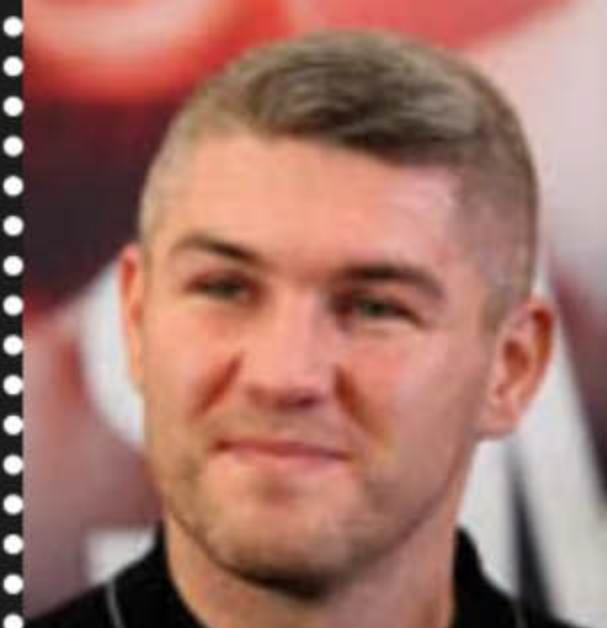




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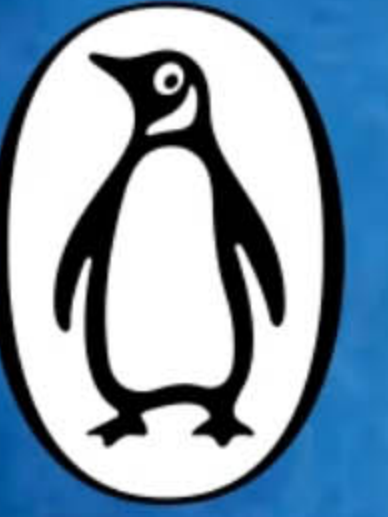


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THE FIRST BELL

by GRAHAM HOUSTON

Moving with the times

YouTuber bouts aren't for everyone but even the purists will likely learn to accept them

So, Matchroom Boxing has presented its second bout between so-called YouTube sensations and boxing is divided.

The traditionalists mostly don't like these bouts, feeling they somehow demean boxing. They resent the fact that "social influencers" such as the Paul brothers, Logan and Jake, KSI (real name Olajide William Olatunji) and AnEsonGib (birth name Ali Loui Al-Fakhri) make more for a single fight than some world champions.

The other side of the argument is that the YouTubers bring a new viewership to boxing, with the hope that these viewers might get into boxing and even become fans.

Teens might even like the idea of putting on the gloves themselves. After all, the YouTubers are influencers, right?

The streaming network DAZN obviously thinks that it is well worth its while to feature the YouTubers. I don't know DAZN's numbers, but if thousands of young people (would that be Generation Z?) take out even a one-month subscription simply to watch the YouTubers, that surely helps the bottom line.

And these YouTube bouts ensure that DAZN gets name-checked numerous times in the lead-up to the bouts and in post-bout stories. That's free advertising of sorts.

Demeaning boxing? Critics of the sport would say, of course, that it is impossible to demean boxing. But boxing has had its share of circus-type events and novelty attractions. One could argue that heavyweight champs Muhammad Ali and Tyson Fury taking part in boxer-wrestler events "demean" boxing. Or Floyd Mayweather meeting

MMA superstar Conor McGregor on PPV. Or the *Foreman vs Five* affair in Toronto when George Foreman met five opponents on the same night.

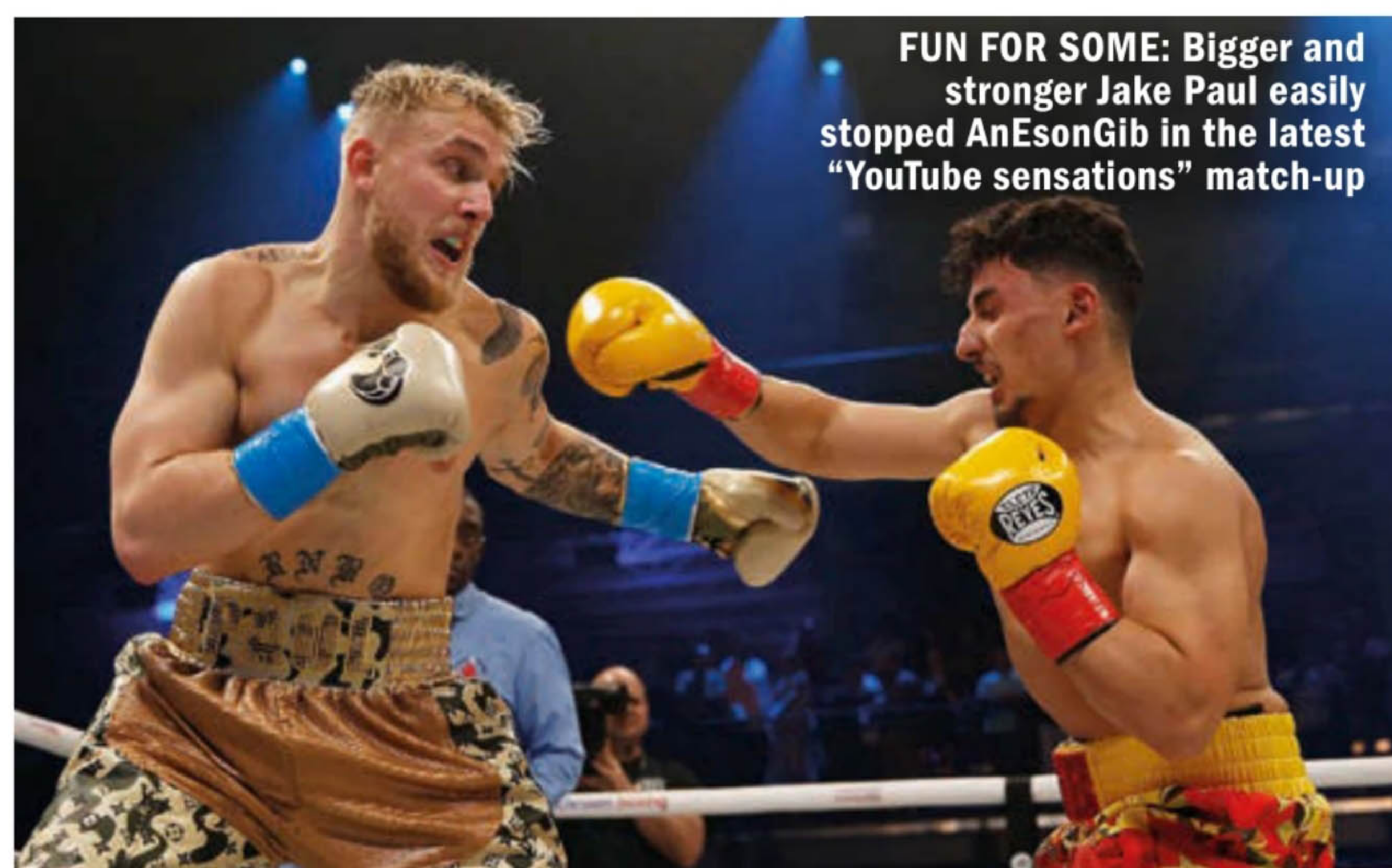
We had actor and sometime boxer Mickey Rourke appearing in a "fight" at the age of 64. Or how about old rivals Jeff Fenech and Azumah Nelson meeting again long after they had retired, with a combined age of 94? Boxing has had its share of bizzarities.

And are the YouTuber match-ups so very different from undercard bouts featuring novelty attractions Butterbean and Mia St John? (And here let me say that I interviewed both Butterbean and Mia for this magazine; Butterbean was very easy going, likeable and gregarious, while I always found Mia to be thoroughly pleasant and totally without pretension. They were never going to be top-level boxers but they had the spirit to get in there and do their best.)

The first YouTuber bout on DAZN — KSI winning a split decision over Logan Paul — was quite entertaining in its way, always bearing in mind that these are novices with very little boxing experience. The crowd was into the fight. This lent the bout a sense of occasion.

In the meeting between Jake Paul and AnEsonGib, the crowd didn't have much to get enthusiastic about, with the bigger and stronger Paul — who actually has rudimentary boxing ability — dropping the flailing Gib three times for a one-round win. But at least Gib managed to bloody Paul's nose before the referee pulled him out.

As for entertainment value, KSI vs Logan Paul was a fun watch. It was arguably more enjoyable than watching a 7-0



FUN FOR SOME: Bigger and stronger Jake Paul easily stopped AnEsonGib in the latest "YouTube sensations" match-up

Getty Images

blue-chip prospect beating up a 5-18-2 opponent who "knows what he's there for".

I believe that KSI and Logan Paul trained like "proper" fighters for their meeting, while Jake Paul said he spent five months up at altitude at Big Bear Lake under the tutelage of Shane Mosley to get ready for AnEsonGib. At least the YouTubers respected the sport enough to prepare properly.

The younger set is definitely interested in these YouTuber bouts. According to the Forbes website, the Jake Paul vs AnEsonGib set-to "attracted more attention than the main event" (Demetrius Andrade vs Luke Keeler), which is probably true, seeing that the social media rivals have an estimated combined following of 22 million on YouTube.

Is this a younger generation vs older generation thing? I don't think so. A boxing traditionalist doesn't necessarily have to be older (or flat-out old). A younger person can have a traditionalist perspective.

Still, a "them against us" mentality seems to be growing. The website ccn.com trumpeted "Jake Paul Just Sent a Savage

Message to Arrogant Boxing Purists". Columnist Aubrey Hansen argued that it was fine with her if the purists will never accept the likes of Jake Paul because: "No one cares what they think anyway."

That is the extreme view from the pro-YouTuber faction. The other extreme is to call a YouTuber bout a circus act. But why can't we meet in the middle? "Traditional" boxing can easily absorb the occasional YouTuber event.

These bouts aren't for everyone, but we live in a changing world. It's likely even hardcore fans will get used to the YouTube bouts. There was "traditionalist" resistance to women's boxing for a while, right?

And, at the end of the day, is it such a bad thing for boxing to try to move with the times? The YouTuber meetings have the potential to introduce boxing to a new viewership.

Look at it this way: People who watch a boxing show because they want to see the YouTubers are, nonetheless, still watching boxing. If only a small percentage of them become fight followers, that's a win for our sport.



PREACHER'S CORNER

by BILLY "PREACHER" GRAHAM

This Brit has the Liston look

Daniel Dubois is that rarity, a big-punching heavyweight who is also a complete fighter

When I watch a heavyweight, I'm looking for certain things.

Obviously I'm looking for power. I know it's a saying that all heavyweights can punch but not all of them punch their weight. There's a difference, believe me. I like to see good balance and rhythm. I like to see ambition and a willingness to fight people.

Obviously you like to see a fighter emerge with the full package but you don't always get that at heavyweight. Daniel Dubois looks like he might just become one of those rare complete heavyweights.

When you're working with a well-balanced, athletic fighter, your scope for improvement is so much wider. If the boxer you're working with has physical limitations then you can only do so much with them. Dubois is fucking huge but when I watch him I don't feel like I'm watching somebody clumsy or uncoordinated. You aren't watching a big, cumbersome Frankenstein's monster. Dubois looks rhythmic and puts his punches together well. There's nothing at all crude about him.

I think Dubois is in the same ilk as fighters like Sonny Liston and Riddick Bowe. Good movement isn't all about bouncing around the ring. It's about grace and subtle movements. They were both very smooth operators and Dubois is the same. People watching them tend to concentrate on punching power and knockouts but they are so much more than that.

It might be the only time he's gone the distance but the night I started to think Dubois

might just have something special was when he fought Kevin Johnson. Johnson's a tough, crafty bastard and gives everybody something to think about and Dubois wasn't getting into the right positions or working at the right range at the start. As the fight went on, slowly but surely he started to do things properly. It's not often you see a young prospect do that, especially one as young as Dubois was at the time. Usually they go back to the gym and work on things but it takes a talented fighter to learn on the job.

He was exciting against Richard Lartey and he was absolutely flawless against Nathan Gorman. At this moment in time, there is nothing bad to say about him.

Just because he's quiet, don't mistake that for a lack of confidence. He was a baby when he started out and he'll get more and more comfortable around cameras. He's going to have to if he carries on at this rate. Plus, not everybody has to be bombastic and kick up hell at press conferences and I think the way he's going about things is refreshing if I'm honest.

This is the biggest compliment I can give him. I haven't seen a better heavyweight prospect. You can never guarantee anything in boxing but if I could train any young heavyweight in the world, it'd be him.

I think fighting Joe Joyce (confirmed for the O2 Arena on 11 April) is the perfect next step for Dubois but I don't think taking on Dubois is the smartest move for The Juggernaut.

Look at the amount of the money that's out there for heavyweights these days. I think it's a massive risk. I think Joyce's bubble might be about to get burst.

WELL BALANCED:
There's nothing
lumbering about
Dubois



Gatly Images

A few years ago I saw a story about Mickey Ward offering to donate his brain to Boston University for study when he passes away. Recently, I saw another story where Micky was talking about the headaches he suffers from these days.

It's something that's been on my mind for a long time now, especially as more and more of the fighters I knew seem to be getting diagnosed with issues.

For a long time we always used to associate punch drunk syndrome with the past and the days when boxers used to have hundreds of fights and boxed every week. Sadly it's becoming clearer and clearer that it's rife.

The strange thing — and I think it's something that even baffles the experts — is why *dementia pugilistica* or CTE doesn't affect every boxer. After all, the human head isn't supposed to be punched.

There just doesn't seem to be any pattern to it and there aren't any easy or quick solutions. Micky has given so much to boxing. If he can help the doctors with their research it would be another great contribution.

I remember Micky coming over to fight Shea Neary. Shea was as tough as fucking nails and Micky beat him at his own game. After that I watched as many of his fights as I could. The Emmanuel Augustus fight was great and he gave Zab Judah hell. The fights with Arturo Gatti are what he's most famous for but to be honest, I find them uncomfortable viewing these days.

I know what you're all thinking: Why didn't he fight Ricky Hatton? It was never even proposed. I met Micky in Boston when Ricky fought Luis Collazo and I think he wanted the fight. I wouldn't have said no had it been offered to us. I know Ricky would have fancied it. But if I'm honest, I always hoped we wouldn't get offered it.

I'm extremely confident that Ricky would have won but I was always concerned about Micky's toughness. He really wasn't the type of man you would choose to fight — and that's the biggest compliment I can pay him.

Billy Graham was talking to John Evans



VIEW FROM NEW YORK

by MICHAEL MARLEY

Truly Second to Nunn

Harshly sentenced two-weight champion stays positive as he marks his first year of freedom

Michael Nunn, whose federal prison tour took up 16 years and six months of his prime adult life, knew he would be physically provoked and challenged while locked up. What he did not know was that all the wannabe “fighters” who looked to beat up on the highly skilled former world middleweight and super middleweight champion disdained the Marquess of Queensberry ring rules completely.

Today, Nunn is about to mark his first year of freedom after being cooped up for — yes, he counted the days, hours and minutes he served for a cocaine sale in hometown Davenport, Iowa — 198 months.

“I am happy. I am home, I am age 56 and I am healthy. My beloved mother Madies died in April of 2017 but I have five children and nine grandchildren. I am truly blessed.”

Nunn explained how “challengers” came at the superlative southpaw whose pro record was 58-4 with 37 knockouts.

“There are tough guys in jail, no doubt, some inmates and some correctional officers. I always say there are good police and bad ones, same thing in jail,” Nunn said. “The ones who wanted to try me only got tough when I had handcuffs on or was otherwise physically restrained. No one wanted a boxing match.”

Little wonder, for at the apex of his ring rise Nunn was being anointed as the pound-for-pound king and touted as a popular successor, both in skill and in charisma, to the electric Sugar Ray Leonard.

Therein lies the true tale of how the younger man and

Leonard nearly duked it out in the men’s lavatory of a cheesy Las Vegas disco known as *Botany’s*. This was in the wee hours, the cocktails were plentiful and Leonard seemed irritated by the attention the discogers were paying to Nunn. (I was on the scene.)

Nunn stole the HBO show with a 1:28 first-round wipeout over rugged Italian Sumbu Kalambay; Leonard was the cable network’s commentator.

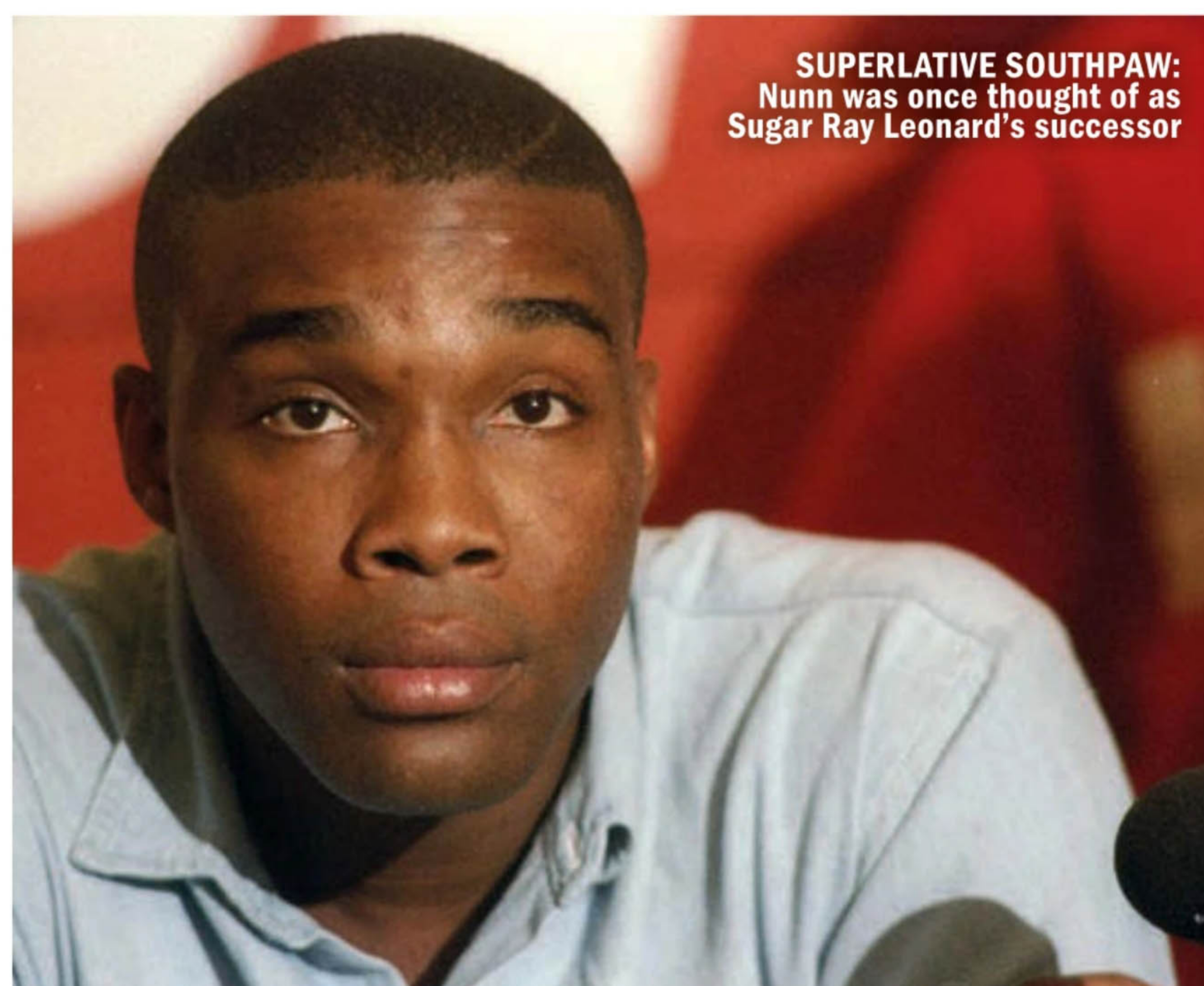
Suffice to say, only harsh words were exchanged and cooler heads prevailed. Nunn is hoping to soon meet and chat with the fighter he so admired.

“I will speak to Ray. I looked up to him, to Tommy Hearns. [Marvin] Hagler and Roberto Duran,” Nunn said. “I hoped to fight them all like they fought each other. But I wasn’t going to fight Ray in a nightclub for free. I’d like to talk to Ray about what happened, I idolised all of them plus, of course, Muhammad Ali.

“It seems today guys talk tough on the internet and the biggest and best matches aren’t coming off. I really like Terence Crawford, a Midwestern kid like me, but he’s not getting the other top guys. Boxing needs less talking and more fighting. Prove who is better. Prove it in the ring, not online.

“I think Emanuel [Steward] may have steered Tommy away from me and perhaps Angelo [Dundee] may have similarly influenced Sugar Ray. I could box slick, punch hard — and a southpaw to boot.”

Additionally, especially at 160lbs, Nunn was conquering formidable opposition, stalwarts such as Iran “The Blade” Barkley, Juan Domingo Roldan, Marlon “Magic Man” Starling, Frank Tate and Donald Curry.



SUPERLATIVE SOUTHPAW:
Nunn was once thought of as
Sugar Ray Leonard’s successor

Getty Images

THE SYSTEM IS A MONSTER DESIGNED TO CHEW YOU UP AND SPIT YOU OUT. THERE IS NO JUSTICE IN SUCH A SOCIETY

He KO’d world champs Tate, Kalambay and Curry. Not a pushover in the bunch.

Nunn earned his way to exalted status from big paymaster HBO.

But disaster loomed back in the Quad Cities (Davenport), both in the ring and later with a drug sale to an undercover cop.

On 10 May 1991, a hometown title defence went smoothly for almost 11 rounds before then-unheralded James “Lights Out” Toney dethroned the local favourite.

Nunn moved up to super middle but wasn’t as potent a fistic force.

Nunn’s world really came crashing down when the feds pinched him on 6 August 2002.

The draconian 24-year sentence he was given was absurd and was later cut down.

Nunn belongs in the International Boxing Hall of Fame, no doubt. And he has wise words for young people to heed.

“The system is a monster designed to chew you up and spit you out. There is no justice in such a society. I will never put myself in a position to go back. I faced down the jealous ones, the haters. I’m done with all that. I should’ve stayed away from Davenport back then.”

Nunn has a chance to write a happy ending.

He deserves one.

He’s gone the distance, all 16 years and six months of it.



BIG DADDY BUNCE

with STEVE BUNCE

@bigdaddybunce

Olympic optimism

GB's 13 men and women all have the credentials for success in Tokyo qualifying tournament

It is hard to imagine a team of British boxers with better credentials than the 13 selected to compete in the European Olympic qualifier at the Copper Box in East London in March.

One is a reigning world amateur champion, another has won a European title, two are Olympic veterans, one has never lost and every single one of the 13 has won a medal at a major tournament.

The 13 have close to 50 medals from the world and European championships and the Commonwealth Games. Caroline Dubois, at 60kg, has never lost and has won an unprecedented triple of youth titles — the European, world

and Olympics. There is also Charley Davison, a mother of three, who had seven years out after a silver medal at the Youth World Championships in 2011.

The men are led in many ways by big Frazer Clarke, a veteran of domestic fights with Anthony Joshua and Joe Joyce and the winner of a silver medal at the Europeans in 2017. He was also the victim of a harsh reversed decision at the world championships in Russia last year — the decision took away a certain medal. At the qualifier, Clarke has to reach the semi-finals; at some weights reaching the last eight will be enough to guarantee a passage to Tokyo.

Last year, Lauren Price won the world amateur title, joining

just three other British boxers: Frankie Gavin, Savannah Marshall and Nicola Adams. That is elite company. Price is not a big middleweight but she is fast, slick, very tough and knows every single one of her rivals.

If she gets through the qualifier — like Big Frazer, she has to also reach the semi-final — she will get a good seeding at the Olympics and closer to one of the three medals needed to keep the GB funding flowing. The criteria for funding survival are three to five medals at the Olympics; Rosie Eccles and Karriss Artingstall complete the five, and all have a realistic chance at a medal. There are no chancers in the entire squad of 13.

The McCormack twins, Luke and Pat, have been picking up medals for nearly a decade at major youth championships and then as senior boxers; gold at the European Games, the Commonwealth Games, silver and bronzes at the European and world championships.

Like many in the GB set-up during the last 10 glorious years

LEADING THE WAY: Frazer Clarke has battled Anthony Joshua and Joe Joyce in the super heavyweight division



Getty Images

of success, they have also seen enough hardship, robberies and inexcusable behaviour on their travels sharing rings with the finest Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Russians and Cubans. Pat went to Rio, had a tough draw. They are 24 at the moment, seasoned veterans — the type of boxers who up until London 2012 never stayed longer than one Olympic cycle.

Galal Yafai also went to Rio and has won Commonwealth gold since. Even the three relative new men have seven major medals between them: Sammy Lee, Ben Whitaker and Cheavon Clarke are still elite boxers. Nobody is going to the qualifier for “experience”.

In early 2016, Peter McGrail was still hoping for a spot on the GB team for Rio. He missed out. It helped him grow properly; in 2017 he won the European title, a title won by just a few British male boxers in the last 60 years. In London, he needs to reach the quarter-final to get an Olympic ticket.

“I will treat every fight like a final, I have to have that mentality,” he said. There is a second chance at the “world” qualifier in Paris in May but that event will be manic, the last chance for so many desperate boxers. Hopefully, this GB team will not need Paris.

• Lauren Price profile: pages 34-37

DAVE RODEN: BIG MAN WITH A BIG HEART

Although Birmingham's Dave Roden was never an elite boxer, he was nevertheless a capable heavyweight who was matched tough in a 19-bout pro career.

Roden, who died on 2 February aged 70, was a sparring partner of Joe Bugner and he appeared on the same bill as Bugner's fight with Joe Frazier at Earls Court Arena in July 1973, defeating US trial horse Charley Polite on points in a six-round bout.

A stand-up boxer with a good jab, Roden won 11 and lost eight of his bouts at a time long before a boxer's record was given during the MC's introductions. It was a time when the important thing was that a boxer fought well and gave value to the crowd. Won-lost statistics were not considered terribly important.

