structural deficit in a way that would not affect most Pennsylvanians. But its critics say it could cost businesses across the commonwealth that advertise on platforms like Google and Facebook, which could raise prices in the state to compensate.

“Pennsylvania businesses are increasingly turning to online marketing strategies to meet their customers where they are,” Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry Vice President Neal Leshner wrote in testimony submitted to the Finance Committee. “With businesses still struggling due to inflation and increased supply chain costs, now is exactly the wrong time to impose new taxes on a common business practice.”

The chamber also warned the proposal could result in costly litigation, a point even its supporters acknowledge.

That's what happened in Maryland, the first state in the country to enact a similar policy, which was signed in 2021. It was sued by tech companies, including Apple, Google, Meta and Peacock, and other entities.

Litigation has been ongoing for years, and has so far resulted in a section of the law being struck down that barred digital advertising platforms from charging advertisers an itemized fee to cover the tax.

“Will you be sued? Yeah, absolutely,” said Darien Shanske, a professor at the University of California Davis School of Law who testified in favor of the bill. “I wish I could say that's not the case, but the question is: given that you're in the right on the policy and legal matter, are you gonna let the fact that you're going to eventually be sued keep you from doing the right thing?”

However, advocates for the policy testified in committee that Fiedler's bill took lessons from what passed in Maryland. It does not include language that would bar digital advertising platforms from charging a fee or surcharge, similar to the part of Maryland's bill found unconstitutional.

The bill includes an exemption for broadcast and news media companies like television and radio stations, or online news outlets that sell banner ads.

The bill has earned 49 co-sponsors, all Democrats.

The measure is part of a package of bills being pushed by a coalition of progressive organizations called Pennsylvanians for Accountability from Yass, Billionaires and Corporations (PAYBAC). It includes two other proposals. One would close what's known as the Delaware loophole, where companies establish holding companies in Delaware to avoid Pennsylvania corporate taxes. The other would raise taxes on non-wage income from sources like trusts and dividends on stock sales.