

ORLANDO CRUZ

b. July 1, 1981, Yabucoa, Puerto Rico

BOXER

“I have and will always be a proud Puerto Rican. I have always been and always will be a proud gay man.”

The 2000 Olympic Games were pivotal for boxer Orlando Cruz. After representing Puerto Rico in the games, Cruz launched his professional boxing career. He won a world featherweight title and went nine years without a defeat.

The homophobia that Cruz experienced growing up in Puerto Rico made it difficult for him to accept his sexuality, especially in the world of boxing machismo. Cruz’s internal conflict continued as rumors spread among boxing fans. This tension culminated during his 2008 world title fight. “The spectators bad-mouthed me; they called me a faggot,” Cruz said. “That’s when I realized that something had to change.”

Cruz spent the next few years meeting with a psychologist to work through coming out publicly. In 2012 Cruz became the first professional boxer to come out during his career and one of the first professional athletes to come out while still active. Soon after, he won a major fight wearing rainbow shorts. A year later he married his boyfriend.

In 2013 the National Gay and Lesbian Sports Hall of Fame made Cruz an inaugural inductee. He stated, “I want kids to know that you can be whoever you want to be, including a professional boxer.”

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