Roden, who turned to promoting and managing boxers after his retirement, had been in poor health for some time. In his later years, he retained an interest in boxing as a steward at the Boxing Board and later as a Commonwealth Boxing Council director.

Roden didn't mince words if he thought his boxers could be doing better in a contest. One of the boxers he managed was Achilles “Speedy” Mitchell, a colourful welterweight. Simon Block, Hon. Sec. of the Commonwealth Boxing Council, recalled asking Mitchell what was worse — having to go out for each round or having to go back at the end of each round to face Dave Roden. “When I told Dave of that conversation he said to me: ‘I bet I know what his answer was!’” Block recalled.

“Dave was also well known in Midlands social circles. He could handle himself outside as well as inside the ropes.”

Very true. It was rumoured that Roden knocked out another, better-known Birmingham heavyweight, Johnny Prescott (who passed away in 2012), when the dashing “Beau Brummie” apparently pushed a disagreement too far.

“He was also a successful businessman, working hard to become a success after a start in life that did him no favours,” Block said. “Dave was a big and generous man with a big and generous heart.”

Roden leaves a wife, Pat, and daughter, Justine.

GH

The Big Question returns next month



CRUISE COLLAPSE

Mairis Briedis and Yuniel Dorticos
reach the WBSS final and the v
BORGES looks at t

Barely two years removed from the biggest disappointment of their boxing careers, **Mairis Briedis** and **Yuniel Dorticos** find themselves in the position they came one victory from in 2018 — the cruiserweight final of the World Boxing Super Series. As the great reggae singer Jimmy Cliff would have described their journey: “It’s been a hard road to travel and a rough, rough way to go.”

So it has been for both and for promoter Kalle Sauerland as well. The two fighters reached the 2018 WBSS semi-finals only to fall short, Briedis losing a slim majority decision to eventual WBSS and unified cruiserweight champion Oleksandr Usyk by a margin so thin that Usyk later called it “the hardest fight of my life”.

One can see why Usyk saw it that way considering that one judge had it a 114-114 draw while the other two had Usyk a 115-113 winner. One can take CompuBox statistics for what you feel they are worth but they, too, were razor thin that night, Usyk throwing 269 more punches but only outlanding Briedis by 17. The latter, after all, is the only real point of punching in the first place, is it not?

As for Dorticos, he landed heavy shots early in his fight with Murat Gassiev, setting the tone for what would become a brutal battle that seemed to be irreversibly altered beginning in the 10th round. Dorticos landed some powerful shots early but Gassiev remained unmoved, finally shaking Dorticos with an uppercut-left hook combination early in that round. That uppercut would soon become Dorticos’ undoing as Gassiev found his chin more and more frequently with it as the seconds ticked away.

Gassiev hurt Dorticos again in the 11th with a chopping right hand and nearly sent him to the floor later in the round with a left uppercut and right hand, Dorticos remaining upright only by wrapping his arms around

**THE TWO FIGHTERS REACHED THE WBSS FINAL, BUT
TO FALL SHORT, BRIEDIS LOSING TO USYK
EVENTUAL WBSS AND UNIFIED CHAMPION**

CRUISER DIVISION

cos have travelled a hard road to
winner is anyone's guess. RON
the Rumble in Riga

Gassiev so tightly he looked like a man battered by hurricane gales.

But in the final round, Dorticos could find no firm grip to keep himself upright as Gassiev floored him three times, the latter coming after a crushing right hand sent him through the ropes. With Dorticos' slumped body half on the ring apron, referee Eddie Claudio leapt in and called a halt to the fight with eight seconds remaining. It was a noble and gritty defeat, but a defeat nonetheless.

Both Dorticos and Briedis had suffered the kind of painfully disappointing losses that many fighters have trouble recovering from and often do not. Dorticos' came accompanied by the humbling fact of having been knocked out for the first time in his career. Briedis' carried with it the notion of seeing his hopes dashed by so thin a margin against a fighter most boxing observers felt was the best cruiserweight in the world.

Yet just over two years later each has fought their way back into the WBSS cruiserweight final, which will be contested on 21 March in Arena Riga in Riga, Latvia, Briedis' hometown. But even this comes in less-than-ideal circumstances.

While the Cuban-born Dorticos easily won his right to the finals by knocking out Andrew Tabiti with a sizzling counter right cross in the 10th round, which ended a fight he had commanded for most of the night by being busier and more aggressive, Briedis was stripped of his WBO version of the title in November after refusing to accept an immediate rematch with the man he beat to reach the WBSS final — Krzysztof Glowacki.

Briedis legally could not do so because of his contractual commitment to the WBSS tournament. But the controversial ending to the Glowacki fight both delayed the final, which was originally set for 14 December 2019, and threw his presence in it into controversy. ▸

THE BEST: Briedis and Dorticos are the No. 1 and No. 2 cruiserweights in the world without question

THE 2018 WBSS SEMI-FINALS ONLY
A SLIM MAJORITY DECISION TO
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■■■■■ BRIEDIS vs DORTICOS

KGZ



"KO DOCTOR": Dorticos kept the pressure on Andrew Tabiti before knocking him out in the 10th round in the WBSS semi-finals

KGZ



CHAMP AGAIN: A former WBA champion, Dorticos captured the IBF belt with the win over Tabiti

In one of the oddest outcomes of 2019, Briedis stopped Glowacki in the third round but only after a torrent of odd occurrences happened in the second round. With the two of them in a clinch, Glowacki struck Briedis with a hard rabbit punch in the back of the head and before referee Robert Byrd could separate them, Briedis responded with a harder elbow to the chin that sent Glowacki crumbling to the floor, obviously hurt.

Byrd didn't buy it, however. Having not seen the elbow land, he told Glowacki to get up but later shifted gears and took a point from Briedis for the foul as the fight proceeded. It was then that things got truly weird.

Briedis sent the still-wobbly Glowacki back down to his knees from a string of big right hands just before the bell sounded to end the round. The only problem was Byrd didn't hear it.

With the bell tolling constantly and people at ringside waving at Byrd to try and get his attention, Briedis again attacked and floored poor Glowacki before order was restored. By then, one of Glowacki's cornermen had entered the ring to try and save him, although it's unclear if it was from Briedis or Byrd.

Regardless, the round was finally over — but sadly, so was Glowacki. He came out for the third round still in a fog and Briedis rocked him with a

crushing uppercut followed by a right hand that ended the fight but not the controversy. What compounded the problem was that while Briedis apologised for throwing an elbow, he admitted during a post-fight interview to hearing the bell. Then he laughed.

He wasn't laughing quite so much after Glowacki appealed the outcome and the WBO ruled in his favour, ordering an immediate rematch that forced the postponement of his fight with Dorticos and eventually led to his being stripped of the WBO belt.

Regardless of the rough, rough road the two have followed to get to this moment, however, it is now nearly upon them and both are predicting they will take the measure of the other.

The 33-year-old Dorticos (24-1, 22 KOs) isn't called "The KO Doctor" for nothing. He may well be the hardest punching cruiserweight in the world and he is certainly one who comes to the arena packing heat and bad intentions.

He knows only one way to fight, which is to wade forward, throwing hard shots to both the head and body. The likelihood he will suddenly have a strategic alteration of his style is slim. In fact, it is non-existent.

"He is a great fighter but he has never faced a fighter like me," Dorticos says of Briedis. "Come Saturday, March 21, I will show the



SPECTACULAR: Briedis blasted Krzysztof Glowacki to defeat although there were controversial aspects to the fight

world his weaknesses. The Ali Trophy [signifying WBSS champion] has my name engraved on it already. It's coming back to Miami with me.

"Briedis better prepare himself for war. On fight night, he will come to know why I'm called the KO Doctor."

Briedis (26-1, 19 KOs) is equally self-assured. Although well aware of Dorticos' dangerous power, he believes firmly that he can outbox him until his moment comes and he unleashes his own fusillade of punches to carry the day.

"We know Dorticos has a really hard punch," Briedis said from his training camp in Riga. "He's a very experienced boxer and everyone knows his strengths. Obviously we will be looking for his weaknesses and try to avoid his strong side."

"First of all, we're focusing on his punching power. Basically, the focus is on his big punches and avoiding them as much as possible by moving around as much as I can to avoid being hit."

"I'm really looking forward to the final. I'm facing one of the very best cruiserweights on the planet. The stakes are so high. Both of us are only looking for one thing — to win."

Briedis described his training camp as "a bit like being in the army". Although fighting at home he lives apart from his family, seeing them only on Sundays, when he does not train. The rest of the week is devoted to a Spartan existence, living with his

CELEBRATION: While Briedis and his team loved the result Glowacki had cause for complaint



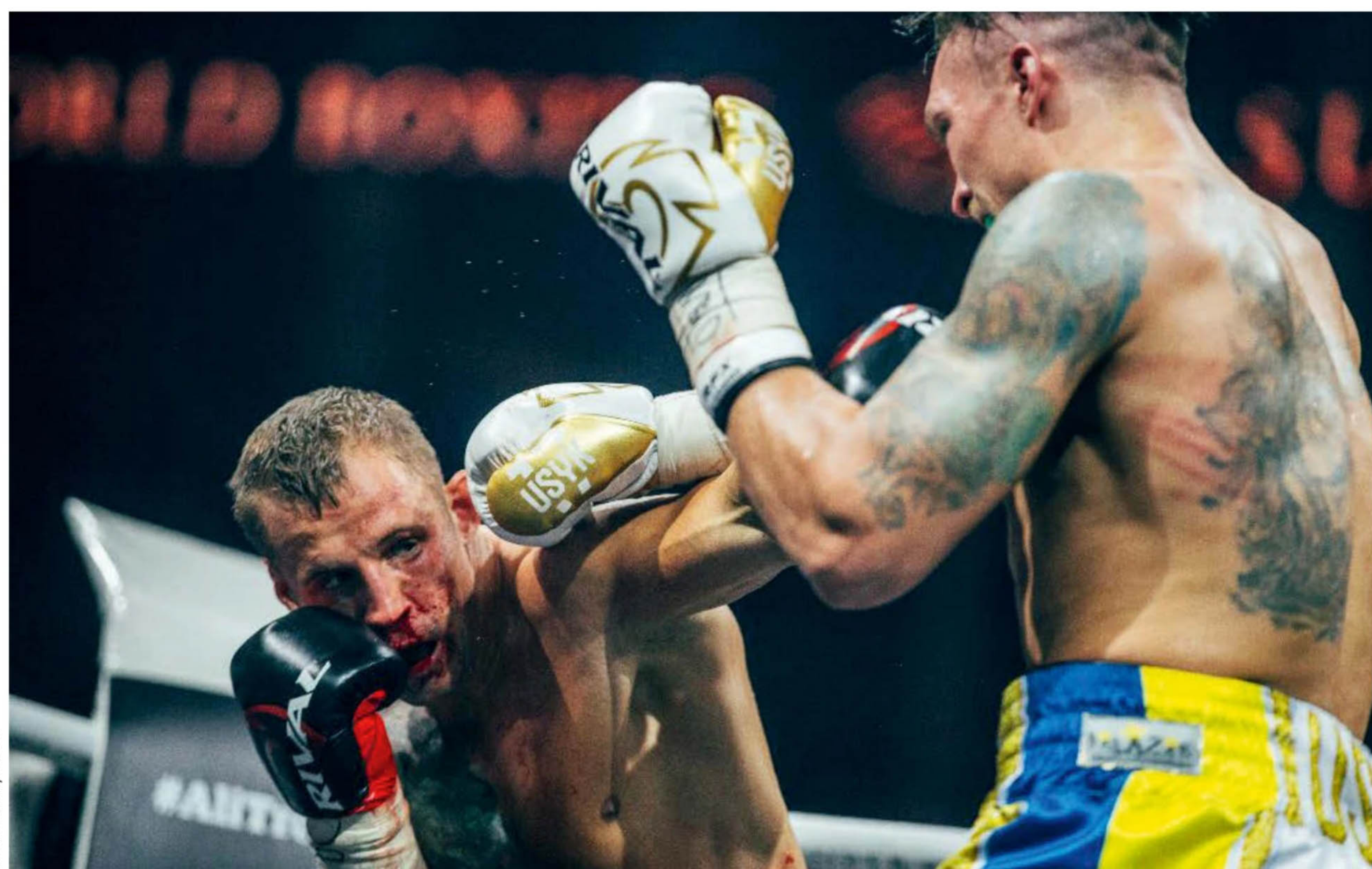
I'M REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FINAL... THE STAKES ARE SO HIGH — BRIEDIS

■■■■■ BRIEDIS vs DORTICOS

Pavel Tabarchuk/WBSS



Mikis Klavins/WBSS



Top: Dorticos suffered his first and only loss when the rugged Murat Gassiev stopped him in the final round

Above: Although bloodied, Briedis gave Oleksandr Usyk the toughest, closest fight of his career

training partners, running, sparring and thinking of Dorticos' big right hand.

As for the winding road he took to reach this moment, the former WBC, WBO and IBO champion insisted he has no regrets how it came about or what tactics were used to secure his place in the finals.

"Some people said that the elbow changed the course of the fight but I don't really believe it changed anything," Briedis said. "The outcome would have been the same. Everyone

could see there was a huge difference in how he fell after the elbow — when he paused and was looking straight at the referee — and when he was punched. Then there was no pause. He just fell down."

Briedis would like to see Dorticos do the same and the hard-punching Cuban sounds as if he would be shocked if he doesn't see Briedis at his feet at some point that night. Such mindsets are the breeding ground for an action fight whose outcome is difficult to predict.

Both are two-time world champions. Both can punch with authority. Each has shown a willingness and ability to take punishment for the chance to dole out some of their own. But there is another question each will have to answer, one that is in the back of the minds of many in boxing, and it has nothing to do with each other. It has to do with the route Usyk has taken since winning the Ali Trophy 19 months ago.

After unifying the cruiserweight division, Usyk decided to move up to the heavyweight division to try and box his way through that land of modern-day Goliaths. Might one or both of these two pursue Usyk as well after this fight?

The brash Dorticos said definitively, "Absolutely, but for now all I'm focused on is the Ali Trophy and the final."

Briedis was more non-committal, saying only: "If it's in the stars we will meet again and I believe a rematch would be three times better than the first fight [with Usyk]. But that's a 'what if'. Right now, we're focused only on Dorticos. We can't even lose one per cent of our focus on any side issues. It's only Dorticos."

That is as it should be for both men. Their problem at the moment is only each other. For both of them, that alone will be a sizeable one to face.

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NEW DECADE NEW GOALS

Liam Smith is the WBO No. 2 junior middle contender and tells MARK BUTCHER he is upbeat about winning back the 154lbs belt while seeking to maximise his earning potential

A 12-year pro with relatively few miles on the clock, **Liam Smith** is targeting his old title in a new decade.

With Smith anticipating two or three more years at top level, he is eyeing another run at a world championship to boost his earning potential and secure the financial security of his family, especially with a first baby due in April.

"I've probably got two, maybe three years left, it all depends on what fights I get. I always put maybe 33, 34 as a benchmark [for age] years ago," Smith told *Boxing Monthly*. "Now we'll see what the next three years pile on for me and what fights I get. But I hope to become world champion again and be involved in another few big fights."

"I have to maximise what I can get. I've got a baby on the way and I'm 31. I've got to think of life after boxing now. I need the big fights for the biggest money."

The former WBO 154lbs champion is angling for a clash with current title-holder Patrick Teixeira, though he will have to wait in line after the Brazilian's promoter, Golden Boy, surprisingly agreed terms for a mandatory defence against PBC fighter Brian Castano. No date for the fight has been announced.

It was an unexpected turn of events as PBC supremo Al Haymon had previously steered his fighters clear of the sanctioning body. Nevertheless, Teixeira remains the champion in the Scouser's sights.

"I was curious to see what Castano done with him being a PBC fighter. But Castano is going to fight Teixeira next," Smith, the WBO's No.2 rated contender, told BM. "I just think Teixeira's the one I'm closest to and the more realistic possibility that I get that fight."

"Teixeira is a good fighter; he's a tall, kind of a slow southpaw who likes a bit of a

fight. His record's good. He's only lost to Curtis Stevens but it's a fight I believe I could win as long as I get it."

Teixeira (31-1, 22 KOs) rallied late to beat the touted Carlos Adames in a rousing 12-rounder to clinch the WBO's interim crown last November (before being upgraded to full champion shortly afterwards). A wiry and deceptive puncher, the Brazilian appears Smith's best championship option with most of a competitive division tied up with the PBC and involved in an inter-promotional round-robin.

"I think Adames' conditioning let him down late on in the fight and Teixeira took over, especially after the [seventh round] knockdown, but it was a good fight," Smith said. "They both took their fair share of shots and Teixeira just seemed to take the fight late."

Wide-open division

Following Julian Williams' shock fifth-round defeat to Jeison Rosario in January, the 154lbs division lacks a dominant force, with a number of past and present champions — including Jermell Charlo, Erislandy Lara, Jarrett Hurd, Tony Harrison, Teixeira and Smith — now jostling for position.

"You've probably got to say [WBC champion] Charlo [is the best]. It's hard to write Hurd off, he's back at 154 and [only] lost one fight to Williams. But the division is wide open," Smith said. "Everybody seems to be beating each other, so no one is at the elite level. They are all vulnerable. They are all beatable. It just depends who turns up on that given night."

A decision over roughhouse middleweight Roberto Garcia just before Christmas had suggested Smith (29-2-1, 16 KOs) might be toying with a move up in poundage. Most of the division's finest at 154lbs are affiliated with the PBC, which could prove a promotional roadblock, but

Smith is sticking with the weight class for the foreseeable future.

"I'm going to push for a world title or a massive fight at 154," he confirmed. "I can flirt with 160 but I am going to push at 154 first. I can easily fight [the PBC boxers]. I'm with Eddie [Hearn] at the moment but I'm not signed down to anything and not stuck in any contracts with Eddie. So I'm sure everyone would be happy if I got a shot on a PBC [show]. That wouldn't be a stumbling block for me."

Previously, the forthright Smith engaged in an intense two-fight rivalry with Welsh firebrand Liam Williams, with the Scouser winning first as a brawler, then a boxer. Williams, a point ahead on all cards, suffered a terrible cut and retired after nine rounds with Smith coming on strong in their first encounter.

The Liverpool man won the return with relative ease, outboxing noted jabber Williams in a refined boxing display. With two wins already in the bank, one would think Smith had near-zero interest in a trilogy, but Williams has been namedropping again following a good run of form at middleweight.

"He's improved probably with maturity, with age, with experience, but he's yet to fight a decent name at middleweight," Smith said. "I think people are banging on about him for knocking over a few opponents who no-one has really heard of. ▷

INTELLIGENT FIGHTER:
Whether the other man
chooses to box or to fight,
Smith says he always
answers the bell ready to
adapt and do what it
takes to win





Top: Hammering Sam Eggington into defeat in five rounds kept Smith in the 154lbs picture

Above: Although he lost the fight, Smith gave Jaime Munguia plenty to think about

“They are just going by the French kid [Karim Achour] because David Lemieux never stopped him and Williams did. Mark Heffron was a kind of a prospect stepping up who wasn’t ready for that step up and will improve. But [Williams] has some good wins and it’s nice to see he’s found a bit of fight in himself, a bit of bottle.

“But I showed I can beat him both ways. Obviously, I know I can outfight him because that’s more my game than his. Then, in the second fight, I showed I could outbox him and outjab him and stuck to that gameplan because of a little thing in the

build-up. Him and Gary Lockett said I could only do one thing, so I was a little bit stubborn and stuck to [boxing].

“I’ll beat you at what you think [you’re good at]. They are all raving he’s got a world-class jab and he knocked Kris Carslaw out with a jab, so I stuck to outjabbing him.

“He seems to have found this bite with other people but still he couldn’t really do that with me. I am wondering where all that was with me when he’s threatening people on social media? He’s saying to Sunny Edwards: ‘I’ll slap you’ and stuff like that. I’m thinking: ‘Where’s this kid been all along?’”

Smith subscribes to the notion that Williams, for all his talent, is an on-top fighter. “When he can, he will. If he can’t, he won’t. He’ll be quiet. I think that’s just the way he is in person. I’ve spoke to him privately in different messages and I’ve said it’s all right saying [you want a third fight] so people see and to get people talking, but if you really wanted it I was with [the same promoter] Frank [Warren]. He knows if he wants the fight that bad to tell Frank to phone me.”

A more attractive proposition for Smith is a clash with former IBF welterweight champion Kell Brook. “There’s been discussions, ongoing,” Smith said.

“It’s a good fight to top Liverpool or Sheffield or a chief support to somebody else. It’s definitely worthy [of a spot on a pay-per-view bill].”

After splitting amicably with long-time promoter Warren and signing with Matchroom in early 2019, Smith has headed in a different direction, fighting in Mexico (TKO 7 Mario Alberto Lozano) and Phoenix, Arizona (W10 Roberto Garcia) after a hometown dismantling of Sam Eggington (TKO5) last March. With Matchroom’s endless dates on either side of the Atlantic, on Sky Sports and DAZN, opportunity is never far away.

Smith already has invaluable seasoning at the highest level, losing his WBO title to Canelo Alvarez in September 2016 in front of 51,240 fans at the AT&T Stadium in Texas before an attempt to win it back fell short against Jaime Munguia two years later.



“They bring their own little tricks at that level and different things. I had to pick up things they done. Especially with Canelo, he did a lot of things really well,” Smith recalled. “Now I use that experience to my own advantage whenever I can.”

Since their encounter, Canelo has submitted a positive drugs test, allegedly from ingesting contaminated meat in Mexico, but (as seems to be the norm in boxing) only received a lenient six-month ban. While Smith admires Canelo the fighter, he remains bemused by the lack of punishment.

“Regardless of my fight, I don’t think he was punished enough at all,” Smith said. “No. He got a six-month ban and he fights every six months anyway.”

“I do think those six-month bans are a joke, even for other fighters who have had them, but regarding my fight with him I don’t look back at it bitter or anything. It was a good fight, I enjoyed it and obviously I do think he was too good for me anyway.”

Liam’s younger brother Callum, the reigning WBA Super champion at 168lbs, remains in the lucrative Canelo sweepstakes. Callum fell below his usual high standards in a close fight against John Ryder in November, but that sub-par showing may tempt Canelo or another major name later this year.

“I hope he does fight Canelo. I’ve said if anyone is going to beat him, it will be Callum. [Rivals] will look at [the Ryder fight] and maybe take the fight now. It will open doors for Callum,” Smith said. “They will want



to fight him and that’s when you’ll see the best of him. I think Callum has got the style to beat Canelo. He can box, he can punch and fingers crossed he gets that fight.

“Callum boxed well [but] underperformed a little bit [against Ryder]. It’s hard to get up for a Ryder fight when you are talking about Canelo, David Benavidez, Caleb Plant and Gennady Golovkin then all of a sudden you’re fighting an English kid whose lost to someone you’ve stopped in one round. So it’s very hard to get up for that. It was a job he had to do, he’s done it and we move on.”

At 31, Smith’s thoughts have inevitably wandered to life after boxing. The four fighting Smith brothers Liam, Callum, Stephen and Paul created history by all winning British titles and now they are looking to give something back to the game after boxing.

“We’re in the middle of doing a gym. We’ll stay involved. We’ll give something back definitely,” Smith said. “Whether we decide to do an amateur club, a fitness gym or train [pro] fighters, I don’t know, but we’re sorting a gym out between the four of us.”

Top: Smith feels he proved a point by outjabbing Liam Williams in their return fight

Above: While losing to Canelo Alvarez was a disappointment, Smith has no hard feelings and can even say he enjoyed the bout

THE RIGHT CHOICE

Shakan Pitters had an unconventional route to his forthcoming British title challenge. He tells DANNY FLEXEN about the decisions that led him to where he is today

Shakan Pitters is making a career out of the unconventional. The 6ft 6ins light-heavyweight only began to take boxing seriously at the age of 22, and used a short-format tournament as a catapult to domestic title contention. A showdown with Craig Richards — building from a rivalry becoming more bitter by the day — was on, then off, then back on, then off again, but is now secured for 28 March in Coventry, with the vacant British title on the line.

For Pitters, the son of an ex-pro boxer who fell in love first with football, this huge opportunity, promoted by Hennessy Sports and televised live on UK terrestrial station Channel 5, is further confirmation that he made the right choice, not only regarding the sport in which he competes but also in finally dedicating himself to boxing full time, four months ago.

"I was at DHL Logistics and we used to sequence the parts for Land Rover," he explained to *Boxing Monthly*. "The anti-roll bars that connect to the underneath of the car, we put them in sequence order for Land Rover, Range Rover."

"Work was supportive at the time around fights but now there is more time, I can rest in between sessions, I can balance my training a lot better. When I was working, I was doing shift work. I'd have to be up at 5am to clock in at 5.45am, finish at 1.30pm, or the other shift was 1.30pm till nine at night."

"I've managed it well, got my run in before work, training before or after work, but now I can come back, eat, go back to sleep, train again, whatever else. I get sufficient rest now."

Dad Colin Pitters was a tough 6ft 3ins middleweight who went in with the likes of Richie Woodhall, Neville Brown and Steve Foster Sr in the early 1990s. Shakan was about six when his dad retired but the imperious Manchester United side of the era proved an alternative inspiration, even for a child growing up in Birmingham.

"I used to watch my dad on TV when he used to have his fights," Shakan recalled. "Where we used to live, the boxing gym was 15 minutes' walk away. My brothers Anwar and Andre were both amateur boxers and my dad took me along because he was taking them. My dad was a trainer there, Moor Leaf ABC."

"But I was a big football fan, watching it all the time. I had all the jerseys. I genuinely just liked watching it on TV. I was always a Man U fan. My brothers played it. Dad took me to a team when I was younger. After two, three years, I got scouted by West Bromwich Albion and I was there till my teens. Then I got released from West Brom. They were offering adult scholarships at 15-16, but I broke my toe."

"After I got released, I was playing for other teams, trying to get back into it. That's when I fell out of love with football."

Before boxing could take a dominant place in Pitters' life, circumstance stepped in. With grown-up responsibilities looming large, the 18-year-old Pitters became the modern version of a door-to-door salesman, trying to elicit charitable donations on a commission-only basis. He took away the positives and used them to develop people skills for a future career he had no concept of at the time.

