

# Boxing gym on its feet

By KRIS DANDO

It's time to welcome the first young boxers.

The Cannons Creek Boxing Academy was officially opened on Saturday, with dignitaries, community leaders and TV cameras present at the premises in Bedford St.

It was hard to keep the smile off the face of Latu Talu, a protege of Billy Graham, from Naenae Boxing Academy.

He was worried about his speech.

"Billy told me I had to say something," Talu said. "I really don't like public speaking and there were a lot of people, but I had to just do it."

The building that houses the Cannons Creek Boxing Academy has had many uses over the years.

It was formerly the infamous Top Tavern and opened as the Freedom Church in 2007.

Talu said the massive room upstairs was perfect for the gym's purposes. The boxing memorabilia and posters are up – with more contemporary boxers than adorn the walls of Graham's gym in Naenae – and a temporary ring on loan from Wellington & Hutt Valley Boxing Association will be set up before the new one arrives from the United States.

The first intake of 11 to 13-year-olds would have classes this week, Talu said.

"It's taken a long time to get to where we are now; a lot of work by a lot of people.

"The building was a bit rough,



**Latu's domain:** The head of the Cannons Creek Boxing Academy, Latu Talu, inside the nearly finished gym last week.

Photo: KRIS DANDO

but it looks way better and we have the chance to start changing some lives now."

The Cannons Creek gym is the first in the ambitious plans of box-

ing coach, author and motivational speaker Graham, who opened his Naenae academy in 2006. It has helped curb tagging and crime rates in the area.

Club rules include shaking hands when you enter, no bullying, hats or swearing.

Graham has the backing of Vodafone and the Tindall Foun-

dation to set up more academies around New Zealand.

Graham said Talu, a nationally ranked boxer, was a quiet leader who would be an ideal mentor.

Ref: 6199557

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