Displaying a penchant for talking to people and a degree of self-discipline, Pitters began to relish the challenge. He

held the job down for a number of years. The demanding nature of the role had the effect of denying him time to play football. Instead, introspection led to an epiphany of sorts.

"From school, I used to go to football, then it was working, then football, but by that stage I was only working so I had plenty of thinking time," he remembered. "I felt 'I've gotta do something to occupy my mind and time even more.'"

"As kids, we'd run, go gym, even my mum would join in — I remember me being at primary school, my dad would wake us up as a family about 4am and make us all run as a group."

"My dad grew us up in a very strict household. We were all good kids, never brought police at the door, I feel 'cause of the fear of what my dad would be like. He's very old-school. It made me the man I am today. Without my dad, no doubt I wouldn't have had the skills from so young."

This new-found understanding led to a brief period in amateur boxing, but the meandering Pitters did not take it seriously enough or summon the required commitment to training. Despite this, he still won a pair of Midlands titles, reached two national finals and held his own when sparring with decent professionals.

His daughter, Leilani, was born in 2015 and that, combined with a growing aptitude for pro-style boxing, ultimately led Shakan to make his paid bow two years later, aged 27, managed by Jon Pegg and trained by the experienced Paul "Soggy" Counihan.

The first 18 months resembled a standard apprenticeship. Seven opponents Pitters was expected to beat were

SHAKAN PITTERS ■■■■■

DEDICATION: Pitters has given himself the best possible chance for success by becoming a full-time boxer

TOUGH CONTEST: Pitters showed he could prevail in a long, hard fight when winning a 10-round decision over old rival Dec Spelman



summarily dismissed with the minimum of fuss. Like many boxers at a similar stage, the light-heavyweight strived for a golden opportunity when, suddenly, two emerged at once.

"I was actually training for the Amir Khan [against Samuel Vargas] undercard in Birmingham," Pitters revealed. "I was in the Dominican Republic on a holiday with my girlfriend but I was still doing my runs out there, using the gym facilities.

"I was on my way back to the airport and me and Soggy, we have a good relationship, we have a plan, he'll know what I'm doing, we don't hide nothing from each other. I said [on his mobile phone] 'I'm coming back now, boarding the plane, see you in the gym tomorrow.' He said: 'No more holidays' and told me about *Ultimate Boxer*. I had attended the first one where Drew Brown won, so I knew the vibe, the attraction it brought."

As regular readers will know from our previous feature on Pitters, he defeated Sam Smith, Georgii Bacon and, in the final, Dec Spelman to capture the *UB* robe and a cash prize that left him with around £16,000 after deductions.

Far more than that, his name was made virtually overnight. Pitters' first title shot came less than 12 months later when he challenged old foe Spelman for the English belt last year. In what is his most recent outing, the 30-year-old earned a clear decision in a gripping contest that proved he could both take a shot and dictate the pace against a talented adversary. Going in, Shakan had been confident despite concern he had never previously made 175lbs.

"I knew that I was gonna beat him but I wasn't feeling cocky or overlooking him," Pitters reasoned. "I'd also had a solid

training camp in Dubai, working two-three times a day in the best conditions, good spars. I knew I'd make weight comfortably.

"*Ultimate Boxer* was a great platform to test that out, as it was made just two pounds over the championship limit. I knew it would be hard for Dec as he's a very solid-set person as well. His face looked drained in the staredown. He's a nice guy. I took a liking to him after we had shared a ring and knowing his story, the Scott Westgarth tragedy [Spelman was the opponent in the contest that took Westgarth's life], we stay in touch even now. He could have picked an easier defence but it just shows the willpower in the man.

"I was always a slim kid growing up. I've never ever been fat. I think it's my lifestyle outside the ring, I don't eat greasy food and kebabs, I eat a lot of chicken, fish, veg. My girlfriend is into her gym as well. We eat healthy, never no junk."

And so, on to Richards, someone with whom Pitters was on friendly terms before the fight negotiations — both official and via social media — dragged on.

"I'm mandatory, I earned that position just like he has, but they feel as if they're really the A-side," Pitters said. "He'll get the best me on the day and I know I'm gonna win.

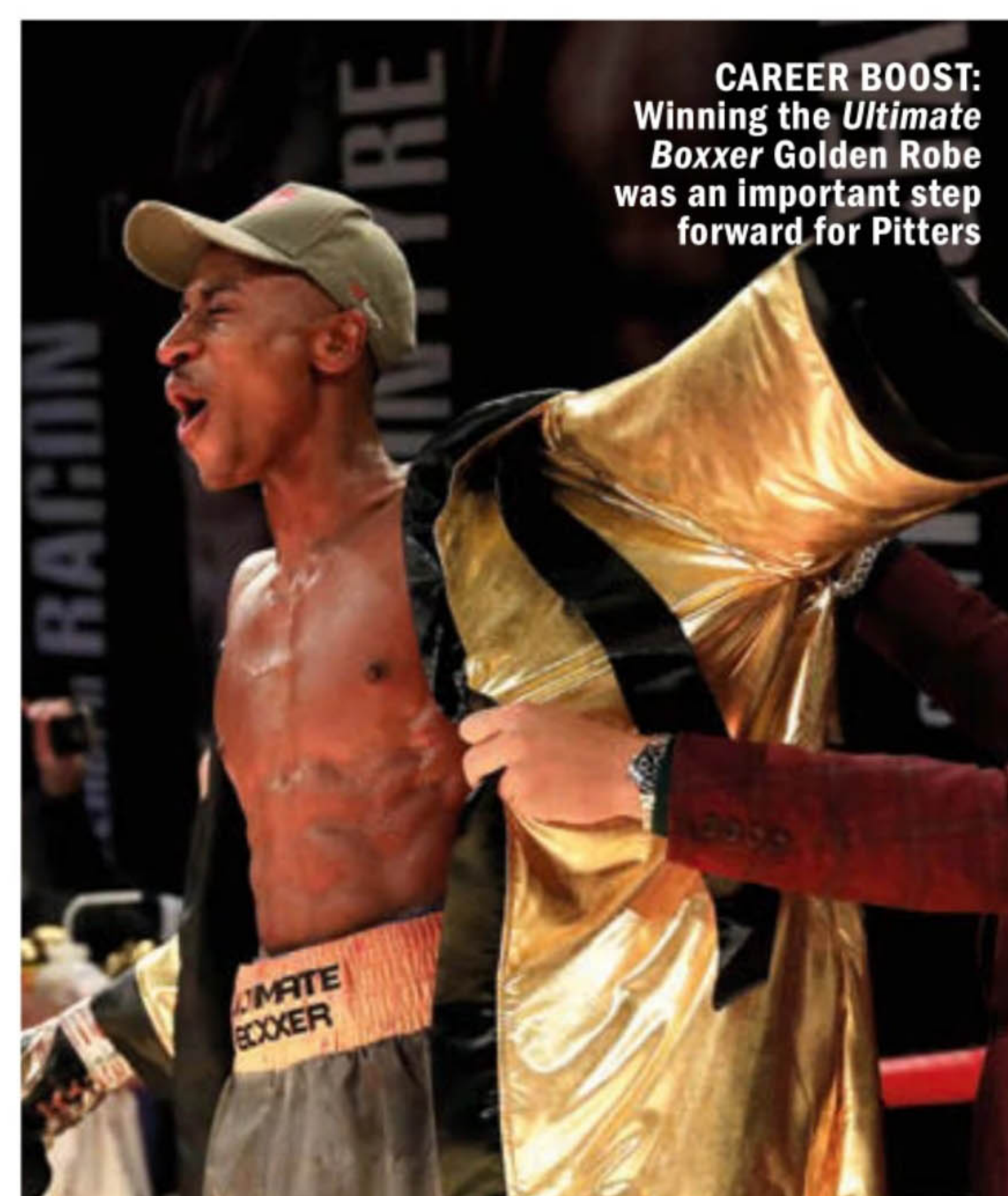
"The Chad Sugden performance [Richards drew on that December show against the spirited late replacement] was very poor. Chad's no mug but Craig was making excuses to make him feel good, blaming the ref, anyone but himself."

Following an unconventional beginning, Pitters' career is now beginning to take a more traditional path. Pitters (13-0, 4 KOs), has won the English title and now seeks to

FRIENDLY RIVALS: Pitters and Dec Spelman have now shared a ring twice and each has respect for the other



CAREER BOOST: Winning the *Ultimate Boxer* Golden Robe was an important step forward for Pitters



win the British. Should he beat Richards, who has top-15 rankings with two of the major world sanctioning bodies, Shakan could even find himself on the verge of a world title shot, which must have seemed unlikely even three years ago. Guess he made the right call after all.

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RIGHT HAND UP: Booth makes sure defensive nuances are in place as he takes Josh Kelly on the pads



HIT FAST — AND DON'T GET HIT

Adam Booth has been training boxers for 25 years. He takes time out from operating his new state-of-the art gym to share his coaching philosophy with PAUL ZANON

Adam Booth's philosophy for training fighters is firmly based on the principle of taking as few punches as possible. Hit and don't get hit, with the accent on the latter.

"I carry this deep desire about my fighters being hard to hit, and to hit hard and fast," Booth told *Boxing Monthly*. "I always have."

"When they spar or when they fight, I kind of don't care about the shots that they land. But when they take a shot, it irritates the fuck out of me."

"In recent times, Michael Conlan has suffered that criticism after coming back [to the corner] after a round of sparring thinking he's absolutely battered the fella, only to get totally berated by me because he's taken shots he could get away with with a headguard on, because it muffles and dampens it."

"But when you're in with a fella that can whack with 8oz gloves, all of a sudden, the effect of that shot you don't realise was significant becomes extremely significant in terms of winning or losing a fight and also the risk of your health."

With two and a half decades of professional boxing training under his belt, Booth has just opened the doors to The Boxing Booth Gym in Merstham, Surrey.

Having previously tutored the likes of David Haye, George Groves and Andy Lee, the once-monikered "Dark Lord" now has a number of new and exciting charges, including Conlan, Shannon Courtenay, Harlem Eubank, Joe Joyce and Josh Kelly. Who is likely to be the best prospect for 2020, though?

"Can't say, because they are all at very similar levels in terms of Josh, Michael and Joe," Booth said. "Although they're all less than 14 pro fights, they're all quite highly ranked. Michael is number one in the WBO [ratings]."

"Someone might edge by a nose this year but they're all quite even at the moment. I wouldn't want to mention who could be the first world champion out of them because I don't want to put that pressure on them. What I would say is that

they all do what I ask of them and as a coach that's all I need from them."

A few of Booth's charges have been described as having "natural talent". Booth has pondered over the meaning of the term. "What is natural talent? That's something I've thought about a lot," he said. "Natural talent can be aesthetic. You can have fighters, as a result of their circumstances and upbringing, be really tough. They're not naturally tough, though, they became that. Nobody is born a champion or a fighter. Everything starts from the mind."

"Josh Kelly has got an incredible imagination and the ability to do lots of different things, which is a strength and a weakness. It's like spinning too many plates. You've got so many options that you don't stick with the one that's working for you, and that's a process he's in at the moment. But he's certainly unique."

"Michael Conlan became world number one as an amateur admitting he used a very limited skill set because he knew that skill set would keep winning fights. He didn't go outside the lines. Yet he's got the potential to be a good inside fighter and good long-range boxer."

The eclectic blend of fighting weights and personalities in the stable certainly seems to be working, with camaraderie at an all-time high. Light-hearted humour is a key ingredient.

"I try not to be funny because once I start cracking jokes they take liberties and then all of a sudden I realise an hour has gone by and they are not training," Booth said. "They've each got different types of humour. Josh will dig people out about their insecurities. Michael is absolutely ruthless. There's no boundaries to Michael's piss-taking and the two of them work really well together. Overall, though, they have a great work ethic and if it can be done in a happy environment, then even better."

From super bantamweight to heavyweight, Booth explained how sparring worked between his fighters. "It doesn't! That said, Harlem Eubank is probably the most improved fighter in the ▸



ADAM BOOTH

gym. He's had a hand operation, which has kept him out for a while, but he's the most improved because he came here with only a handful of amateur fights and no pro fights.

"All of a sudden, he's sparring with Josh Kelly and Josh's sparring partners and because of his weight [super lightweight] he's also sparring with Michael.

"Harlem is the only one who's sparred with anyone in the gym. For him it's great but for the others we bring people in. Actually, I tell a lie. Shannon sparred with Joe Joyce. I think she ruffled his shoelaces."

In the past 24 months, Booth has also had a number of fighters passing through on their respective boxing journeys. Two of note are arch rivals Billy Joe Saunders and Chris Eubank Jr.

"I worked with Chris for two fights but that wasn't a working relationship I wanted to continue," Booth said. "Billy Joe came down for a couple of weeks but because of his personal circumstances, he ended up going elsewhere."

So who would Booth favour should the two meet in a rematch? "I still favour Billy Joe. Southpaws don't suit Junior. Billy Joe has gained a lot of confidence over the wins he's had, especially the David Lemieux one, and he's mentally grown into the role of an unbeaten champion. Even though he hasn't been active, he carries that belief. I think that and his southpaw style makes me edge towards Billy."

Booth's state-of-the-art gym is nothing short of sensational. With the last lick of paint fully dried, the premises are also open to the general public.

Booth felt the time was right to open his own premises. "I'd moved out of the country for a year and since 2015 I've been back and kind of renting time and space in other gyms," he said. "I'd been looking around for a long time and it was difficult to find somewhere.

"In the end, the only solution was to buy and build. With [fellow pro boxing trainer] Adam Martin, we decided to do this as a joint project. It's called The Boxing Booth Gym because I guess my name is a little bit more commercial, but in terms of the gym it's a partnership between me and Adam.

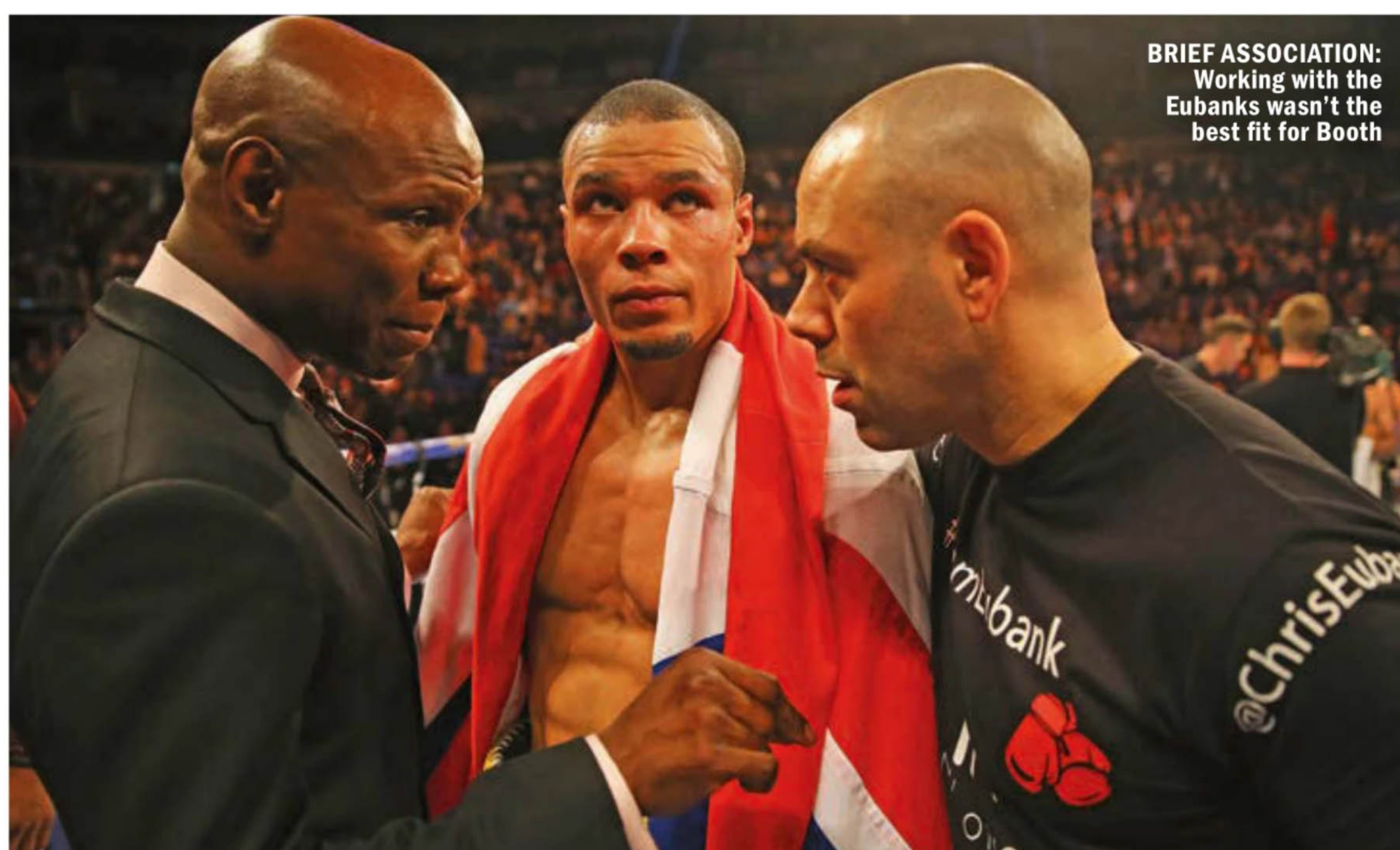
"Adam already trains a crop of fighters who want to achieve. I have my fighters and the both of us are looking to expand our respective stables and work together. We now have the facility and the team to expand. It's funny because one ring has his name on it and the other has mine. For the first few days, it was really territorial and he would have his crew on his side and mine on the other, but now he's decided to invade my land!"

During Booth's boxing journey, he has managed, promoted and trained fighters, albeit he's now dropped one of his hats. "I don't promote any more, and that's a relief," he said. "I'm not a salesman.

"I manage Josh Kelly, Harlem Eubank, Shannon Courtenay and [amateur champion] Ellie Scotney." However, the 51-year-old has some misgivings about the business of boxing. "I still see the same shit that's going on," he said. "I don't want to be disrespectful



POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE: Josh Kelly (left), Adam Martin, Shannon Courtenay and Booth take a break



BRIEF ASSOCIATION: Working with the Eubanks wasn't the best fit for Booth

to the people that I had good working relationships with, though.

"For example, I have a good relationship with MTK, Eddie Hearn, Top Rank, Matchroom. As the years have gone on, I've forged these relationships and I've gravitated to people I've enjoyed working with, who've treated me honestly and fairly, and in turn, that gets passed down to my fighters.

"But there's always that age-old thing as Don King said: 'You're worth what you negotiate.' Sometimes you see fighters get their worth and other times you see fighters getting opportunities they don't really deserve while there's a much more credible individual who deserves an opportunity and gets frozen out, for whatever reason."

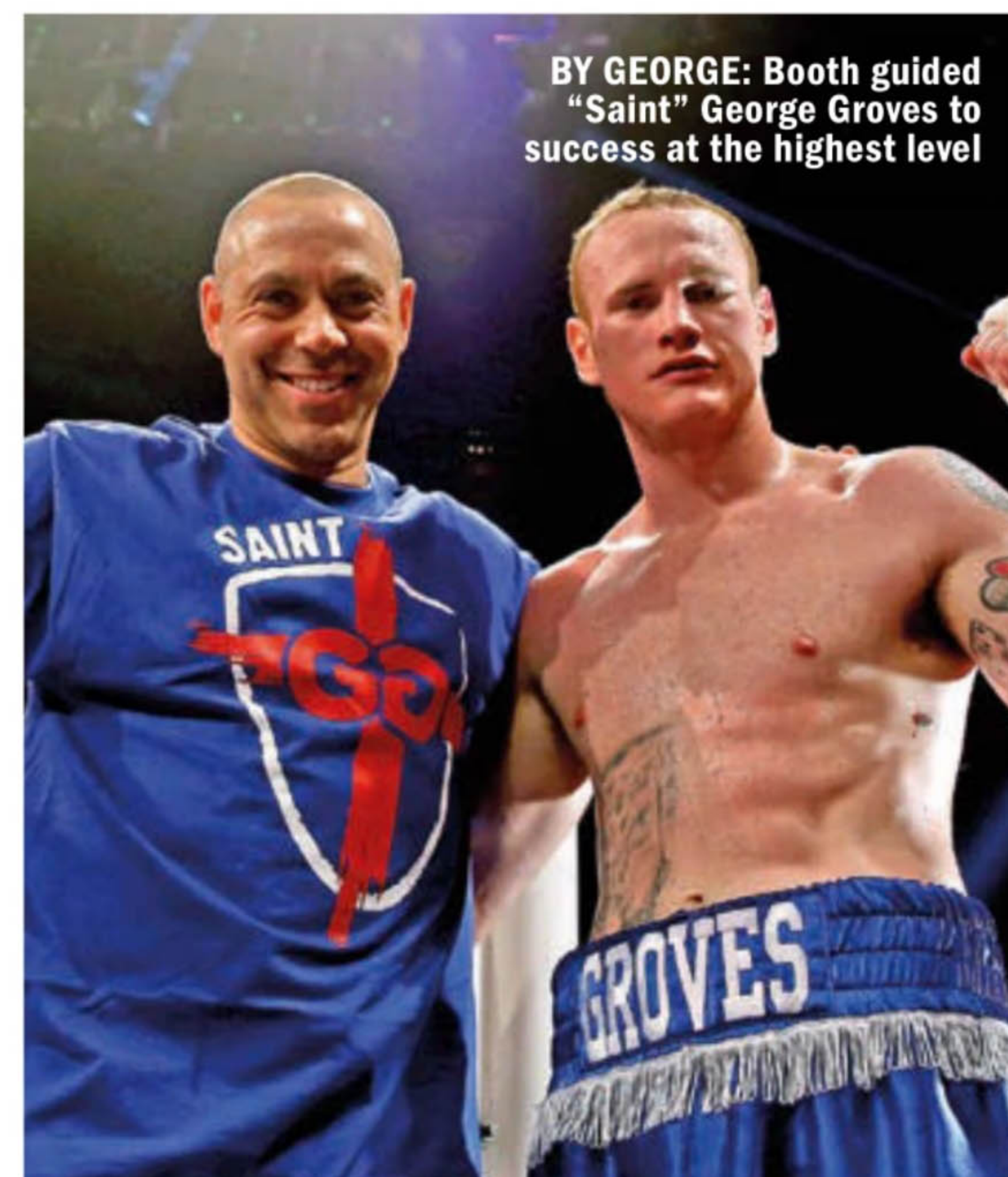
Booth added: "I'm not sure if it's become highlighted more recently but the doping in the sport disgusts me now, more than the business. It really does. I just wish more was being done. I don't think TV networks, promoters and sanctioning bodies are doing their part in punishing the ones that have cheated in a violent scenario. The dope cheats disgust me more than the lying and deceit in boxing, and fighters getting ripped off."

In March 2019, Booth announced that MTK would be acting in the capacity of

advisors to his stable. "My relationship with them started through Michael Conlan, who is one of their leading fighters," he said. "I also had a long-standing relationship with his dad and his brother Jamie, and conversations evolved from there."

After 25 years as a professional boxing coach, Booth is widely regarded by many as one of the best boxing trainers in the UK. But it hasn't been an easy ride. "I remember when I first started with David Haye in the early 2000s and there weren't that many coaches around at the time," he said. "Back then, when a high-profile amateur like David turned pro, it was usually from a choice of a handful of coaches and less than a handful of promoters and managers to choose from. I was independent and took a lot of flak back then. People [were] saying I wasn't qualified to carry a bucket — and this was way before the social media bullshit."

"I met David Haye when he was 16 and I'd not long been able to box myself. Coaching fighters was my way of expressing the love for the sport and at that time I happened to come across David, and we got on really well, and that's what gave me an opportunity to get a reputation as a coach.



"The people that doubted me didn't know how I boxed as an amateur. They don't know that I turned pro and got injured. They didn't know how I coached because these people never spent a minute with me in the gym, listening to what I said and how I worked with fighters.

"I taught myself back then to treat criticism and praise as the same imposter because if you're susceptible to one, you're susceptible to the other. When people say something nice to me, I appreciate it, but if they haven't worked with me or seen me in action, they don't know if I'm good or bad.

"There used to be a saying that the coach is only as good as the fighter. That's not true. A coach's reputation is born out of the profile of the fighter he works with, but the quality and grade of the coach is how good they are.

"I know a lot of great coaches you've probably never heard of, and will probably never hear of, because they don't push themselves commercially or go chasing fighters who will give them that commercial element. I think I know what I'm doing but time shows everything and I still think I have a lot to prove to myself as a coach.

"I go back and watch fights and fighters I'd watch when I was 12 or 13 years old and see it through those eyes. Boxers like Sugar Ray Leonard, Hector Camacho, Roberto Duran, Wilfred Benitez, Marvin Hagler, John Mugabi. There were certain fighters I'd like watching and I remind myself, especially in testing times, why I chose to do this. It helps refresh me a little bit."

With a background noise of skipping ropes and the thudding of punch bags, Booth briefly halts the interview and shouts across the gym to one of his co-trainers: "Charlie. Can you glove up Josh [Kelly] for me, please?"

Booth continued. "Back to coaching. As I've worked with different fighters, I've had the chance to indulge in different elements of the sport that I've watched over the years and tried to force myself to understand.

"With David Haye, he had very specific strengths and weaknesses, and a very specific attitude with regards to his approach to training. He'd be the first to admit that he hated training but loved fighting.



"Working with fighters who have different abilities and attitudes towards training, but are also good fighters, gives me the chance to really express my desire to test my knowledge and understanding with different styles.

"What works for one doesn't work for another. Each style has a different defensive and offensive flow that goes with it and that's what I've loved and still love to develop these days.

"I want to help my fighters fulfil their potential, give them all the success they want in terms of their stats as a fighter and keep them as healthy as possible. That sounds like a cheesy statement, but I know, deep down in my heart, that's how I look at it."

The merits of the gym in a UK society currently overridden with bullying and knife crime is a topic dear to Booth's heart. "A boxing gym is a leveller socially, I believe," he said. "There is no social hierarchy in a gym. It's always been that way. You can have a really experienced, hardened champion and a total novice, but the champion might watch the novice spar. They have that respect that the individual is brave enough to put themselves in a position of harm and to test themselves and their character.

"The gym is also a place where you can exercise your psychological state of being

and consciousness. Exercise is the most natural form of stress relief. Fight or flight — which means you either fight or run. In a boxing gym, you do both. You can spar to practise a fighting art and you can also exercise like you would when you are running.

"It's a good place where there's a social equality, where there's an exorcism of energy and consciousness and you never walk out of a boxing gym feeling angry or stressed, regardless of how knackered you feel.

"I think that type of environment for individuals carrying a sinister, hateful, vindictive, victimised, scared attitude towards life could be very helpful — it has to be one of those things that makes them want to carry a knife in their pocket. Either because they are not sure they can defend themselves and they have it in case someone comes to them with a knife, or whether they want to be the one who goes on the attack.

"It's still an energy or a consciousness and a boxing gym or combat gym is the perfect place to exorcise those types of conscious demons. If you don't respect a combat environment, eventually you are going to spar with someone and regardless of how tough you think you are, you're going to learn that level of respect, and that's the beauty of an environment like this."

■■■■■ SAVANNAH MARSHALL

TRANSFORMATION:
Marshall has evolved into
a young woman who has no
doubts about her place at
boxing's top level



SIMPLY SAVANNAH

Once Savannah Marshall shunned the spotlight. Now matured and self-assured, the 'Silent Assassin' tells GARRY WHITE she's looking to take on old amateur rival Claressa Shields before the year is out

I'd like to be a unified world champion by the end of the year," unbeaten **Savannah Marshall** tells *Boxing Monthly*, before following up with: "It's not too much to ask, is it?" Laughter accompanies the final sentence and is typical of the woman who refuses to trade in hyperbole.

Marshall, who boxes in the super middleweight division, still carries the nickname the "Silent Assassin", given to her by former Team GB colleagues Nicola Adams and Natasha Jonas, but the first part has become less and less relevant.

"When we used to have media days and all the journalists would show up, I'd always go missing," she recalls. "If they did ever catch me I'd just give them one-word, yes or no, answers. I must have been a total nightmare."

Marshall describes herself as "naturally introverted and really shy". However, at 28, she has matured as an individual and now exudes a confident, yet appealingly modest, persona. Born and bred in Hartlepool, on England's North Sea coast, her lilting tones exude warmth and engaging, down-to-earth honesty.

Marshall is no longer the girl in the GB tracksuit concerned about public expectation, the one who entered the London 2012 Olympics as the world amateur champion and a nailed-on certainty for a gold medal but who suffered a shock defeat in her opening bout.

"I just choked it," Marshall says with her customary honesty.

"I got a bye to the quarter-final, so I only had to win one fight to get a medal. But there were 20,000 people in the arena and I just couldn't handle it. It was a huge home crowd.

"I was only 21 at the time and when I was warming up I remember thinking: 'I don't want to do this.' Even six months after, I still told myself: 'I didn't want to be there, anyway.'"

Now, as an unbeaten 8-0 (6 KOs) professional, Marshall looks back on the experience with a more positive perspective,

born of maturity as a person and a boxer. "Now I just think about what an amazing opportunity it was," she says. "If I could go back, I would tell myself: 'Just enjoy it. Show people how good you are and don't shy away from it all.'"

This was the same Olympics where Marshall's good friend and team-mate Nicola Adams collected a gold medal and, with her outgoing personality, immediately became one of the faces of the London Games. "I remember watching her doing all the media stuff and thinking: 'That's not for me. I can't be dealing with that. Thank God I didn't win,'" Marshall recalls, amidst more laughter. "Whereas now, I would love to be in that position."

It was her failure to win an Olympic medal in London and then again at Rio in 2016 that Marshall sees as a key factor in her opting to turn pro. "I would never have turned pro otherwise. I was going to retire after Rio," she admits. "I only really did it because I didn't want to walk away from boxing with nothing [notwithstanding a trio of world championship medals and a Commonwealth Games gold]."

Marshall's path into the pro game was eased by an unexpected invitation from Floyd Mayweather to sign with his promotional company and relocate to the US. "They gave me the dream contract and a debut on the Mayweather vs Conor McGregor card," she recalls. "I'd have been a fool to turn that down. My debut was an amazing experience. I think there were 14,000 people at the weigh-in."

But fight night was slightly less well attended, with Marshall at the bottom of the card and entering the ring hours before the sun had set over the Las Vegas Strip. The T-Mobile Arena may have had room for 20,000 paying customers but Marshall admits that there were "only about seven" in attendance for her first taste of professional boxing. "Three of them were family as well," she acknowledges. But a one-sided four-round points decision was at least satisfactorily recorded. ▶

■■■■■ SAVANNAH MARSHALL

Marshall credits her US experience with “making me the woman I am today”. Far from home, removed from her family, she was compelled to find and make her own way. “The only time I’d get to talk to someone was when I’d go to the gym,” she remembers. “The rest of the time I was on my own in my apartment craving company. Whereas before I would never talk to anyone, now I’d go to the shop and try to make conversation with people because I hadn’t talked to anyone for 24 hours.”

Low on funds and back home for a family wedding, Marshall made the difficult decision to remain in the UK and permanently split from the Mayweather team after just six months and one professional contest.

“They were really good about it,” she says. “I think they understood that my family was on the other side of the world and I couldn’t really afford to live out there.” Nevertheless, she has chalked it up as a great learning experience, both inside the ropes and beyond.

Now, almost two years on, Marshall is positive that she has the right team behind her, with Peter Fury in her corner and a promotional deal with Matchroom finally providing the level of activity that she craves. Indeed, Marshall is clear that she doesn’t want to be in boxing for the long haul, having first walked into the gym as a 12-year-old. “I only want a couple more years and then I’m done,” she says. “So I need to be active now and not waiting around for six months between fights.”

Last in action in October on Matchroom’s Newcastle show, headlined by local favourite Lewis Ritson, Marshall gained a routine third-round stoppage victory over the game but overmatched American Ashleigh Curry.

The difference in class was so vast that it led to some observers calling for a step-up in opposition, but Marshall points out that this isn’t always easy to achieve in women’s boxing. “There’s only really a handful of girls that are at the elite level and then the drop-down from there is massive,” she says.

“It’s not like it is with the men’s, where there are different levels on the way to world level. For example, Katie Taylor had five or six fights after turning pro, where she just blitzed her opponents away. Then, when she started fighting for world titles, you could see that there was a big step up.”

Marshall would be prepared to move down in weight from super middleweight — where she has a number two rating with the WBA — to middle or even super welterweight for the right opportunities.

Scotland’s Hannah Rankin has been mooted as a potential opponent and is included on Marshall’s immediate wish list for 2020. Some social media knockabout has already started between the two, with Marshall politely calling Rankin out for a fight. “There has never been a proper all-British female dust-up,” Marshall says.

“Hannah has just lost her world title and she would surely get more publicity from having a big British showdown with me. I would be prepared to drop down in weight

DIFFERENT CLASS: Marshall dominated American opponent Ashleigh Curry in her last appearance



Mark Robinson Photography

and for the fans and the women’s sport at home, it would be massive if we could fight for the first British women’s title. I’ve got a lot of respect for Hannah. She’s been in with the best in the world and has gone the distance with Claressa Shields.”

A far bigger fight, though, would pit Marshall against the imposing Shields, who she defeated in the amateurs and whose intimidating manner is the polar opposite of Marshall’s quiet persona.

“I think she [Shields] knows how to work the media and for her all publicity is probably good publicity,” Marshall says. “She knows how to get people talking about her. She’s playing the game and doing what she has to do, really.”

But in reference to some of the insults that the three-weight world champion has thrown at her, Marshall does admit: “I know it’s just trash talk but it’s a good job I don’t get emotional at things because she has been quite a bitch [to me]. She has called me a crackhead, said that I’m crap. But when I meet her in person, she is totally different.”

Despite Shields’ titles and double Olympic gold, the sole blemish on her record was inflicted by Marshall back at the 2012 world amateur championships. There is a feeling that Shields, in her self-proclaimed role as the female GOAT, is desperate to even the score.

Marshall remembers remarkably little of her meeting with a then 17-year-old Shields in Qinhuangdao, China. “I had over 100 amateur fights and that fight didn’t stand out to me at all,” Marshall says. “I don’t remember thinking: ‘Oh, she’s strong’ or even that it was a tough fight. I beat her on the old punch-scoring system by about six points.”

THAT WAS THEN: The weight of expectation told on Marshall as a member of Britain’s Olympic team



Getty Images

As for a potential meeting between the two in 2020, Marshall confirms: “I’d like it to happen at the end of this year. I’ve already had a little conversation with Claressa and she has said that she wouldn’t come back up [to super middleweight]. So, it will need to be at middleweight, which doesn’t bother me at all.

“She’s just an opponent. I don’t hate her. But as a fellow boxer, you can’t underestimate what she has done. For me, she is the fastest female puncher out there and a brilliant boxer.

“But I believe I can beat her seven days out of seven and twice on Sunday!”

Further evidence that the timid girl in the tracksuit is no more.

THE TALENT AND THE TRAGEDY

Johnny Bumphus was briefly a world champion but, as Graham Houston reports, he had the skills to have reached greater heights

Johnny Bumphus, who died of cardiac arrest in his hometown of Tacoma, Washington on 31 January, aged only 59, was a fighter who never quite fulfilled his potential even though he was briefly WBA 140lbs champion.

His was a life touched by more than its share of tragedy. His parents were alcoholics. His father killed his mother, apparently in a drunken rage, and later “drank himself to death”, Michael Katz reported in a 1988 *New York Daily News* story headlined “The tragedy of Johnny Bumphus”.

Bumphus was a superb amateur boxer. In January 1984, he was an undefeated world professional champion at the age of 23. He seemed to have it all. But just four years later he was in rehab, a cocaine addict. His wife, Debbie, felt that Bumphus used to store past hurts in the back of his mind. “It gets to the point there’s no more room.”

Now Bumphus is with us no more, leaving us with the memory of what might have been.

A tall and rangy southpaw with fast hands, Bumphus was an accomplished amateur. He was US national champion and won the light-welterweight gold medal at the US Olympic trials in 1980, defeating future pro title contender Ronnie Shields in the final. However, the US did not send a team to that year’s Olympics in Moscow in protest over the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan.

This was especially unfortunate for Bumphus, who had defeated boxers from the USSR and Cuba in international matches and would surely have been fancied to win an Olympic medal. He reportedly had an amateur record of 341-16, with 23 wins from 26 international appearances.

Bumphus relocated from Washington state in 1976 to Nashville, where US Olympic representative Clinton Jackson (also a southpaw) trained him. He worked as a prison guard in Nashville while continuing to box and was given a deputy sheriff’s badge. After the Moscow Games boycott, he turned pro with manager Lou Duva as part of a group of young hopefuls billed as “Tomorrow’s Champions”.

The NBC TV network signed the fighters to a contract. NBC boxing consultant Ferdie Pacheco said he saw “something special” in Bumphus. “I believe he has as much promise, at this point in his career [eight bouts], as Sugar Ray Leonard,” Pacheco told the *Philadelphia Bulletin* in a June 1981 interview.

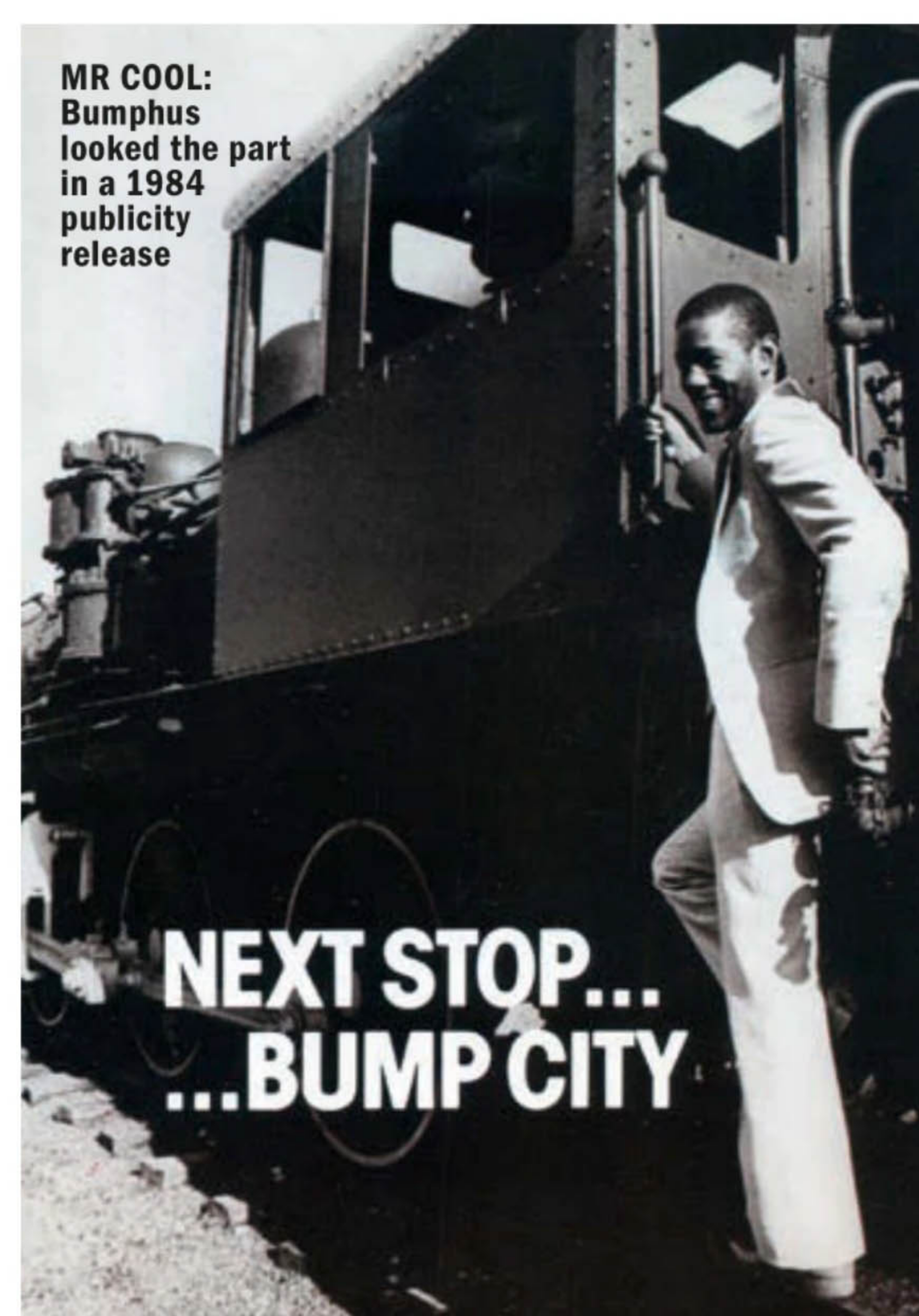
In an era when it was becoming the norm for boxers to give themselves a nickname, Bumphus adopted the “Bump City” moniker. By October 1981 Bumphus, still only 21, was being trained by former middleweight contender George Benton in Philadelphia and fighting in more of a pro style. “We’ve got him settled down now,” Benton told Philadelphia reporter Rich Hoffman. “He’s not moving around so much any more. He’s catching punches, slipping them, developing his own punching power.”

As the wins kept coming, it looked as if Bumphus was going to be something really special. The *New York Times* reported: “Johnny Bumphus is constantly being compared to Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns and Wilfred Benitez.” Promoter Bob Arum was quoted as saying that Bumphus had “the most natural boxing talent” of a Tomorrow’s Champions line-up that included Donald Curry, Tony Tucker and Tony Ayala Jr. “He’s mature and knows where he’s going,” manager Lou Duva told the *Atlantic City Press*.

By 1984 Bumphus had split from Arum’s Top Rank outfit, after litigation, and was being promoted by Main Events, the New Jersey company. A publicity photo showed Bumphus, looking cool in a white suit, stepping out of a train while a headline bore the words NEXT STOP ... BUMP CITY.

The world title that always looked guaranteed was achieved in January 1984. Bumphus won a unanimous 15-round decision over Lorenzo Garcia, of Argentina, to capture the vacant WBA junior welterweight title at the Sands hotel casino in Atlantic City. Garcia wasn’t considered a hard hitter but he dropped Bumphus with what reporter Dave Bontempo called a “sneaky right hand” in the fourth round.

Bumphus was now 22-0 but the train was about to go off the rails. Just six months after winning the title, Bumphus lost it



when, in front on points, he was stopped in the 11th round by rugged slugger Gene “Mad Dog” Hatcher at Buffalo, New York.

Although Bumphus moved up to the welterweight division and won seven more bouts, he was never the same. A technical decision win over Marlon Starling came about in part because of quick thinking by manager Duva. The judges’ scores were made public for that bout. Bumphus started well but the stronger Starling was starting to bully him when heads clashed in the sixth of a scheduled 12-rounder. Bumphus suffered a cut on the forehead and Duva — aware that Bumphus was in front — called over the referee to say the cut was too bad for his man to continue.

The rather hollow victory earned Bumphus a welterweight title fight with Lloyd Honeyghan in London in February 1987. Honeyghan overwhelmed him in two rounds, racing across the ring at the start of the second to blast Bumphus to the canvas before the challenger had left his corner. Honeyghan was docked a point but the writing was on the wall, Bumphus having been floored and almost stopped in the first round. Bumphus never boxed again. 

Professor of pugilism

Boxing's first undisputed champion? That would be James Figg, who 300 years ago was defeating all-comers not just in boxing but in other forms of fighting. ALEX JOANIDES reflects on a remarkable character

Three hundred years ago, in the days of bare-knuckle prizefighting, the boxing world recognised its first "champion". That man was **James Figg**.

There were no rankings or weight divisions at this time. It was simply the case that Figg had seen off all-comers. He had achieved such a degree of superiority that the prizefighting fraternity conferred upon him the title of "pugilistic champion".

From this point onwards, any challenger would have to defeat the incumbent to claim the right to be called champion. And so it has been, more or less, for the past 300 years.

The surprising thing is that Figg's main talent and claim to fame was not as a pugilist ("trials of manhood") but as a swordsman and all-round weapons expert ("trials of skill"). His record ran to hundreds of bouts that often involved fighting the same men dozens of times and even fighting several men on the same day.

Boxing, back sword, foil, sword and dagger, sword and gauntlet, sword and buckler (small shield), falchion (a single-edged sword), a case of falchions (a pair of single-edged swords), cudgels and a quarter staff (a long wooden club) were all part of Figg's armoury.

In fact, pretty much any weapon a man could use to stab, slice or hit another man with, Figg excelled at using — and this at a time when men still carried swords.

In the early 18th century, professors such as Figg were numerous and necessary. Among their ranks were a certain Andrew Johnson, uncle to the famous literary giant Samuel Johnson, who had an amphitheatre in Smithfield, and James Stokes, who fought under the name The Citizen of London and had a venue near

Sadler's Wells in Islington, as well as being husband to Elizabeth Stokes, a famous female boxer of the age.

There was another famous venue, at Moorfields, kept by an eccentric character known only as Old Vinegar, with a sign of the skull and crossbones emblazoned across its entrance, along with the motto "Death or Glory" written beneath.

Figg was unusual in one particular respect that marks him out from all the other professors of his time — namely that he did not hold back on his pupils at all. Much like the later champion Daniel Mendoza, part of Figg's attraction was his brutality when giving training lessons.

Out on his own

Like Mendoza's pupils, people went to Figg to test themselves against the best and of all the numerous trainers and fighters active in London at the time, Figg was head and shoulders above any other. That was true not only in any method of chosen combat but also in the sheer number and variety of skills he excelled in.

Words recorded by regular pupil Captain Godfrey bear out Figg's reputation as a brutaliser of his own clientele: "*I have purchased my knowledge with many a broken head, and bruises in every part of me.*"

Godfrey also stated why he went to Figg above all others: "*I knew him to be the ablest master, and partly, as he was of a rugged temper, and would spare no man, high or low.*"

From a historical point of view, it is interesting to note that about the time Figg and his fellow professors were teaching self-defence, boxing was slowly but surely coming to the fore in terms of wider popularity.

Little is known about Figg's early life but it is recorded that he was born in the

then Thames side village of Thame, in Oxfordshire, in around either 1684 or 1695, the youngest of seven children. He probably came to London in around 1714 after gaining a substantial provincial reputation in his local area.

Some modern research suggests that he initially started training pupils in the garden of the *Adam and Eve* public house on the Hampstead Road. The site is now occupied by the Euston Tower and opposite St James's Burial Ground, currently being cleared of human remains to make way for the HS2 rail project. It includes those of a later champion, Henry "The Game Chicken" Pearce, and the title challenger William Ward (sometimes referred to as Bill Warr), who was twice defeated by the genius of Mendoza in 1792 and 1794.

At the time Figg arrived, this part of London had already formed a sort of central hub for the teaching of martial arts. The *King's Head* pub on the other side of the road was another location where professors taught, behind which was a place called King John's Palace in an area known as Tottenham Court (now located on the north-eastern part of the junction on the northern end of modern-day Tottenham Court Road). This locale later became the first teaching location for John Broughton, the first man to codify the sport of boxing after he regrettably killed a man in a prize fight.

We know boxing took place at the *Adam and Eve* — indeed, evidence of the fact is recorded in art form. If one looks very carefully at William Hogarth's satirical picture *The March to Finchley*, painted in 1750, we can see two men stripped for action and in fighting stance to the rear of this very pub.

Hogarth's inclusion of fighting men is no coincidence as he counted Figg among ►

MASTERFUL: James Figg is believed to have lost only once in many 'trials of manhood' and 'trials of skill'

■■■■■ JAMES FIGG

his friends and also depicts him, sword (foil or cudgel) in hand in plate 2 of *A Rake's Progress* (1733-5) standing next to what is believed to be the composer George Handel, who is seated with his back to the viewer.

Hogarth also painted Figg entering Southwark Fair (1734) on horseback and does him no favours (perhaps a little humour between men who were known to be friends and drinking acquaintances) by painting him with his head covered in cuts, scars and plasters, no doubt the direct result of his countless battles with stick, sword and fist. He also depicts Figg in his 1732-3 painting *A Midnight Modern Conversation*, capturing the moment a substantially inebriated Figg, again with head scars on full display, drunkenly twists off his chair and is sent sprawling to the floor.

Finding early success in London under the tutelage of, or perhaps more likely in partnership with, Timothy Buck of Clare Market, Figg's status as a professor and master was quickly acquired. With his star firmly on the rise, he soon took over the *Boarded House* pub near London's Oxford Street. On an open piece of land at the rear, he built an amphitheatre using a wooden framework construction enclosed with sheets of canvas.

Ironically, the site is occupied today by a modern pub called *The Adam and Eve*, but perhaps the long-forgotten giveaway is a public house located on the opposite corner of Well's Street and Eastcastle Street called *The Champion*.

It is important to note that Figg, or The Atlas of the Sword as he came to be known, was not only a boxer and swordsman but also a promoter. Displays at his amphitheatre included all manner of sports, from bull, bear, leopard and tiger baiting to mixed husband-and-wife combats and female boxing.

Figg was, for example, responsible for ensuring the legendary Elizabeth Stokes (née Wilkinson) became the first woman in the world to achieve pugilistic prominence.

Figg's judgement as a promoter was remarkable. When a giant Venetian gondolier came to England in 1733 to terrorise the London boxing scene, Figg selected and trained a fighter by the name of Bob Whitaker to defeat him at a well-attended fight he set up at his Marylebone Amphitheatre.

After Whitaker's victory, one gentleman present remarked to Figg that he had found the best and most courageous boxer in all of London, to which Figg replied that he had done no such thing and would bring a fighter in a week's time to defeat his own man.

The fighter in question was Nathaniel Peartree and a week later he proved Figg's judgement 100 per cent correct by defeating the courageous Whitaker with superior skill. Figg's conviction was that skill, if properly applied, would always defeat strength and courage in trials of manhood.

Figg's own fighting record included hundreds of victories and only one defeat,



TAKING A TUMBLE: A probably tipsy Figg falling off a chair was depicted in a good-humoured Hogarth painting



HOGARTH'S EYE VIEW: Figg enters Southwark Fair on horseback (left) while pugilists can be seen in *The March to Finchley*





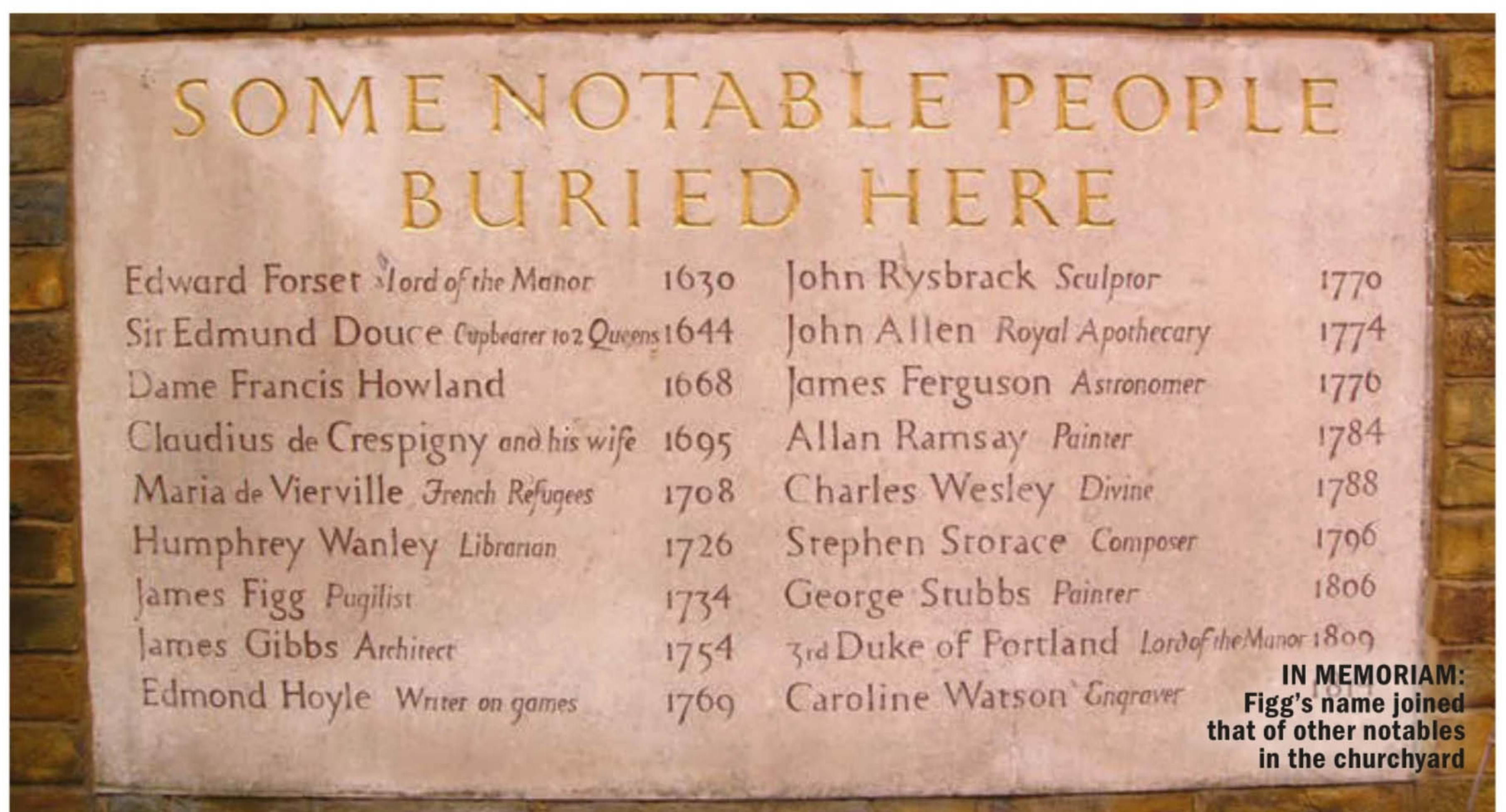
which occurred in a series of three battles against Edward (Ned) Sutton, “The Gravesend pipe maker”. This sole reverse probably only occurred because Figg unwisely fought while ill, as he never turned down a challenge.

By 1733, Figg was at the height of his fame, his judgement as a promoter finely honed. He was still, even after so many years at the top, an outstanding athlete, professor and practitioner.

However, a year later he was dead. Exactly how Figg died is unknown. All that is known is that he went to bed ill at his pub the *Boarded House* on 7 December 1734, died the next day and was subsequently buried in Marylebone Churchyard, with the church register stating his burial as taking place on 11 December.

He left behind a pregnant wife and several children, with a daughter-in-law of his recorded as still living and residing in Charles Street, Westminster in 1794. The cemetery in which Figg was buried still exists but was largely dug up to install an underground play area for a nearby school in 2004-2006.

In a bizarre twist, some of the remains exhumed in the clearance, carried out under the auspices of Museum of London archeologists, may well have been those of Figg. The skeleton in question had evidence



of a rotator cuff injury, a nose broken multiple times, a fractured and healed left eye socket and the two front teeth missing.

Most telling is evidence of repeated trauma to the left side of the body, exactly what would be expected in the skeleton of a right-handed swordsman who fought to first blood — and beyond — with weapons around 300 times in competition.

The shape of the skull also resembles that of Figg's head, and the jaw displays evidence of a dimpled chin similar to that belonging

to Figg. The estimated age of the person to whom the skeleton belonged is 36 to 45, so if it is indeed Figg then it would give him a birth date of between approximately 1689 and 1698.

So any boxing fans who are ever in the vicinity of Marylebone Gardens at the north-west end of Marylebone High Street in London, tip your hat or even have a tippie in a nearby local pub to the memory of the long-dead hero, James Figg, boxing's first ever champion.

TARGET



TOKYO

PURE GOLD: Price went all the way at the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Australia after a semi-finals loss four years earlier. The koala bear Games mascot looks pleased, too

Wales' Lauren Price was a gifted all-round athlete but chose boxing. GLYNN EVANS talks to the blonde bomber who is strongly fancied for Olympic glory

Women's boxing should consider itself fortunate to have Welsh middleweight **Lauren Price** among its fold. She could have chosen other sports.

The 25-year-old southpaw, from Ystrad Mynach, is a gifted all-round athlete. As a tough-tackling centre-back, the blonde bomber wore a Cardiff City football (or soccer if you prefer) shirt in the Women's Champions League. She racked up 52 senior international caps while moonlighting as a four-time world kick-boxing champion.

In her mid-teens, Price had a brief berth on the Team GB taekwondo squad and also declined rugby trials for Wales as a "crash 'em, bash 'em" centre.

"I played in the boys' team and the only one the scout was interested in was me. But I was already doing too much," the surprisingly bashful Price told *Boxing Monthly* when we visited her home in the Caerphilly valley in late January.

"I've always been sports mad. I did OK at school, eight GCSEs, B and C grades, but from a young age I wanted to get paid for doing sport.

"As a kid, my dream was to win an Olympic medal. The success of Nicola Adams and Katie Taylor at London 2012 was a massive inspiration."

And this summer, "Price the Punch" is top pick to lift 75kg (165lbs) gold at the Tokyo Games after becoming the first fighter from Wales — male or female — to win a world amateur boxing title, at last year's event in Ulan-Ude, Russia.

That highly under-publicised triumph was marred by controversy after Price was initially adjudged to have been edged out by Netherlands' 2016 Olympic silver medallist Nouchka Fontijn on a 3-2 split decision, only for the verdict to be overturned in Price's favour on appeal.

"It would have been nice to have had my hand raised inside the ring but eventually I got to top the podium and they played the Welsh anthem. I'm a very patriotic valley girl," quipped the softly spoken Price, who is also the reigning Commonwealth and European Games champion.

"Though I thought I won, I didn't expect the decision to be overturned because Nouch is a well-known girl on the circuit. I thought I'd beat her even more convincing at the previous year's worlds in India but just had to take that one on the chin."

Price readily acknowledges the debt of gratitude she owes her grandparents, Derek and Linda, for facilitating her sporting successes.

"I've lived with them since I was three days old and they've invested thousands in training, kit, trips. I've always had the best of everything. Grandad has dementia now but he used to travel everywhere supporting me," she said.

"They got me into sport early 'cause I was extremely hyperactive; not naughty, more wicked, always playing tricks. From the age of eight, I was training six days a week. While others were on street corners with their flagon of *White Lightning* [cider], I was in the gym. I didn't lead the life of a normal teenager."

Though reared in a rugby stronghold, it was on the football pitch that Price first excelled.

"I was the only girl in the boys' team. I won Player of the Year, Players' Player of the Year then, at just 12," Price said. "I was playing for the girls under-16s. By 16, I was a full international and played against several of the England team who starred at the World Cup last year.

"I only started going to the kick-boxing gym for extra fitness for football. I never thought I was going to fight but fell in love with it straight away. I didn't have much ▶

ACHIEVEMENT: Trophies on display in Price's home are testament to her success



INTENSE: Price captured gold at the Commonwealth Games in Australia by defeating the host country's Caitlin Parker in the final



EVENLY MATCHED: Two bouts against the Netherlands' Nouchka Fontijn in world championships competition saw the rivals go 1-1 although Price lost this 2018 meeting



Getty Images (2)

natural ability. I had to work very hard at it but by age 12, I was fighting adults and beating most of them.

"But kick-boxing wasn't an Olympic sport, so I got put on the Team GB taekwondo squad. I actually won a British silver but as with kick-boxing I was always far better with my fists than my feet, so decided to give boxing a go."

Starting out at the Gelligaer ABC in the borough of Caerphilly, aged 15, Price finally found an Olympic sport that fully suited her.

"Due to all the hours I put into kick-boxing as a child, the transfer to boxing was quite quick," Price said. "When I want to succeed, I put 100 per cent into it. My prior training certainly helped in terms of agility, strength and fitness. From football, I brought the speed and footwork and, from martial arts, I'd already developed the mindset of going into battle. I just had to change my stance a little bit.

"In contrast to football, I was attracted to the individuality boxing brings. Depending on the result, you take all the pain or all the

glory. And I immediately loved the physical side of boxing.

"I was a very physical footballer. I loved flying in on soggy pitches in the rain. I had far worse injuries in football than boxing. The two massive scars down my forehead are actually from when I clonked the back of a girl's skull going up for a header. Another time, playing Sunderland, I came over the top and badly tore a ligament in my shoulder."

To no one's surprise, Price's progress through the women's boxing ranks proved rapid.

"After watching me hit the bag, the trainer Dai Gardiner [once manager of Welsh world champions Steve Robinson and Robbie Regan] phoned up [national coach] Tony Williams and the next weekend I was in the Welsh set-up.

"I hadn't even had a club bout when they sent me to the youth world championships in Antalya in Turkey but I brought back bronze. I was actually leading 14-12 in my semi but had a nose bleed and they stopped the fight with 10 seconds remaining."

While excelling in her Wales soccer shirt, Price won a bronze medal aged just 17 at the 2011 European senior championships in Rotterdam. But when Welsh coach Colin Jones offered a boxing berth at 69kg (welterweight) for the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games squad, Price had a critical choice to make: boxing or football. Boxing won out.

"I came away from Glasgow with a bronze, only losing on a countback to the Canadian world champion [Ariane Fortin], who was a

lot older and more experienced. I made the right choice," Price said.

Three-time world welter title challenger Jones played a key part in that decision.

"Colin's someone to look up to, who's done it himself and is so passionate," Price said. "He'll tell you how it is, very strict with timekeeping, takes no messing. That's what I like about him. If I do something wrong, I like to be told."

Blessed with fast reflexes, fast fists and fast feet, the solid 5ft 6ins Price has evolved into a cerebral counter puncher. "I'm a naturally right-handed southpaw," she said. "Kick-boxing, my stronger right was my lead kicking leg and I was comfortable in that stance."

"I'm pretty short for a 75kg girl. Most GB boxers have slim legs but mine are very big from the kick-boxing and football. I'm only 71 kilos so give a lot of weight away but I don't want to put weight on unnecessarily. I've good technical ability but my best attributes are my speed and footwork, which the bigger girls struggle to cope with."

A stunning upset over Hartlepool's 2012 world champion and London Olympian Savannah Marshall at a multi-nations meet in Spain, coupled with a second European bronze — this time up at 75kg — in Sofia (2016), led to Price being headhunted by the recruiters at Team GB in early 2017.

Bolstered by substantial central funding plus the expert support system available at the English Institute of Sport HQ in Sheffield, Price's career took off.

In addition to triumphing at the Commonwealth Games on Australia's Gold Coast in 2018 representing Wales, she struck bronze for a third time at the European senior championships and a first time at the world championships in New Delhi before sweeping all before her in an unbeaten 10-bout streak in 2019.

"I've been in training camps around the world but the Team GB facility is easily the best," she said. "We've got experts for S and C [strength and conditioning], nutrition, everything, and I've two very experienced world-class coaches in Dave Alloway and Lee Pullen. Richie Woodhall does some pad sessions and Rob [McCracken] supervises the sparring. Some of the boys do give it to you — take you to the trenches — but that's what you need to improve."

"After medalling at the worlds, I'm on A funding, the highest level, but I had it hard before, so I appreciate it. If I didn't live with my grandparents, I couldn't have afforded to go to the Commonwealth Games in Australia because funding wasn't there. I was working in a school across the road, then driving a cab weekends. With the monthly grant I got from Sport Wales, you'd struggle to buy a decent pair of trainers [gym shoes]!"

"Right now, I'm comfortable. I used to find it hard being away from home but presently I'm enjoying GB more than ever. I live in Sheffield with three other [GB] girls, we all get on. We watch Netflix together and there's loads of banter with the boys."

After topping the dais at both the European Games and those world



DISAPPOINTMENT: Price had to settle for a bronze medal after losing to Canada's Ariane Fortin (far left) at the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Savannah Marshall (gold medallist) and Nigeria's Edith Ogoke (bronze) complete the picture



BEST FIST FORWARD: Most southpaws are left-handed but Price has always felt more comfortable leading with the right

championships in Russia, Price is the pre-tourney favourite for gold in Tokyo this summer. However, following the IOC's decision to strip the International Boxing Association (AIBA) of all involvement after corruption scandals, Price has the pressure of re-asserting her position at the Olympic qualifying events in London and, if necessary, Paris this spring.

"In the old system, I'd have qualified already so it's a bit of a nightmare but now I have to make the podium at one of them," she explained.

"I'll hit the gym hard but doubt I'll fight before the qualifiers, to avoid injuries. Things can go wrong."

"For a while, we weren't sure if boxing was even going to be in this Olympics, but as an athlete you can only focus on what you can control. At the end of the day, people want to see boxing in the Olympics regardless of who's running it."

Price anticipates the competition in Tokyo will be intense.

"There's a few good girls. China are strong," she said. "I've just come back from camp in Colorado Springs, where I had several gym

bouts that were just like a fight, and I sparred a lot of rounds with the top US girl Naomi Graham [a 2018 world championships bronze medallist]. She's tough."

"I'm two each with the Dutch girl [Nouchka Fontijn]. She's big, strong, physical and dirty in the clinches. We're both elite competitors so sometimes our fights won't be interesting, but that's boxing — it'll always be cagey."

"We'd had an awesome fight at the European Games in Minsk four months earlier. She came to me, I'm a counter-puncher. I beat her 4-1. I preferred that win to the one for the world title, better fight. In Russia, she changed her game plan, held back."

"All I need to know is that I'm physically fit enough, and fully prepared mentally, to give it my all. Olympic gold would easily top everything in my sporting career so far. It's been my dream since I was eight years old and my grandparents have invested so much in me."

"It's all happened so quick. When people say 'She's Commonwealth, European and world champion', I still have to pinch myself. Only one more to get!"

Getty Images (2)



Igor Soban

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ FILIP HRGOVIC

IMPOSING: Hrgovic feels that his sheer size is one of his best assets

GENES OF STONE

Croatia's Filip Hrgovic possesses the patriotic pride that inspired a popular song about his people's character. LUKE G. WILLIAMS finds out more about a heavyweight on the fast track

As he advances through the professional ranks, Croatia's 6ft 6ins heavyweight hope **Filip Hrgovic** is motivated not only by his innate competitive spirit but also by a fierce sense of patriotism.

Croatia's population only hovers just above the four million mark but the picturesque nation — which straddles the sparkling waters of the Adriatic — has always punched above its weight when it comes to sporting prowess.

Tennis champions Goran Ivanisevic and Marin Cilic and NBA superstars Drazen Petrovic and Toni Kukoc are illustrious names, for instance.

It is also often overlooked that Croatia has produced world champion boxers, notably Mate Parlov, who won Olympic gold in 1972 and the WBC light-heavyweight title as a professional; Stipe Drvis (or Drews), who lifted the WBA title at 175lbs, and Ivana Habazin, the former IBF female welter champ.

There was also Fritzie Zivic, American-born with a Croatian father and Slovenian mother, who won the world welterweight championship from the great Henry Armstrong in 1940 and was known affectionately as "The Croat Comet".

Many people also might not realise that heavyweight contender George Chuvalo was the son of Croatian parents from Herzegovina who emigrated to Toronto.

It's a proud pugilistic lineage that the imposing Hrgovic emphasises he is keen to maintain.

"Croatians have been very good at sport throughout history," the 27-year-old tells *BM*. "I think it is because of our mentality and our genetics. People from Croatia are fighters — it has always been like that and I am very proud to be a part of that. I hope that one day I will be in line with all the great names from Croatian sports history.

"My family are my biggest inspiration, as well as all the people in Croatia and around the world who support me. I am fighting for all of them."

Inspired by Mavrovic

The most notable Croatian heavyweight prior to Hrgovic's arrival on the scene was undoubtedly Zeljko Mavrovic, who extended Lennox Lewis the full 12 rounds in a WBC title challenge in 1998. Mavrovic also successfully defended the European title six times before illness and injury ended his 27-1 career.

Hrgovic admits that he has taken inspiration from Mavrovic.

"I am very good friends with Zeljko and we are in touch," he reveals. "He is still involved in boxing and we have some plans to set up a club in Zagreb and he will maybe coach the fighters. We have a good relationship and he was a very good boxer."

Like Mavrovic, Hrgovic hails from the Croatian capital of Zagreb. Indeed two of

his 10 professional contests to date have taken place in his home city — a three-round stoppage victory against Amir Mansour and a points win against Kevin Johnson in September and December 2018 respectively.

Hrgovic pinpoints the Mansour victory as a particularly positive memory.

"The experience of walking out in front of my home fans in Zagreb was incredible. There was a lot of pressure on me going into that fight. I was originally scheduled to face Gary Cornish, but he pulled out and was replaced by Mansour, who was a better fighter and also a southpaw.

"We had a good game plan, and I stuck to the plan, got a good win and made a big statement in front of my fans."

During Hrgovic's ring walk for the bout with Mansour, musician Marko Perkovic, lead singer of the country's top rock band, Thompson, performed his hit *Geni Kameni*, a title that refers to Croatians as possessing "genes of stone" — an apt track with which to introduce a boxer whose physique looks like it was hewn from granite.

"That [performance] made it extra special," Hrgovic recalls. "It was an honour to have him perform *Geni Kameni* in the ring for me as I made my entrance. It gave me even more motivation to win."

Regardless of what he achieves as a professional, Hrgovic's glittering amateur career has already guaranteed him ▶

Ed Mulholland/Matchroom Boxing USA



Maja Bota



Top: It took Hrgovic just three rounds to stop Eric Molina, who had lasted nine rounds with Deontay Wilder

Above: Durable veteran Kevin Johnson lasted the full eight rounds, one of only two opponents to take Hrgovic the distance

sporting immortality in his homeland, and has been recognised by the award of prestigious Croatian state medal the Order of Danica Hrvatska.

A world junior champion in 2010, Hrgovic also won gold at the senior European Championships in 2015, bronze at the Rio Olympics in 2016 and accumulated an impressive 26-4 record in the highly competitive World Series of Boxing.

"I fought with all the best amateurs of my era," Hrgovic says. "In that youth world championships, I entered the tournament with just 10 fights. Everyone else had much more experience but I beat them all to win the gold and make history for my country — including Joseph Parker in the semi-final and Tony Yoka in the final.

"Later, in many elite competitions, I fought all the best of my era and I mostly won all my fights. That, of

course, gave me the skillset and has made my professional career much easier.

"The WSB was a very good competition. It was very good quality but no one really watched it because of bad marketing and advertising. But it was good for me. I think I went from a boy to a man in the WSB. I have the best record of anyone in the history of the competition."

As well as his amateur experiences, Hrgovic credits his family and upbringing with instilling the virtues that he believes will ultimately make him the world heavyweight champion.

"I started boxing when I was 13 years old. I started for fun but I soon became very serious in training because I liked the sport. Very soon I was successful and the champion of Croatia within just a few months of starting training.

"My parents had five children. I am the middle child. There were times where we didn't have much money and we lived modestly. There was no space for luxury things and a luxury life. It was hard for my parents to support five kids. At one point, my dad didn't have a job.

"There were hard times for my family but my parents are fighters — I think I gained that fighting mentality from them as well as the discipline to never surrender. I am very proud of my family and the environment where I grew up. I think all these things made me the man I am today."

Hrgovic is confident in his own abilities but also keen to emphasise the respect he has for some of the great champions of the past.

"My greatest strengths are that I am a big heavyweight," he explains. "I have a good technique. I have fast hands and fast feet. I can take a

punch and I can throw a lot of punches. I think I am the most complete fighter in the division.

"I like a lot of old champions like Joe Louis, Sonny Liston, Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali. I like to study old fights and old champions, and I mostly watch heavyweights so all of them are my heroes."

Although he has only been a pro since 2017, Hrgovic is hoping to be manoeuvred into a world title bout as soon as possible. His most recent performance — on the undercard of Anthony Joshua's rematch with Andy Ruiz Jr — saw him dispose of two-time title challenger Eric Molina in just three rounds.

"From the beginning, I didn't want to fight low-level opponents. The plan was always for me to be fast tracked," Hrgovic explains. "I think it was a good performance [against Molina].

"I controlled the fight from the first second. I caught him with good shots to head and body and got the win. It took Deontay Wilder longer to knock him out, so I was happy with that.

"I made some technical mistakes and he caught me with some big punches but he never hurt me. I showed that I have the best chin in the business although, of course, it is better to avoid such punches."

Former amateur rivals Joe Joyce and Tony Yoka would be obvious future foes for the ambitious Croat. Indeed, Hrgovic seems particularly keen to settle a score with the 2016 gold medallist in the Rio Games as Yoka knocked him out of the super heavyweight tournament at the semi-final stage.

"Technically, he is a good boxer," Hrgovic says of "La Conquete", who is currently 7-0 but was out of action for a year after picking up a ban for missing three drugs tests.

"Yoka has a good jab and fast feet but I think if we were to fight again as professionals, I would beat him. At the time [I fought him] in the Olympics, I had a lot of problems with my coach and we split after the Olympics.

"The whole year before the Olympic Games, we had a lot of problems. I didn't train well. I wasn't prepared well. I didn't like my performance against Yoka at that time but I think it was very close. I think the decision could have gone either way. But I know I can do much more."

Such is Hrgovic's frustration with the fact he did not return from Rio with a gold medal that he has seriously considered putting his professional career on hold and attempting to qualify for the Tokyo Games.

"I still have a desire to win Olympic gold and since they now

PRIDE IN COUNTRY: The Croatian flag is on display whenever Hrgovic fights. Promoter Nisse Sauerland is on the far left while Hrgovic's Cuban trainer Pedro Diaz is second from right



allow professionals to compete in the Olympics, my dream is still alive," he says. "I have plans to go to Tokyo and win gold but we will see what is going on in the next few months. I have a lot of professional obligations but I would do everything I can to go to Tokyo and win gold for my country."

Whether he returns to the Olympic stage or not, Hrgovic is utterly convinced that he will ultimately bring the heavyweight

championship of the world back to his beloved Zagreb.

"The winner of Wilder and Fury will need to fight Joshua to determine the division's number one," he says. "Then we will have a unified heavyweight champion. I think they are all good fighters with different strengths and weaknesses but I believe I am a more complete fighter than any of them. When the time comes, I will be ready for whoever has the belts."



DISAPPOINTING: Tony Yoka got the verdict in Rio but Hrgovic feels he was not at his best

'MEXICAN FEATHERWEIGHT IN A HEAVYWEIGHT'S BODY'

Filip Hrgovic's promoter Nisse Sauerland explains why he believes his man is the heavyweight champion in waiting

"I rate anyone who gets in the ring with Hrgovic. He's a scary guy. And he likes fighting. In my experience over the years, a lot of heavyweights have been guys who didn't like fighting that much.

"They were big guys, maybe failed American footballers or whatever, who were often boxing for money. Even going back to when I was at school, I remember a lot of the big guys were sort of gentle. But Filip has the spirit of a Mexican featherweight in a heavyweight's body, which is a scary proposition!

"Since the Klitschkos went, the whole heavyweight landscape has really heated

up. The heavyweight division is very hot right now, which means the values put on even lower-ranked opponents are crazy at the moment. Prices are very inflated, which makes it hard to find people to fight, especially for someone like Filip, whose amateur pedigree is obviously very good.

"He's up for fighting anyone but if you're a [Dillian] Whyte or a [Alexander] Povetkin, someone of that level, and you're close to having a world title fight for a lot of money, why would you risk it to fight a young, hungry guy like Hrgovic?

"I think he can go all the way, though. And he's a great guy. I get on very well

with Filip. We know each other well now, having spent a lot of time together away from home. We're a tight-knit unit.

"He likes to know and trust the people around him. He won't turn up with a bus full of an entourage. That's not Filip's style. He has a tight inner circle and we've built a system around that.

"And 100 per cent it's on the cards for us to take Filip back to Croatia for a big stadium fight in the future — hopefully for a title fight or a contest against a big name."

LUKE G. WILLIAMS

LOVE HATE

Relationship

Despite hard times and frustrations in his ring career, cruiserweight contender Deion Jumah tells JOHN A. MacDONALD that success in boxing means the world to him

Seven years ago, **Deion Jumah** had the world at his feet. After a short amateur career in which he won all but one of his 24 contests, picking up two ABA cruiserweight titles in the process, the then-23-year-old turned professional with Sauerland Event. At the time, two of the four world champions at his weight were under the same promotional banner.

He was trained and managed by Adam Booth, a man who knew a thing or two about guiding cruiserweights to glory, having led David Haye to the top of the division.

These factors, coupled with Jumah's unwavering self-belief and relentless will to win, left him certain he would be a world champion.

Despite fighting in three countries, on the undercards of major events in large arenas, the following 36 months would be far more tumultuous than Jumah could have envisaged. Attempts to get down to light-heavyweight took their toll, both physically and mentally. He felt weak. He became disillusioned. It showed in his performances as he laboured against journeymen.

The diagnosis of a serious heart condition was the final straw. Having joined the paid ranks with high expectations and to a reasonable amount of fanfare, Jumah quietly walked away from the sport in 2016.

After a two-year hiatus, a healthy and mentally reinvigorated Jumah decided to give boxing one more go.

This time, everything would be different. Jumah had to rebuild on the small-hall scene. Arenas in Germany and Denmark were replaced by York Hall. Gary Logan replaced Booth as his trainer. (The pair had known each other for years and had worked closely together during Logan's time as Booth's assistant coach.) Jumah signed a management deal with Steve Goodwin, who wasted no time in getting him back on track.

Jumah quickly dispatched Kristian Kirilov and Tomislav Rudan before halting

Ossie Jervier in the fifth round to capture the Southern Area cruiserweight title.

The following year, he sent former Commonwealth champion Wadi Camacho into retirement, obliging Marcus McDonnell to halt the contest in the same round. Jumah loves boxing but it has made him angry at times, frustrated at others. Now, at 30 years of age and with a 13-0 (7 KOs) record, he will not be denied.

The latest obstacle in his path was Sam Hyde in a British title final eliminator. Jumah was under no illusions. He knew Hyde would present the biggest test of his career to date. The purse bid to stage the fight was won by Hyde's manager, Joe Gallagher, whose M22 Promotions gave Hyde home advantage at Wythenshawe. The fight was every bit as gruelling as Jumah had anticipated but he was prepared for anything Hyde could throw at him and came away with a unanimous decision.

Perfect camp

"It was a good performance for me," Jumah told *Boxing Monthly* over the phone. "Gary Logan was just brilliant this camp. We knew what we were in for when we had to fight Sam, and the first thing I said to him was 'You've got to make me hard with this camp.' And he said 'Deion, that was exactly the game plan. I'm going to make you as hard as possible in camp. We're going to have to do different sparring to what we're normally doing, so you're going to be out of your comfort zone for the whole camp.' And he said 'No matter what happens in camp, as long as you can get through it, we'll be fine with the win.'"

"We were sparring a lot of amateurs but all these guys who I sparred, they were perfect in the way that they really do enjoy putting a beating on me [laughs]. They're all really keen to put a beating on me, they're all strong lads, they all hit hard, and they all put a pace on you, so it was just perfect."

Logan was keen for his fighter to silence the sold-out partisan crowd. He knew every

shot thrown by Hyde would receive a loud cheer. Some Jumah supporters made the journey from London to Manchester, knowing there was a possibility they would be turned away at the door. However, their determination was rewarded as they were allowed to enter.

The travelling contingent made its presence felt as Jumah gave them plenty to cheer, departing from his usual elusive style in favour of a more aggressive approach.

"I'm more of a slickster," he said. "I can slug — actually, I started my career slugging — but I've got higher respect for boxing and I'm a student of the sport, so I am a kind of hit-and-don't-be-hit fighter."

"But we didn't want to give Sam any momentum in this fight, so even stepping off or slipping a few shots and then not going for the counter, that was off the cards for us. We decided we're going to do as minimal movement as possible and he's going to know he's in a fight. So, whatever he was throwing I was making sure I landed some body shots back."

"It's something that comes naturally to me. I always like to hurt my opposition. I always do go for a stoppage and if I didn't get a stoppage, it's just because I couldn't get it. A lot of fighters say 'Oh, I didn't go for the stoppage this time, I wanted the rounds.' That's never been the case with me. I want the stoppage. It's what makes me feel good, it's what's made me feel good from when I started fighting. So, yeah, I don't think I had to adopt too much of a different mindset but I did have to adopt a slightly different style."

In the final round, Hyde caught Jumah flush. *Boxing Monthly* columnist Steve Bunce was commentating on the fight and felt Jumah was in trouble. However, "The Ghost" disagrees.

"This is the thing, I've watched it, and I understand why people think I was hurt, but I wasn't hurt," he said. "My legs were fine. I see it as being smart, holding to break up the action, more than holding on because I ▶

READY FOR ANYTHING: Jumah went out to meet Sam Hyde expecting a tough fight and this type of mindset carries over to his career as a whole



Karen Priestley



GRUELLING CONTEST: Jumah's decision to take the fight to Hyde proved a winning strategy

Karen Priestley (2)

was going to fall over, or holding on because I couldn't take another shot." The passion Jumah has for boxing is clear but he was at a low ebb in 2016, which was when his health started to deteriorate. This resulted in him blacking out in an airport.

"I had kind of palpitations but I never spoke to anyone about it, just because that's what I'm like," he recalled. "I had sparring with Yoan Pablo Hernandez [IBF cruiserweight champion] in Germany and I was there for about two weeks because he was fighting a southpaw, and on the very last day of sparring I felt really weak and I told them 'Listen, I'm feeling really stiff, I can't spar today.'

"I got to the hotel, fell asleep, woke up and my arms were really hurting. I knew that was like having a heart attack. But me being pretty stubborn, I had the idea 'My plane's in an hour, I'm going to go to the airport, I'm going to get the plane to London, then I'm going to go from the airport in London to the hospital.' Obviously, that didn't happen.

"I got to customs in Germany and I must have fainted. I woke up in hospital in Germany. It just took a long time to recover from that, not only physically and not only getting the doctors to give me the all-clear, but mentally as well. When you suffer from something like that, doing high-intensity exercise becomes a bit of a problem.

"So yeah, that's one of the reasons I was out, plus all the other stuff, just me being unhappy, my career not kicking off. Obviously dealing with all these things, it affects your progress, skillset, everything. It was all just a bit of a mess."



RUGGED RIVAL: Although Jumah's attitude is to go for the stoppage, Hyde was too tough and too gritty to be halted

Jumah was diagnosed with a condition known as pericarditis, which is an inflammation of the fibrous sac surrounding the heart. While many would have walked away from the sport at that stage, Jumah persevered.

In January 2016, Jumah turned in a lethargic performance against Colin Farricker, a fighter with a 3-1 ledger. Afterwards, as he sat alone in the changing room, Jumah remembered feeling depressed. "I just needed some time to recover, physically and mentally, and just to get some sort of strength back, and that's what I did," he said.

During his time away from the ring, Jumah worked at the Box Clever gym

helping clients with their fitness goals. He also changed his diet and lifestyle which, alongside medication, allowed him to recover from pericarditis. After a two-week break in Thailand, Jumah was ready to box again.

In Gary Logan, he knew he had the perfect trainer for his style. All he needed then was a promoter, yet the lack of interest in signing him came as a surprise. However, he is grateful to Steve Goodwin for guiding his career.

"I thought all the big guys [promoters] would want me [and] I'm not blowing my own trumpet," he said. "I wasn't expecting a lot of money or anything, but I did expect

TIME FOR A BREAK: A clear points win over Colin Farricker was followed by a two-year layoff as Jumah felt the need to regroup mentally and physically



Getty Images (2)

AMATEUR CHAMPION: Jumah outpointed Declan Fusco in the 2012 English ABA cruiserweight final



that there would be interest, like 'Yeah, I'll give you a go.' Steve's a good guy. Not only that, Steve's a very good tactician, he's very good at, from my experience, manoeuvring you through the boxing scene.

"Maybe it was a good thing I had to sell tickets at York Hall just to understand the hunger again. I thought I was hungry for the big time but are you really hungry for it? Are you willing to go back to selling tickets on the small-hall scene? It's all important to getting me here to the point now where I'm beating Sam Hyde and mandatory for the title.

"It's hard. I have thought about maybe doing something else. I thought 'Am I being

silly pursuing this? Am I being selfish for doing this?' I've got a mum, I've got a little brother I need to look after. At this stage, boxing doesn't really give you much, in terms of anything.

"The game just takes a lot out of you. But this is me, this is who I am. I am a fighter and I am a winner and I've always been able to prove that to myself and others. It's just what I truly believe. This isn't really for anyone else but me. I've wanted to be a fighter since I was nine years old. I've stuck to it. I'm now 30, mandatory for the British title. I'm going to win that and I'm going to continue on my road.

"Everything that has happened, it's made me stronger, because now I know no one's going to stop me. It's torture and I hate it, I do hate it, but I do love it. If that makes any sense, I don't know. I hate it but I love it, and that's it. It's a love-hate relationship. The actual training and the actual fighting are the best parts, believe it or not."

Jumah is now the mandatory challenger for the British title, held by Richard Riakporhe. It's a fight that Jumah desperately wants.

Jumah knows there is a real possibility that Riakporhe will vacate but whoever is next, he is ready. He sees winning the British title as achieving an important goal.

"That would mean the world," he said. "I don't care too much about being the biggest superstar ever, or anything like that. Some finances would be great and a couple of world titles and the big fights on the big stage would be amazing, against some of the best fighters in the world, and not just to compete with them but to beat them.

"I just want to be an honest fighter, true to myself, true to everyone else and to reach my potential, which I think has been a slow process. But we will get there.

"Even though I've been through all these things, I don't feel old. I still feel like I've got time. I think I have six, seven years left. Cruiserweights last a bit longer, so I'm looking forward to learning, building. And I'm still looking forward to some hard times. If it makes me better, then why not?"

■■■■■ JAMES TENNYSON

BETTER THAN EVER:
Moving up to
lightweight has made
James Tennyson even
more formidable

Mark Robinson Photography/Matchroom Boxing



LEARNING FROM HIS LOSSES

Belfast's James Tennyson isn't dismayed by defeats, telling LUKE G. WILLIAMS they've helped mould him into a better fighter

In an era of boxing characterised by padded and manufactured records, and populated by pros for whom inactivity comes as standard, Belfast lightweight **James "The Assassin" Tennyson** is a refreshing exception.

Still only 26, the explosive Tennyson has crammed a lot into a pro career that already spans seven years and 29 fights (26-3, 22 KOs). The youngest boxer to win an Irish title in the modern era, courtesy of a TKO against Mickey Coveney in 2013 when aged 19, Tennyson has won various international titles as well as the Commonwealth and European championships in his thrilling showdown with hitherto unbeaten Martin J. Ward in 2018.

He's not had things all his own way, though, suffering a shock defeat against Latvian journeyman Pavels Senkovs in his ninth contest, as well as reverses in British and IBF world title challenges against Ryan Walsh in 2016 and Tevin Farmer in October last year.

Speaking to *BM*, the amiable Tennyson admits that he has no regrets about the trajectory his career has taken and emphasises that every bump in the road has served as a learning experience.

"I've learned the most from my losses," he says. "Boxing is such a tough sport. Before you lose, you think you're great and it's easy to get ahead of yourself. Once I lost [for the first time] I really started knuckling down and wanting to learn.

"That's what has made the difference to me in terms of the fighter I was and the fighter I now am. My losses. Whenever I've had setbacks they've got me down, but once I'm back training again I always love it. It's about keeping busy, keeping my head in the sport.

"And I'll fight anyone. Fighting guys with records better than me or who are at world



QUESTIONS ANSWERED: Tennyson showed he can triumph in a long, tough fight when stopping Craig Evans

Mark Robinson Photography/Matchroom Boxing

level, those are the sort of fights that help you to learn and improve. Those are the sort of fights I want. That's how you progress."

After losing to Farmer by fifth-round TKO in Boston, Tennyson left the super featherweight division behind and is now campaigning at lightweight.

"The move up has made a massive difference," he explains. "When I was at super featherweight, cutting those last four or five pounds was really affecting my performance.

"Now I've got an extra few pounds on me I'm able to perform in fights the way I perform through training camp. When I was at super feather, I'd perform really good in camp and in sparring but taking the last few pounds off would kill me."

The Farmer fight was case in point, Tennyson argues.

"Farmer is a real slick and slippery, classy fighter. If you go in weight drained and not on your game against a guy like him, he's gonna pick away at you all night.

"We went out to Boston early and I spent the whole time with a sweat suit on trying to cut weight. Every day I'd eat and then put the sweat suit back on. By the time of the fight, I was done.

"Because I was so weight drained I thought I'd just try to put it on him. I was rushing forward and was getting caught. I was trying to hit him and hurt him and I paid the price."

After moving to 135lbs, Tennyson has won four straight fights via stoppage in 2019, accounting for hitherto unbeaten Garry Neale, Nicaraguan trial horse Brayan Mairena, Rotherham's Atif Shafiq and Welshman Craig Evans.

"I like being active," he explains. "I like to be kept busy. You need a date, something to train for. After the move up in weight, I've had a real busy year. That was the plan, so I could settle into lightweight."

The Evans victory was particularly impressive and answered the questions some were posing about Tennyson's stamina, with his 11th-round victory the longest fight of his career.

"It was a real tough fight," Tennyson reflects. "I couldn't box and move against that guy — I just had to stand and fight, which was the perfect style for me to win the fight.

"It was a good, hard combination that put him down [in the first round]. But when he got up, I thought I might be in for a long night.

"In the 11th, we were stood toe to toe and I landed a few clean shots. The referee made the right decision. It was a perfect stoppage. If I'd landed a few more, he could have gone down really hard."

As his account of the Evans fight proves, there is no hyperbole or exaggeration in Tennyson's manner and no viciousness in his words — only his fists. ▶

Indeed, so softly spoken and modest is he that it's hard to believe he was originally steered into boxing as a seven-year-old because his temper was so uncontrollable it was causing his mother concern.

"She sent me round to a club called Hogarth ABC," he recalls. "Back in the day it was one of the top clubs and was full of talent. I loved the sport [from the beginning] — I just absolutely love boxing, training and fighting."

The temper has long gone, replaced by an admirably level-headed attitude.

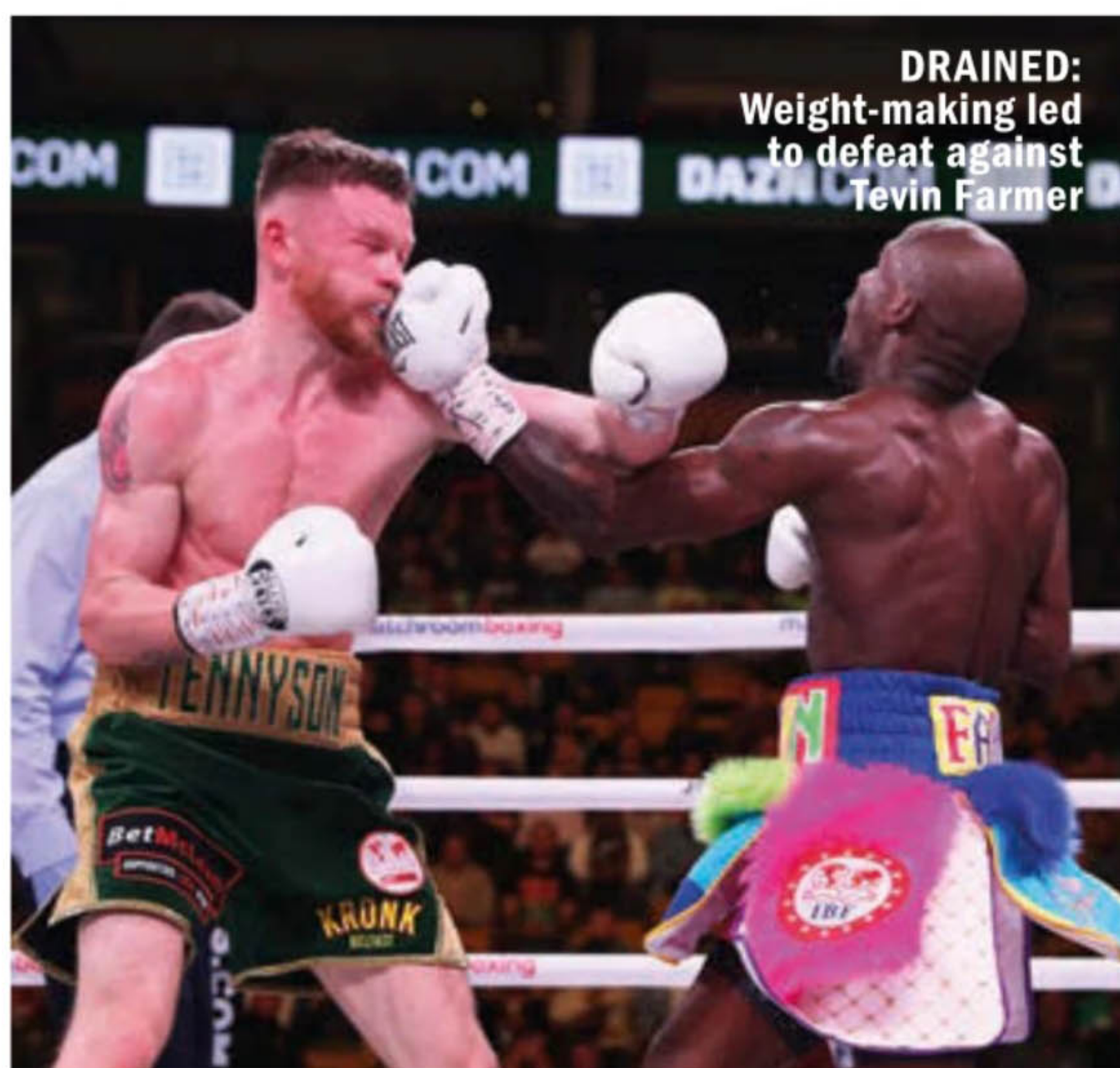
As his manager Mark Dunlop points out to *BM*: "James is still a very young man but you wouldn't believe how sensible he is."

Tennyson has been with Dunlop since he first turned pro in 2012 aged just 19 [see sidebar], a period that has coincided with dramatic growth in the sport in Northern Ireland.

"Boxing in Northern Ireland at the minute is absolutely booming," Tennyson says. "We have some amazing talent. It's busy and there are a lot of shows. At one point it was just Mark Dunlop putting on shows — he was the one who kept Belfast boxing active — but now there's a lot of other promoters and shows going on."

The sport's ability to bridge the sectarian divide that still exists within Northern Ireland — albeit on a less pronounced level than in the 1970s and 1980s — remains potent.

Given Tennyson's own mixed-faith background — his father is Protestant, his



Ed Mulholland/Matchroom Boxing USA

mother Catholic — boxing's tradition in welcoming fighters from all faiths is something he is proud of and values highly.

"Belfast has had a big divide over the years, what with the Troubles and what not from back in the day. To be honest, I don't know too much about [the history of] that — but I do know boxing brings communities together."

"Carl Frampton [a Protestant married to a Catholic] and Barry McGuigan [a Catholic married to a Protestant] are from similar backgrounds [to me]. The sport does a great job [of bringing people together]."

Frampton is, Tennyson admits, a key influence. "I've always looked up to him. He's been an inspiration since I was young."

To join his hero in becoming a Northern Irish world champion is, Tennyson says,

"what I've been dreaming about since I was seven years of age".

He admits: "It would mean all the hard work over the years has paid off. My family have sacrificed a lot as well, so it would mean the world to all of us."

"After another few fights, I'll hopefully get another world title shot. I'm making the weight comfortably and I believe I have a real good chance of picking up a world title. That's my aim and my ambition. And I believe that on my day I can do so."

One thing is for sure, if one man would be unfazed and unchanged by the fame that world title glory brings, it is James Tennyson.

"I've always lived a quiet lifestyle," he says. "I like to keep myself right. I'll only have a week or so off after a fight and then I'm straight back in training. I don't put too much weight on."

"I've got an 11-month-old [as of December 2019] son now and being a dad suits me. I'm not the sort of guy who goes out a lot. So it's been absolutely brilliant for me [becoming a father] — I have more company now when I stay in!"

With a flash of the modest charm and humour that make him such a likeable kid (somehow the youthful epithet suits him), Tennyson then adds, with fatherly pride: "He's a handful! To be honest, he is taking after me already. If anyone comes up to him and asks: 'What does your daddy do?', he throws his paws in the air. He knows how to put his hands up and throw his fists out!"

'HE'LL FIGHT ANYONE — HE'S FEARLESS'

Manager Mark Dunlop first encountered the young James Tennyson at the Belfast Kronk Gym, back in the days when the youngster from Poleglass in west Belfast was so fresh-faced he was known as the "Babyfaced Assassin".

"I lived in Jersey for a long time," Dunlop explains. "When I relocated back to Northern Ireland, I hooked up with some old boxing friends and I went down to the Kronk. I've known them there for years."

"I was asked if I wanted to get back into pro boxing and I asked: 'Well, who is there?' I met James and he had just turned 18. I thought: 'This kid's too young.' He had been to a couple of gyms who had told him the same thing: 'You're too young to go pro, come back in a couple of years'."

"Then he got an international call-up for a multi-nations tournament in Portugal. He went up against three men, knocked all three out and won the gold medal. He was already Irish amateur champion anyway and had won every title going in Ulster."

"I said to him: 'Look, I'll sign you but you have to be patient. You're still only a kid.' But the power he had at that early age was phenomenal. He was knocking out men and he was no more than a kid."

"He fought Mickey Coveney [in 2013] and became the youngest Irish champion in decades. He beat him in just a couple of rounds and I

knew then I had something special."

"He's one of those kids who is blessed with one-punch knockout power. Every fighter in the world would give everything to have what Tennyson has."

"The night of his first loss [in 2013 against Pavels Senkovs] was devastating. It was like somebody died. But this wee man's resilience is unbreakable and he bounced back like we knew he would."

"Another example is when we walked out after losing the [Tevin] Farmer fight in Boston — everybody was in tears, his mum and everyone, and James just came around to everyone and said: 'Look at my picture up there among those lights! I'm only 25 and this isn't the end.' And he's right. He's still got time."

"I wanted the fight against Craig Evans because Evans was rated number 7 by the WBO and James was only 15th. So now he's won, he may find himself at about number five and within spitting distance of a shot at the lightweight world title."

"Against Evans, he showed he has stamina and strength to burn. He's the real deal, there is no doubt about that. Look at the likes of Manny Pacquiao, Jorge Linares — they took losses on the way up because they weren't protected the way some fighters are protected and not tested."

"The last 10 fights James has had have been against good kids and he's knocked most of



Chris Scott

them out. He's been on Sky." A multi-fight deal with Matchroom Boxing should lead to wider TV exposure. Promoter Eddie Hearn sees Tennyson fitting right into the 135lbs world title mix.

"It would be incredible to win a world title, because he's such a nice kid and he's almost like a son to me," Dunlop said. "We're really close. The boxing game is full of dogs and snakes and so on but James has been so loyal to both me and his coach [Tony Dunlop, no relation to Mark]. When things don't go his way, he doesn't make demands or play the blame game."

"And you know what? James Tennyson would fight [Vasiliy] Lomachenko. He's a real old-school fighter who would fight anyone. He's fearless."

LUKE G. WILLIAMS

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THROWBACK

‘Hebrew Hammer’ Cletus Seldin prides himself on fighting like the fan favourites of yesteryear. ‘My job,’ he tells GARRY WHITE, ‘is to go forward and throw punches’

When Don Cockell fought Rocky Marciano for the heavyweight championship in May 1955, he did so with the knowledge that his manager John Simpson had derided the ring as “the size of a postage stamp”.

When New Yorker **Cletus Seldin** arrived in Laval, Quebec for what was then the biggest fight of his career, Simpson’s words may have found resonance with him, albeit in reverse. Opposing the Long Island, New York fighter was former Canadian amateur champion Yves Ulysse Jr and a ring that Seldin describes as “Olympic size, the biggest they could find”.

For a fighter who defines himself as a throwback and is knowledgeable and articulate in his admiration of the great ring battlers from the 1920s through to the ’50s — Marciano included — the ring size did not set him up for success.

An unbeaten record was lost — live on HBO — as Seldin was dropped three times in the opening three rounds on the way to a heavy points defeat to the slick, counter-punching Ulysse. The defeat had some observers questioning the wisdom of Seldin’s unreconstructed, battering-ram style.

Via a conference call with *BM*, the 32-year-old bristled at this suggestion: “Do these people actually know anything besides what the commentators tell them?” he asked. “Ulysse had fought Steve Claggett, a kid that fights just like me, and he [Claggett] won the decision. It was the same arena, but a much smaller ring.

“Claggett fought him head-on and won. But we didn’t know that Ulysse was going to run the whole time. He’s a very talented and quick fighter. He was really able to use his movement and that’s something that we didn’t properly practise for. Now I’ve learnt what I should and shouldn’t do.

“I’d love to do that fight nine more times — I’ve got to win at least one of them!”

But the muscled 140-pounder does in retrospect have some regrets over accepting that fight back in December 2017. “If I was doing it all again, I definitely wouldn’t have taken it. It was just because it was on HBO,” he admitted.

“I had just come off the back of a fight in September against Renald Garrido [W10]



ALL ACTION: Seldin demonstrated his constant-pressure style when crushing Mexico’s Roberto Ortiz in three rounds

EVEN BEING IN THE RING WITH A LEGENDARY FIGHTER [ZAB JUDAH] IS A HIGH POINT

and then fought right afterwards against Roberto Ortiz [TKO 3] in November. By the time I fought Ulysse, it was three fights in 11 weeks. Training was tough and I was worn out just getting there. I was injured going into it and straight after I had to get Tommy John surgery.”

Seldin was talking about serious elbow reconstruction, which is more common to baseball pitchers such as the former Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Tommy John and usually results in a recuperation period of 12-18 months. Seldin was believed to be the first boxer to undergo the procedure and he

was able to return ahead of time, only 11 months after surgery.

Two first-round knockouts were followed by a win over former two-weight world champion Zab Judah in Seldin’s last fight. He described the 11th-round stoppage as “absolutely the best win of my career”, adding: “Beating a legendary fighter — even just being in the ring with such a legendary fighter — is definitely a high point for sure.”

However, Seldin’s victory last June against a 41-year-old Judah attracted widespread attention for all of the wrong reasons, with the ex-champ suffering a

IN GREAT SHAPE: The Seldin physique is testament to years of bodybuilding and taking part in a variety of sports





CROWD FAVOURITE:
Promoter Joe DeGuardia
has built Seldin into an
attraction on Long
Island, New York

brain bleed. Seldin was informed of the news the next morning by a security guard at his hotel and was later reassured by Judah's father "that he was doing OK". But he recollected returning to his room to find that "the internet had literally gone insane with the news".

Seldin's success over Judah came at a cost — a shoulder injury that needed surgery and has kept him out of the ring since. (He was due to return as this issue of *BM* was going to press). "I had a tear in there," he said. "A bone spur was sticking out and ripping my bicep tendon. I'm good to go!"

However, Seldin's career has not been without some conjecture. Back in April 2017, Seldin tested positive for increased levels of testosterone and received a six-month ban from the WBC — barring him from appearing in any bouts sanctioned by that organisation.

It was a punishment that was challenged at the time by Seldin and his team as they felt full disclosure had been provided into the 32-year-old's ongoing testosterone treatment. Seldin's promoter Joe DeGuardia, of Star Boxing, commented at the time: "It's not like he's trying to hide anything or gain an unfair advantage. He wrote it on the sheet when VADA came to test him."

DeGuardia told *BM* that as far as he is concerned the testosterone issue is in the past: "Cletus is focused on his return to the ring after his surgery following his thoroughly impressive win [over Judah]. We are looking forward to his return."

"Any questions regarding testosterone are over two years old and have already been addressed. Cletus remains committed to his boxing career and is anxiously seeking the biggest fights out there and remains ready

I THOUGHT IF I COULD OUTLAST THE OTHER GUYS BY WORKING HARDER, I COULD PROBABLY BEAT THEM

and willing to continue to submit to any requested testing."

So, it's onwards and upwards from the Seldin camp's perspective.

Seldin is that rarity, a Jewish professional boxer, hence his "Hebrew Hammer" moniker. ("People say to me: 'I didn't even know Jews boxed,'" he laughed.) He grew up and still lives in the Long Island neighbourhood of Shirley. Despite the hamlet's name, it is "the hardest blue-collar town on the entire island", Seldin said, although he acknowledged: "If you tell someone you're from Shirley, you get a look."

His entry into boxing came relatively late and after he excelled in a variety of other sports as a youngster.

"My goal in life, ever since being a kid, was to be a professional athlete," he said. "I was good at lots of sports in high school and I was always determined to achieve my dream."

"I wasn't able to make it in some of the sports that I really wanted to. I'm 5ft 7ins and 140lbs, so I was never going to make it in the NFL. I wasn't good at school. I went

every day but I was never really pushed on homework and stuff. Home was a little like the Wild West.

"I didn't even spar until I was 22. I totally sucked!" But Seldin was determined to use his physical strength and fitness to make up for his technical shortcomings. "I just worked really hard at my conditioning and thought that if I could outlast the other guys by working harder, then I could probably beat them," he recalled.

"Now years later as a pro, I can see that all the bodybuilding, lifting weights and fitness paid off, much more than me just being a skilled fighter. You can have the most amazing technical skills but what happens when the fight goes to its limit. You can be the best fighter for 10 rounds, but can you go 12 rounds? I know I can."

"Everybody thought there was no chance anything could ever happen for me in boxing."

Three years in the amateur ranks brought Seldin his share of success. He won 26 of 28 contests and competed in the finals of the New York State Golden Gloves tournament.



HELDING FORTH: Promoter Eddie Hearn featured Seldin on the undercard of the Daniel Jacobs vs Luis Arias bout and the Hebrew Hammer did his bit in selling the show

“After that, I knew I wasn’t going to be a good amateur fighter,” he said. “I didn’t sign up for amateur boxing. I signed up to be a professional athlete.

“I knew I had to move on. I just went out on my own and tried to figure out how I could become a pro fighter. I went to a gym and someone put me in touch with Pete Brodsky and he said; “OK, let’s do this! He has been my trainer and manager ever since.”

Seldin has swiftly built up a solid reputation on the New York fight scene, frequently headlining shows at the Paramount Theatre, Long Island. It’s an intimate venue and one where Seldin’s dedicated supporters create an intimidating atmosphere. “We get a crowd in there and sell out every show,” he said with obvious pride.

“All these blue-collar guys from Shirley show up. They call themselves ‘The Hammerheads’. When you walk out and they start shouting, it feels like the old fight nights. The only thing that is missing is the smoking, otherwise you would have yourself an old-school boxing match, with a small, little ring.”

There is a sense that Seldin defines himself by the term “old school”. Thoroughly modern person though he is — he collects Funko Pop figures — when he’s in the ring Seldin seeks to reflect a less complicated age when photos and TV images were in black and white.

“When the bell rings,” he said, “my job is to go forward and throw punches. I am a



RIPPED AND READY: One thing that’s guaranteed is that Seldin will always show up in fighting trim

dangerous dude in that boxing ring. I’m gonna hurt you real bad and I’m willing to go all these rounds.

“The inspiration comes from how I felt growing up, always feeling like the underdog and needing to work harder than the other guys. But like them old-time fighters, I fight every second of every round. Yes, just like Henry Armstrong — the best and greatest fighter of all time.”

But what of the great Jewish fighters? “Benny Leonard was one of the best ever,” he

suggested. “But I prefer Barney Ross because he was more of a fighter.”

The Hebrew Hammer nickname and Star of David on his trunks leave no one in doubt about Seldin’s ethnicity. “Both represent who I am and how I was brought up,” he said.

“I feel like I am literally the only Jewish guy in the sport. I would say that less than 0.5 per cent of the Jewish community know who I am. But once they see me, they get it. It’s all about the style.

“I want to bring those good times back.”

Comeback? Not for Crolla

The former lightweight champion wasn't pleased with his performance in his last fight but has no itch to box again. Instead, he finds contentment passing on his knowledge to up-and-comers

ANTHONY CROLLA is already back in the boxing ring but instead of delivering punches he is content with life teaching young amateurs and professional prospects how to throw a shot.

It was an emotion-drenched evening at Manchester Arena last November when the former WBA lightweight champion competed in his farewell contest — scraping past Frank Urquiaga.

There would still be paydays if Crolla joined the procession of fighters who did a U-turn after initially bowing out on their own terms.

He insists: “There have been no itchy knuckles to fight again, not one sensation in my body to box again. It has not been a struggle whatsoever since I stopped boxing.

“There hasn’t been one occasion when I have wanted to box again but I have been doing a lot of coaching, which has helped that.

“There has only been a handful of times I have punched a bag and that was just to keep fit with my mates.

“I was going to spar one when one of my fighters needed some help, but my old trainer Joe Gallagher soon told me not to do that.”

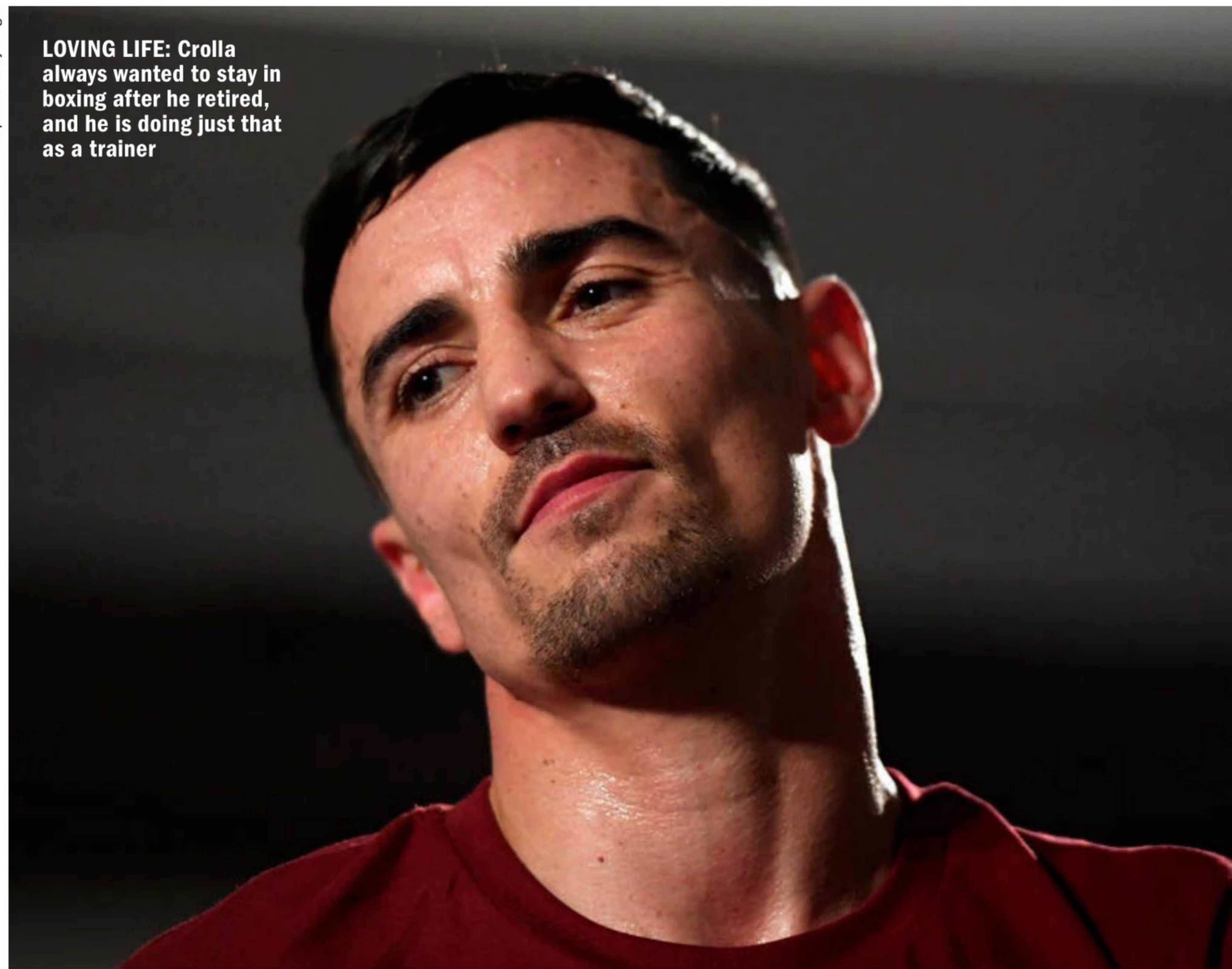
Crolla was planning for the future even before losing his penultimate contest against Vasilij Lomachenko last April, buying the Manchester gym that houses Fox ABC, his former club.

He trains unbeaten professionals Dylan Evans and Jake James, works with the younger amateurs at his sweatshop in Moston and helps teenagers facing exclusion from school.

Crolla, 33, also finds time to assist Gallagher at the Bolton gym where he soared from domestic fighter to world champion.

All photos: Getty Images

LOVING LIFE: Crolla always wanted to stay in boxing after he retired, and he is doing just that as a trainer



“Having my own gym and helping Joe out a few times a week, so I am not missing out on the gym camaraderie and banter, helps make not boxing easy for me,” explained Crolla, who retired with a 35-7-3 record.

“I couldn’t live without boxing, even though I can live without being a fighter.”

That is obvious for anyone who spends time with Crolla away from the gym.

The night before our interview, we attended the Manchester City vs Manchester United Carabao Cup semi-final second leg.

At half-time, when United had pulled back the aggregate deficit to 3-2, and full time, when City had clung on against their bitterest rivals, the conversation in the packed hospitality box was obvious. Or was it?

The dramatic match was furthest from minds as Crolla chatted boxing instead among the guests who included former British light-heavyweight champion Maurice Core, up-and-coming super lightweight James and promoter Mike Le-Gallez.

Crolla is clearly at his most comfortable talking about boxing, revelling in mad anecdotes and discussing what might be wrong with the sport. He only stopped to step outside and chat to injured United midfielder Scott McTominay.

“If someone said I couldn’t train boxers or work in the sport, I would struggle in my life. I need it in my life, whether it is coaching or talking about it,” he said.

You would struggle to find anyone with a bad word to say

about Crolla as a person, and it becomes clear why during our interview.

He has the makings of a top trainer but is struggling to imagine coming up against Gallagher or friends in boxing when they’re in opposite corners.

Gallagher is a dab hand at mind games with rival coaches and Crolla laughs: “We have never discussed it but I am hoping I never have to go up against Joe as a trainer.

“If I was at a press conference with Joe and he started, I would have to laugh it off and remind him I’ve been part of it.

“I am soft and I don’t want things like that to happen.

“There is a kid who comes to the gym on a Friday who attends a local school but has a difficult time there, so I help.

"He is a young amateur at another club and he waits for me every Friday to do a little bit of pads and he lets me know how things are going at school.

"I've just found out he is fighting one of the amateur kids at my club. I have not matched it up and it is unbearable for me.

"I know it is going to get a lot worse for me if, say, I go up against Joe or one of the Smith brothers if they're training fighters.

"I'm in bits over a three two-minute rounds [fight] between two 15-year-old boys. This kid waits for me every week and he is matched against a kid I do sessions with. I will have to leave the room when they fight.

"My mates are saying not to be ridiculous but that is what I am like."

Crolla has picked up invaluable knowledge from Gallagher and is grateful for advice given by top Scottish trainer Billy Nelson.

He says: "There are so many great trainers in Britain and it is fantastic to see young trainers like Shane McGuigan making an impact.

"I love watching Ismael Salas boxers and the way he gets his fighter into a rhythm and moving. I take bits from so many trainers that I could rattle off so many other top ones in Britain and overseas.

"My ambition as a trainer early on is to spend time with my amateur club and get some champions.

"I'm lucky to have two special kids in Dylan and Jake making their way as professionals.

"It's easy to say I want to train world champions but my ambition is to get the best out of the boxers I have so they reach their potential, whatever the level.

"I believe I will work with fighters a lot more skilled and talented than what I was. I want to say: 'If I could win a world title by applying myself and getting that bit of luck, there is no reason you can't.'

"I want to get the best out of every fighter that I work with. That is my goal."

Gallagher added: "He will be a good trainer and already has 10

FAREWELL APPEARANCE: It was difficult for Crolla to block out emotions in his final contest but he managed to eke out a win over Frank Urquiaga



years of experience working my corners in so many big fights.

"Anthony comes to me three days a week and is working with Paul Butler and Callum Smith on the pads. I want him to work with me for as long as he wants."

With defeats at domestic level, it is fair to say that Crolla's success in winning a world title, along with valiant efforts against Jorge Linares twice and Lomachenko, exceeded all expectations.

Sensibly, Crolla got out at the right time, with the win against Spain's Urquiaga showing that his best days were well behind him.

His farewell had the feeling of a testimonial football match in the build-up and almost caught Crolla out on fight night, but he just about did enough to clinch a majority verdict.

He added: "I know I should have boxed a lot better in my final fight but it is what it is, and maybe that is a blessing as well.

"When the MC introduced me he actually announced: 'For the last time', and when the bell rang I thought: 'I still have a job to do here.'

"There are people who thought I lost but I think I

definitely did enough to get the decision. It was close but I won the latter rounds to get it.

"I know I made such hard work. After two or three rounds, I thought: 'I will get to Urquiaga now.' But I let the fight pass me by.

"I was so slow responding with things. It was just a really bad night and the only positive was that I showed a bit of character to win the last few rounds, which I needed.

"For an hour or two after the fight I was beating myself up and wondering how I boxed like that, but after a few hours I forgot about it because I'd seen family and I was out with a few friends.

"It was like I was relieved to get it done. I committed to the date and not long after I signed the contract I questioned whether I was doing the right thing.

"I wasn't going to pull out but I knew it was the last time I would box.

"I enjoyed the build-up and thought I'd be strong enough to block out any emotions. I sparred really well and some lads in the gym were questioning if I was doing the right thing retiring.

"On the day of the fight, it got to me emotionally because I was

reading all the lovely messages. I don't usually look at my phone on fight day and that day I shouldn't have because of all the nice stuff.

"It was important to go out on the win even though it was one of my worst performances. I just wish I gave a better account.

"I won't be remembered for that performance. People are going to remember the good nights."

Crolla won't go down as a lightweight great but his achievements are an inspiration to any fighter suffering setbacks.

Who would have backed him to draw 12,000 fans to Manchester Arena, headline Sky Sports cards and lift a world championship after losing to Youssef Al Hamidi in his ninth professional fight?

He says: "My career was a roller coaster. I got beaten early in my career and later on achieved the dreams I set out to do. I'm satisfied and look back happy.

"Boxing took me to places I never thought I would see as a fighter or part of the team. I also met some great people.

"Boxing is and always will be a big part of my life."



WORLD IN ACTION

11 January, San Antonio
Jamie Munguia
 TKO11 Spike O'Sullivan

On his grand arrival at middleweight, former WBO 154lbs champion **Jaime Munguia** showed flashes of brilliance before gradually breaking the resistance of Cork puncher **Spike O'Sullivan** in a bruising affair at the Alamodome.

Munguia impressed with the jab but frustratingly neglected it for long periods and at times sailed close to peril, with the Irishman often making him pay for defensive lapses. O'Sullivan was in the fight for six rounds before Munguia's firepower (plus low blows and punches to the back of the head) and fatigue took a heavy toll.
 O'Sullivan remonstrated with referee Mark Calo-oy, who

belatedly told the judges to take a point from Munguia (now 35-0, 28 KOs) in the sixth round for a low blow.

Throughout, O'Sullivan (now 30-4, 21 KOs) caused problems with his body punches and dangerous right hand. After O'Sullivan signalled a rabbit punch in the third, Munguia took advantage of his distraction with a left hook. O'Sullivan staggered into the ropes before jolting Munguia with a right that made the Mexican fighter's head swivel on his neck. Munguia can evidently take a shot but a war gave O'Sullivan a chance.

A left hook to the body had O'Sullivan taking a knee in the seventh but the referee ruled an unintentional low blow and gave the Irish fighter a time out to recover. O'Sullivan ended the round on the ropes but remained a danger. "I want you to go out on your shield," implored trainer Paschal Collins after the round.

O'Sullivan looked jaded by the eighth as Munguia's jab reawakened with disheartening effect. For the first time, the Cork banger looked empty but he wobbled Munguia with a left hook in the ninth.

Having assured trainer Collins he wished to continue before the 11th, O'Sullivan drained every last drop of fighting spirit. But Munguia was now irresistible and right hands sent O'Sullivan down by the ropes just as the towel came in. **MB**

18 January, Philadelphia
Jeison Rosario
 TKO5 Julian Williams

In an early candidate for upset of the year, **Jeison Rosario**, of the Dominican Republic, blasted **Julian Williams** into defeat in the fifth round to win the WBA and IBF 154lbs titles.

Williams, fighting in front of a hometown crowd at the Liacouras Center, was a 25-1 on favourite in his first defence of the titles he had won by defeating Jarrett Hurd — another upset — last May. He started strongly, putting shots together to win the first round on all three judges' cards, but things soon went horribly wrong.

Rosario, looking huge at the weight (his "Banana" nickname a tribute to the fruit he says gives him strength), took command of the fight in the second round when Williams suffered an ugly cut over the left eye, seemingly caused by a left jab.

Williams landed a flush right hand in the third round but ominously Rosario didn't budge, and the challenger was now getting the better of the exchanges.

Although both men were landing heavy blows, it was clear that Rosario was hurting Williams more than Williams was hurting him. A left hook wobbled Williams in the fifth and he was getting backed up and battered. Rosario seemed to wrestle him to

EDGING HOME:
 Jumah's southpaw right hook worked well



BRITISH FIGHT OF THE MONTH

19 January, Manchester
DEION JUMAH W12 **SAM HYDE**

English cruiserweight champion **Deion Jumah** withstood a punishing late rally from **Sam Hyde** to hang on to his title after a small-hall classic at the Woodhouse Park Lifestyle Centre in Wythenshawe. Scores were 115-113 (twice) and 115-114 in an absorbing encounter that doubled as an eliminator for Richard Riakporhe's British title.

After eight keenly contested rounds, Hyde led on one card and was even on two others courtesy of his industry and hurtful right hands. But his energy levels dipped soon afterwards, with Londoner Jumah taking full advantage to sweep rounds nine to 11.

"The Ghost" proved fittingly elusive, drifting away from Hyde's dogged pressure to pepper him with fast, accurate flurries. The Sale fighter was under siege and leaning over the ropes in the ninth, already bothered by a bleeding mouth and a damaged right eye, a mild recurrence of the fight-ending swelling he suffered against Riakporhe in November 2018.

Near the end of the 11th, Jumah was almost coasting, picking off Hyde with relative ease and scoring with right hooks upstairs and left hands to the body. Then, in the dying moments of the round, Hyde (now 15-2-1, 8 KOs) reeled off successive right hands that left Jumah drooping and dazed on the ropes before the bell rang in the nick of time.

Hyde required further dramatics in the final round if he was to win and he came mightily close, a right uppercut taking the wind out of Jumah's sails. The house fighter, inspired by the crowd, summoned his last reserves of energy to have the champion teetering on the ropes but the more skilful Jumah (now 13-0, 7 KOs) just about survived and discovered a late spark before the bell. His wilier boxing, bodywork and southpaw craft early on was enough to see him over the line.

After a slow-burning seven-year career, Jumah has finally broken into the British title picture. The luckless Hyde can come again. **MB**

FINAL OFFENSIVE: There was no stopping 'Banana' Rosario in the fifth



with **GRAHAM HOUSTON** and **MARK BUTCHER**

the canvas as Williams grabbed desperately, and although referee Benjy Esteves waved “no knockdown” the champion was in desperate trouble.

There was no stopping Rosario now. A right uppercut followed by a left hook sent Williams lurching back against the ropes and referee Esteves waved the finish after one minute, 37 seconds of the fifth round. Two judges had Rosario in front, 39-37, after four rounds while the third judge had it 38-38, but it was obvious very early that this fight was never going to go to the scorecards. **GH**

30 January, Miami
Joseph “Jo Jo” Diaz
W12 Tevin Farmer

Fighting from the second round with a severe cut over the left eye, southern California’s **Joseph “Jo Jo” Diaz** kept on top of Philadelphia’s stylish **Tevin Farmer** to win the IBF junior lightweight title on a unanimous, richly deserved decision.

Farmer started and finished well in the all-southpaw fight but Diaz was far more consistent in the middle rounds, sweeping the fourth to the ninth on all three judges’ cards. Although Farmer came on again in the last three rounds he had fallen too far behind, with Diaz winning by 115-113 on two judges’ scorecards and 116-112 on the third card.

Perhaps a busy schedule (this was his fifth title defence in 15 months) had left Farmer a little jaded, and it didn’t help that he hurt his right hand — his “jab hand” — in the first round. But Diaz, the US Olympic representative making his second world title challenge, fought a gritty, tenacious, inspired fight.

A clash of heads in the second round saw Diaz suffer an ugly-looking slash over the left eye but by the fourth round he was simply outpunching and outfighting Farmer, winning rounds on consistency and workrate.

Diaz just kept punching, up and down, overwhelming Farmer with punch-volume. Farmer landed the occasional jab, left hand or right hook but Diaz was almost swamping him with



IRREPRESSIBLE: A fired-up Diaz had Farmer ducking for cover with a middle-rounds onslaught

Getty Images

punches. Farmer is noted for having a slick defence but there were too many punches coming at him for him to dodge them all.

By the middle rounds, Diaz’ corner had the cut under control and it was clear that Farmer needed to hurt the aggressive, sturdy challenger to have any chance of turning things around — and with just six opponents halted in his 36 fights, the chances of Farmer landing a decisive blow looked remote in the extreme.

Farmer managed to summon up a big effort in the last few rounds, with Diaz finally slowing down a little. Diaz knew he had the fight won, though, and let out a “Whoo!” in the closing moments in anticipation of having his hand raised as the new champion. **GH**

31 January, Kinshasa
Ilunga Makabu
W12 Michal Cieslak

Coming back from a slow start to apply relentless pressure, **Ilunga Makabu** proved too strong, too seasoned and too heavy handed for Poland’s **Michal Cieslak** to capture the vacant WBC cruiserweight title, much to the delight of the home fans in Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the DRC’s most significant fight since the *Rumble in the*

Jungle, Makabu dominated the closing rounds to win by scores of 114-112, 115-111 and 116-111.

It was a gruelling, exciting contest. Makabu scored a knockdown in the fourth round but suffered a flash knockdown himself in the next round. Cieslak finished the fight with a cut on the bridge of the nose.

Although Cieslak was unbeaten going into the bout (19 wins and a no decision), he was facing his toughest test by far and a long way from home. He acquitted himself admirably and was leading on points after five rounds.

The way Cieslak came back from a rocky fourth round was remarkable. He had only himself to blame for the knockdown, dropping his hands and turning away after borderline body blows from Makabu. It appeared that Cieslak was indicating to Canadian referee Michael Griffin that Makabu should get a low-blow caution. However, the referee hadn’t issued a “stop” command and Makabu stepped in with two successive left hands from his southpaw stance to send Cieslak to the canvas.

Cieslak survived Makabu’s follow-up onslaught and rallied in the fifth, landing a right hand that had Makabu touching down on his right glove to be given an

eight count. It had otherwise been a good round for Makabu and the Mexican judge made this only a 10-9 round in Cieslak’s favour.

Gradually, almost inexorably, however, Makabu took control of the contest. Cieslak seemed to hurt Makabu to the body but the DRC veteran was landing the more eye-catching blows. A stiff right jab sent Cieslak’s gum shield flying out in the seventh round, and a right uppercut sent his head snapping back in the 11th, and now the Polish fighter was cut on the bridge of the nose.

Cieslak looked weary in the last round and went to his knees but referee Griffin ruled a slip, although Makabu seemed to land a right hook to the body. Makabu was now in full flow — jabs, left hands, that big, southpaw right uppercut again — but Cieslak battled it out to the bitter end. **GH**

31 January, Shreveport, Louisiana
Ruben Villa
W10 Alexis Collado

A model of consistency, undefeated featherweight **Ruben Villa** took his record to 18-0 by outsmarting and almost outclassing Cuba’s **Alexis Collado** for a 10-round unanimous decision.



WORLD IN ACTION

Dave Mandel/Showtime



ACCURACY: Villa kept the right jab pumping to dominate Collado

Collado had a puncher's reputation (22 KOs in a 25-2 record going into the bout) but like all of Villa's opponents he found it difficult to land a clear scoring blow against the savvy southpaw from Salinas, California.

Villa isn't a seriously hard puncher (just five opponents stopped) but he has mastered the art of hitting and not getting hit, and so it was in this fight as he racked up the rounds to win by scores of 99-91 from one judge and 98-92 from the other two judges.

Collado gave a good effort but time again he was made to miss and getting peppered. Villa used the southpaw jab to excellent effect, stabbing to body and head throughout. Still, the fight wasn't quite as easy as the wide scores suggest. Villa had to stay alert throughout — which he did. **GH**

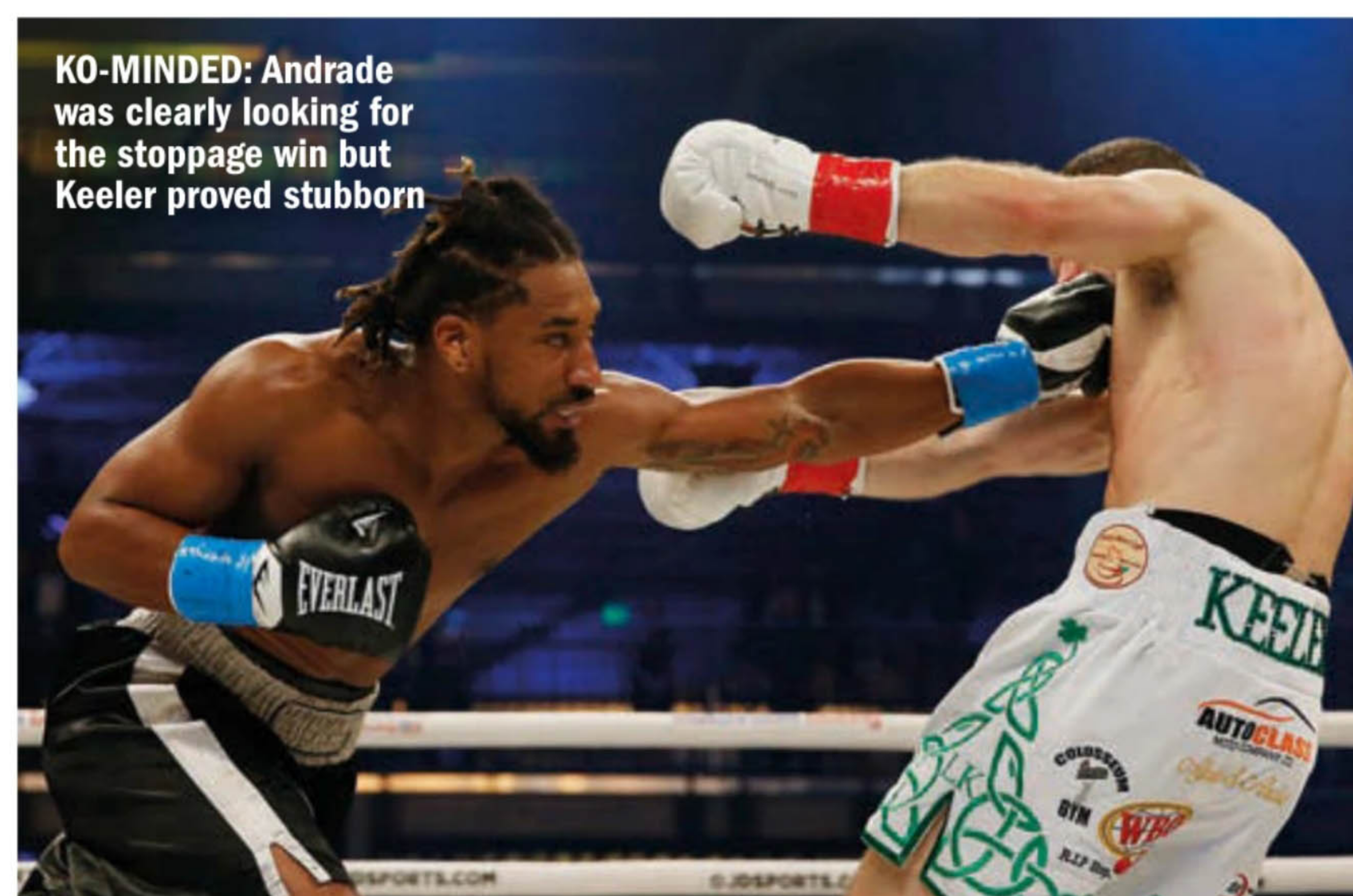
1 February, Miami Demetrius Andrade TKO9 Luke Keeler

WBO middleweight champion **Demetrius Andrade** tried too hard to impress and ended up achieving the exact opposite with a lacklustre ninth-round stoppage of Dublin's game **Luke Keeler** at Meridian, Island Gardens.

Beating the drum for a lucrative unification fight, Andrade evidently viewed Keeler as potential cannon fodder and discarded his safety-first boxing in search of a highlight-reel stoppage.

The tactic almost paid off with Keeler caught square on and dropped inside five seconds by a southpaw left hand. Keeler took a nine count on one knee and the signs were ominous, but he was caught cold more than hurt.

Andrade repeated the trick in the second with a heavier knockdown, courtesy of the same shot. Keeler rose at nine and a half to narrowly beat the count, then traded on instinct to survive the final seconds of the round.



KO-MINDED: Andrade was clearly looking for the stoppage win but Keeler proved stubborn

Yet Keeler (now 17-3-1, 5 KOs) recovered from his nightmare start to pose problems without winning a round or threatening the upset. A calculated southpaw without fireworks, Andrade pursued the stoppage but looked painfully awkward in the process.

The champion's solid left hand kept Keeler in check but he neglected the well-schooled jab that is the foundation of his best work. "Why are you forcing everything? I don't care about the knockout!" said trainer Paul Andrade in his son's corner after the fourth.

Andrade (now 29-0, 18 KOs) seemed caught between his natural style and a desire to show he's a puncher but Keeler was proving a growing nuisance with his workrate and endeavour.

Keeler was still making a fight of it in the ninth when Andrade's left hand finally found its mark again, wobbling the challenger and sending him to the ropes.

Andrade pounced, hurting the Dubliner with a big right uppercut and unloading a series of right hooks until referee Telis Assimenios stepped in, but Keeler can hold his head high.

MB

7 February, Panama City Luis Concepcion TKO11 Rober Barrera

Loser of two of his last three bouts and considered a faded fighter at the age of 34, Panama's **Luis "El Nica" Concepcion** came from behind to stop Colombia's **Rober Barrera** in the 11th to capture the vacant WBA interim flyweight title.

It was a triumph of old-fashioned guts and big-fight experience. Barrera, switching between the orthodox and southpaw stances throughout, rallied from a second-round knockdown and scored beautifully from long range to lead by scores of 95-94, 96-93 and 97-92 after 10 rounds.

Finally, however, the always-pressing, never-give-up Concepcion caught up with Barrera and stopped him to win a thrilling fight.

Concepcion (now 39-8, 28 KOs) was clearly the heavier hitter and had a big second round, hurting Barrera with a left hook and then dropping him with a series of punches.

Barrera (now 23-3, 13 KOs) gathered himself and came back to outbox Concepcion for the next four rounds. However, Concepcion was hurting Barrera when he was able to back him up on the ropes and land his hooks and right hands.

Finally, the superior strength and battle-hardened toughness of Concepcion pulled him through. Barrera, 27, was cut on the bridge of the nose and had damage under the left eye by the 11th, and he finally wilted.

Concepcion slammed in a right hand behind the jab and Barrera staggered across the ring before going down against the ropes.

Although Barrera dragged himself up, he had nothing left and he was under fire and defenceless as referee Rafael Ramos waved the finish after two minutes, 38 seconds of the round. **GH**

8 February, Sheffield Kell Brook KO7 Mark DeLuca

After a 14-month absence, **Kell Brook** shook off the ring rust and pounded out his frustrations on the willing but limited Massachusetts southpaw **Mark DeLuca**, who fell in the seventh round at the FlyDSA Arena.

For two rounds, Brook (now 39-2, 27 KOs) lacked his former sparkle. His timing was understandably awry as the solid but unspectacular De Luca, a former marine, showed hustle and looked to harry the body.

Getty Images

DIFFERENT LEVEL: Brook proved far too powerful and accomplished for the game DeLuca



The Sheffield man found his range in the third, a right hand bringing blood from DeLuca's nose. Brook then burst into life, drilling his man with a series of right hands before a salvo of left hooks and right uppercuts sent the bewildered DeLuca to the canvas.

DeLuca survived the round after taking the eight count and even had time for a broad grin as Brook turned southpaw and began to resemble the clinical box-fighter who won the IBF welterweight title in 2014.

Although DeLuca (now 24-1, 13 KOs) could have justifiably retired on his stool after the third, he held firm under increasingly ferocious fire. A sharper Brook bullied him on the ropes in the fourth, unloading that hurtful right uppercut, but DeLuca absorbed everything before floundering again at the bell.

Brook dominated with his skill and physicality, some of that old sharpness returning with the benefit of competitive rounds. He worked DeLuca up and down, pinning him to the ropes with impunity, though he shipped a few southpaw left hands for his troubles.

DeLuca's fighting pride kept him upright but in the seventh a patient Brook finished matters in satisfying fashion when a left hook sent DeLuca crashing backwards, whereupon referee Phil Edwards counted him out after one minute, 15 seconds of the round.

Brook's back but former WBO 154lbs champion Liam Smith could be next and a true measure of what he has left in the tank.

MB

8 February, Sheffield **Terri Harper** W10 Eva Wahlstrom

A terrific **Terri Harper** produced a nerveless display under the lights to outfight and outbox the seasoned **Eva Wahlstrom** to clinch the WBC super featherweight title on the Brook vs DeLuca show.

Scores were 98-91 and 99-90 (twice) as the Yorkshire boxer, a pro for only two years, showed rich promise in ending the battle-tested Finn's five-year reign.

This was a big leap up in class for Harper (now 10-0, 5 KOs) but she immediately found her footing, using her height and range to keep Wahlstrom at bay with an educated lead. Wahlstrom struggled with the sprightly Harper's angles, movement and vitality and it wasn't until the third that the Finnish woman finally threatened with sharp right-hand counters.

The champion enjoyed her best spell from the third to fifth rounds as she worked well to the body, harried with the left hook and unsettled Harper with looping right hands over the jab. Yet Harper remained composed under fierce scrutiny and boxed smarter, choosing her moments wisely.

Harper was barely fazed and took over in the seventh when a crisp right hand dropped an off-balance Wahlstrom for a crucial knockdown. The champion vehemently disputed referee John Latham's call, but it was legitimate and momentum altering. That single shot dented Wahlstrom's period of ascendancy and effectively ended

POWER ADVANTAGE: In a closely contested bout, Akhmadaliev's bigger punching caught the eye



WORLD FIGHT OF THE MONTH

30 January, Miami

MURODJON AKHMADALIEV W12 **DANIEL ROMAN**

In just his eighth pro fight, Uzbekistan's **Murodjon Akhmadaliev** survived a torrid last round to take the WBA Super and IBF 122lbs titles from **Daniel Roman**, of Los Angeles, on a split decision.

One judge had Roman winning, 115-113, but the other two judges went for Akhmadaliev, both scoring it 115-113.

The fight was intense and absorbing, every round hard fought. Akhmadaliev, the Olympic bronze medallist who now fights out of the California desert community of Indio, landed big, sweeping left hands from his southpaw stance while Roman scored with the more compact punches, especially uppercuts from both hands.

Akhmadaliev showed some cute moves, boxing as well as banging. At times he surprised Roman by following the left hand with a solid right jab.

Throughout the fight, it was a matter of one man rallying every

time his opponent seemed to be gaining momentum, but Akhmadaliev's blows looked more damaging. He seemed to wobble Roman with a right hook late in the fifth and landed some more punches before the bell rang, with the champion briefly holding the top rope as if to steady himself.

At times, though, Akhmadaliev seemed to be thinking a little too much, or perhaps pacing himself in his first 12-rounder, and in these moments the battle-hardened Roman seized the initiative with uppercuts, body punches and sharp right hands.

Roman suffered a cut over the right eye in the ninth round but he came on strongly in the last three rounds and drove Akhmadaliev all around the ring with a tremendous last-round offensive as the challenger suddenly seemed to run out of steam. It was a huge closing drive, but Akhmadaliev had built up enough points to secure victory. **GH**



WORLD IN ACTION

Getty Images



TERRIFIC: Harper was near-perfect in beating Wahlstrom

her rapidly diminishing hopes of retaining her title.

Guided by mentor Stefy Bull, Denaby's Harper remained ice cool, belying her comparative lack of experience and exuding self-belief behind that commanding jab. She stood toe to toe with Wahlstrom (now 23-2-2, 3 KOs) in the eighth and emerged the stronger from the trenches. A left hook had Wahlstrom in disarray near the end of the round. By now, a blinking Wahlstrom also had to contend with a cut under the right eye.

Still only 23, Harper resembled the accomplished veteran in the final round. With her refreshing humility, a new star has risen on the women's boxing scene. **MB**

8 February, Sheffield Kid Galahad TKO end of 8 Claudio Marrero

Sheffield's **Kid Galahad** all but sealed another shot at IBF featherweight champion **Josh Warrington** with a clinical eight-round dissection of Dominican Claudio Marrero in their final eliminator at the FlyDSA Arena.

Galahad (now 26-1, 15 KOs) lined himself up for another crack with arguably a career-best victory. Elusive and hurtful, he disrupted Marrero's rhythm with a demoralising jab and debilitating body punching.

Southpaw Marrero (now 24-3, 17 KOs) jabbed to the body but the Sheffield switch-hitter, mostly fighting in the orthodox stance, repeatedly trod on

Marrero's right foot and employed his forearm, earning warnings from referee Howard Foster.

Marrero's southpaw left hands beat the Sheffield man into a hasty retreat in the second but from the third Galahad always had the last word, with his bodywork and right hands gradually undermining Marrero's resolve.

By the fifth, Galahad was befuddling Marrero and picking him apart with an incisive jab. In either the orthodox or southpaw stance, Galahad's jab punished and perplexed Marrero. He backed up Marrero on the ropes and landed sickening body blows.

Marrero looked dejected and his resistance was ebbing away. A series of southpaw lefts spun his head and sent him careening into

the ropes in the seventh. His legs leaden and face reddened, Marrero's fight was all but done.

Galahad was in prime form here. Winning as he pleased, his pressure caused the beleaguered Marrero to sag noticeably in the eighth before the Dominican was compassionately withdrawn by his corner at the end of the round.

Seasoned and strong, Galahad remains a horrible night's work for any featherweight on the planet. Warrington knows this already. **MB**

8 February, Allentown, Pennsylvania Gary Russell Jr W12 Tugstsogt Nyambayar

Just too smart and too slick for a tough challenger, WBC featherweight champion **Gary Russell Jr** used his southpaw right jab, cute moves and hand speed to win a unanimous 12-round decision over **Tugstsogt Nyambayar** at the PPL Center.

The judges had it 118-110, 117-111 and 116-112, and Nyambayar had no complaints. Although an Olympic silver medallist and winner of 11 consecutive pro bouts, Nyambayar was in a little over his head against Russell, who has boxed just once a year for the past five years but says he remains sharp by staying in the gym year-round.

Russell (now 31-1, 18 KOs) was basically one step ahead throughout. He kept the right jab popping out, cleverly slipped and ducked punches, fired quick left hands through the middle of Nyambayar's guard and landed right hook counters. Every so often, Russell opened up with the rapid-fire punches that have become his trademark.

Nyambayar was always moving forward, trying his best, his Mongolian supporters responding with enthusiasm to every punch he threw. But although Nyambayar landed the occasional right hand and was able to close the distance and land body punches from time to time, he was never able to gain a foothold in the fight. It seemed that every time Nyambayar was coming on, so Russell would regain the initiative with superior skills and punch-speed.

There were no real highlights in a bout that was interesting rather than exciting. Nyambayar had probably his best round of the fight in the ninth with pressure and body punches, but even though Russell looked a little tired towards the end he was still doing enough to win rounds, with the champion winning the 10th round on two judges' cards, sweeping the 11th and capturing the 12th on two cards for a clear though somewhat hard-earned victory.

GH



PUNISHER: Galahad steadily broke down an increasingly demoralised Marrero

Getty Images

BOXING MONTHLY

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BOXING

★ MONTHLY ★

Boxing Monthly focuses on a top 10 except for divisions with a limited number of boxers available. Only boxers active in the past 12 months will be rated. We now include boxers born outside the UK but who are British-based and campaigning in Britain. Ratings up to and including 8 February.

- HEAVYWEIGHT
- Over 200lbs/14st 4lbs
- 1

Anthony Joshua

(Watford), 23-1

IBF/WBO/WBA-Super champion
- 2

Tyson Fury

(Wilmslow), 29-0-1
- 3

Dillian Whyte

(Brixton), 27-1
- 4

Joe Joyce

(Putney), 10-0
- 5

Daniel Dubois

(Greenwich), 14-0

British and Commonwealth champion
- 6

Dereck Chisora

(Finchley), 32-9
- 7

Hughie Fury

(Manchester), 23-3
- 8

Nathan Gorman

(Nantwich), 16-1
- 9

David Price

(Liverpool), 25-7
- 10

David Allen

(Conisbrough), 18-5-2

- CRUISERWEIGHT
- 200lbs/14st 4lbs
- 1

Lawrence Okolie

(Hackney), 14-0

European champion
- 2

Richard Riakporhe

(Walworth), 11-0

British champion
- 3

Tommy McCarthy

(Belfast), 16-2
- 4

Deion Jumah

(Chelsea), 13-0, English champion
- 5

Chris Billam-Smith

(Bournemouth), 10-1

Commonwealth champion
- 6

Jack Massey

(Chapel-en-le-Frith), 16-1
- 7

Sam Hyde

(Sale), 15-2-1
- 8

Luke Watkins

(Swindon), 14-2
- 9

Nick Parpa

(Palmers Green), 9-1

Southern Area champion
- 10

Mikael Lawal

(Shepherd's Bush), 12-0

- LIGHT-HEAVYWEIGHT
- 175lbs/12st 7lbs
- 1

Anthony Yarde

(Ilford), 19-1
- 2

Callum Johnson

(Boston), 18-1
- 3

Joshua Buatsi

(Croydon), 12-0
- 4

Hosea Burton

(Manchester), 25-1
- 5

Craig Richards

(Crystal Palace), 15-1-1
- 6

Shakan Pitters

(Birmingham), 13-0
- 7

Lyndon Arthur

(Moston), 16-0

Commonwealth champion
- 8

Liam Conroy

(Barrow-in-Furness), 18-5-1

Northern Area champion
- 9

Dan Azeez

(Lewisham), 11-0, English champion
- 10

Chad Sugden

(Newark), 11-1-1

- SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT
- 168lbs/12st
- 1

Callum Smith

(Liverpool), 27-0,

WBA-Super champion
- 2

Billy Joe Saunders

(Hatfield), 29-0, WBO champion
- 3

John Ryder

(Islington), 28-5
- 4

Martin Murray

(St Helens), 39-5-1
- 5

Rocky Fielding

(Liverpool), 28-2
- 6

Lerrone Richards

(New Malden), 13-0

British and Commonwealth champion
- 7

Lennox Clarke

(Halesowen), 19-1-1
- 8

Zach Parker

(Woodville), 18-0
- 9

Mark Jeffers

(Chorley), Central Area champion
- 10

Germaine Brown

(Kingston), 8-0

Southern Area champion

- MIDDLEWEIGHT
- 160lbs/11st 6lbs
- 1

Chris Eubank Jr

(Brighton), 29-2
- 2

Liam Williams

(Clydach Vale), 22-2-1

British champion
- 3

Felix Cash

(Wokingham), 12-0

Commonwealth champion
- 4

Marcus Morrison

(Hattersley), 23-3
- 5

Mark Heffron

(Oldham), 24-1
- 6

Danny Dignum

(Bowers Gifford), 12-0
- 7

Andrew Robinson

(Redditch), 24-4-1
- 8

Alfredo Meli

(Belfast), 17-0-1
- 9

Derrick Osaze

(Nottingham), 10-0
- 10

Brad Pauls

(Harlow), 14-0

Southern Area champion

- SUPER WELTERWEIGHT
- 154lbs/11st
- 1

Liam Smith

(Liverpool), 29-2-1
- 2

Kell Brook

(Sheffield), 39-2
- 3

Scott Fitzgerald

(Preston), 14-0

British champion
- 4

Sam Eggington

(Stourbridge), 28-6
- 5

James Metcalf

(Liverpool), 20-0

Commonwealth champion
- 6

Anthony Fowler

(Liverpool), 11-1
- 7

Kieran Smith

(Greenrigg), 16-0
- 8

Ted Cheeseman

(Bermondsey), 15-2-1
- 9

Kieron Conway

(Northampton), 14-1-1
- 10

Harry Scarff

(Derby), 8-1

- WELTERWEIGHT
- 147lbs/10st 7lbs
- 1

Amir Khan

(Bolton), 34-5
- 2

Josh Kelly

(Sunderland), 10-0-1
- 3

Chris Jenkins

(Garnant), 22-3-3

British and Commonwealth champion
- 4

Liam Taylor

(Middleton), 21-1-1
- 5

Michael McKinson

(Belfast), 18-0
- 6

Ekow Essuman

(Nottingham), 13-0

English champion
- 7

Paddy Gallagher

(Belfast), 16-6
- 8

Connor Benn

(Ilford), 16-0
- 9

Luther Clay

(Bracknell), 13-1
- 10

Johnny Garton

(Peckham), 24-2-1

- SUPER LIGHTWEIGHT
- 140lbs/10st
- 1

Josh Taylor

(Edinburgh), 16-0

IBF/WBA-Super champion
- 2

Jack Catterall

(Chorley), 25-0
- 3

Lewis Ritson

(Tyne and Wear), 20-1
- 4

Terry Flanagan

(Manchester), 36-2
- 5

Ohara Davies

(Hackney), 20-2
- 6

Robbie Davies Jr

(Kirkby), 19-2
- 7

Joe Hughes

(Malmesbury), 17-5-1
- 8

Sean McComb

(Belfast), 10-0
- 9

Philip Bowes

(Leytonstone), 20-3

Commonwealth champion
- 10

Danny Egbunike

(Chessington), 6-0

Southern Area champion

- LIGHTWEIGHT
- 135lbs/9st 9lbs
- 1

Luke Campbell

(Hessle), 20-3
- 2

Lee Selby

(Barry), 28-2
- 3

Ricky Burns

(Coatbridge), 43-8-1
- 4

James Tennyson

(Belfast), 26-3
- 5

Stephen Smith

(Liverpool), 28-4
- 6

Liam Walsh

(Cromer), 23-1
- 7

Craig Evans

(Blackwood), 20-3-2
- 8

Gavin Gwynne

(Merthyr Tydfil), 12-1

Welsh champion
- 9

Myron Mills

(Derby), 14-1

English champion
- 10

Jack O'Keeffe

(Birmingham), 10-0

Midlands Area champion

- SUPER FEATHERWEIGHT
- 130lbs/9st 4lbs
- 1

Carl Frampton

(Belfast), 27-2
- 2

Joe Cordina

(Cardiff), 11-0

Commonwealth lightweight champion
- 3

Martin Joseph Ward

(Brentwood), 24-1-2
- 4

Anthony Cacace

(Belfast), 18-1, British champion
- 5

Sam Bowen

(Ibstock), 15-1
- 6

Zelfa Barrett

(Manchester), 23-1,

Commonwealth champion
- 7

Archie Sharp

(Welling), 18-0
- 8

Lyon Woodstock Jr

(Leicester), 12-2
- 9

Alex Dilmaghani

(Crayford), 19-1-1 (1NC)
- 10

Jordan McCorry

(Cambuslang), 18-7-1

Scottish champion

- FEATHERWEIGHT
- 126lbs/9st
- 1

Josh Warrington

(Leeds), 30-0, IBF champion
- 2

Kid Galahad

(Sheffield), 27-1
- 3

Michael Conlan

(Belfast), 13-0
- 4

Isaac Lowe

(Morecambe), 19-0-3
- 5

Ryan Walsh

(Cromer), 25-2-2, British champion
- 6

Leigh Wood

(Gedling), 23-1, Commonwealth champion
- 7

James Dickens

(Liverpool), 28-3
- 8

Jamie McDonnell

(Doncaster), 30-3-1 (1NC)
- 9

Gavin McDonnell

(Doncaster), 22-2-2
- 10

Reece Mould

(Doncaster), 13-0, English champion

- SUPER BANTAMWEIGHT
- 122lbs/8st 10lbs
- 1

Thomas Patrick Ward

(West Rainton), 29-0
- 2

Brad Foster

(Lichfield), 11-0-2

British and Commonwealth champion
- 3

Lucien Reid

(West Ham), 8-0-2
- 4

Tyrone McCullagh

(Belfast), 14-0
- 5

Jason Cunningham

(Doncaster), 27-6

Central Area champion
- 6

Qais Ashfaq

(Leeds), 8-0
- 7

Joe Ham

(Glasgow), 16-2, Scottish champion
- 8

Gamal Yafai

(Birmingham), 17-1
- 9

Ashley Lane

(Bristol), 14-9-2
- 10

Michael Ramabeletsa

(Preston), 18-17

English champion

- BANTAMWEIGHT
- 118lbs/8st 6lbs
- 1

Paul Butler

(Ellesmere Port), 31-2
- 2

Lee McGregor

(Edinburgh), 8-0,

British and Commonwealth champion
- 3

Ukashir Farooq

(Glasgow), 13-1, Scottish champion
- 4

Thomas Essomba

(Ryhope), 10-5
- 5

Iain Butcher

(Jerviston), 19-4
- 6

Prince Patel

(Acton), 23-1-1
- 7

Kyle Williams

(Wolverhampton), 11-2
- 8

Marc Leach

(Salford), 14-1-1, English champion
- 9

Sean McGoldrick

(Newport), 9-1
- 10

Duane Winters

(Bristol), 11-2

- SUPER FLYWEIGHT
- 115lbs/8st 3lbs
- 1

Khalid Yafai

(Birmingham), 26-0, WBA champion
- 2

Charlie Edwards

(Epsom), 15-1 (1NC)
- 3

Sunny Edwards

(Croydon), 14-0, British champion
- 4

Ryan Farrag

(Liverpool), 20-4
- 5

Marcel Braithwaite

(Liverpool), 9-2, English champion
- 6

Quaise Khademi

(East Ham), 8-0

- FLYWEIGHT
- 112lbs/8st
- 1

Jay Harris

(Swansea), 17-0, Commonwealth champion
- 2

Andrew Selby

(Barry), 13-1
- 3

Kyle Yousaf

(Sheffield), 16-0, English champion
- 4

Tommy Frank

(Sheffield), 13-0

Commonwealth super fly champion
- 5

Harvey Horn

(Chigwell), 8-0
- 6

Ross Murray

(Glasgow), 10-2

WORLD RATINGS

BOXING
★ MONTHLY ★

We no longer list championship designations in the world ratings. It is now possible, with the WBC introduction of a “franchise champion”, to have as many as six world champions in one weight division from the four major sanctioning bodies. We feel saturation point has been reached. Ratings are up to and including 8 February.

HEAVYWEIGHT

Over 200lbs/14st 4lbs

- 1 Anthony Joshua (GB), 23-1
- 2 Tyson Fury (GB), 29-0-1
- 3 Deontay Wilder (US), 42-0-1
- 4 Andy Ruiz Jr (US), 33-2
- 5 Dillian Whyte (GB), 27-1
- 6 Oleksandr Usyk (Ukraine), 17-0
- 7 Luis Ortiz (Cuba), 31-2 (2NC)
- 8 Joseph Parker (New Zealand), 26-2
- 9 Oscar Rivas (Colombia), 26-1
- 10 Kubrat Pulev (Bulgaria), 28-1

CRUISERWEIGHT

200lbs/14st 4lbs (junior heavyweight by WBO)

- 1 Mairis Briedis (Latvia), 26-1
- 2 Yuniel Dorticos (Cuba), 24-1
- 3 Arsen Goulamirian (France), 26-0
- 4 Ilunga Makabu (Democratic Rep. of Congo), 27-2
- 5 Krzysztof Glowacki (Poland), 31-2
- 6 Kevin Lerena (South Africa), 25-1
- 7 Lawrence Okolie (GB), 14-0
- 8 Aleksei Papin (Russia), 11-1
- 9 Thabiso Mchunu (South Africa), 22-5
- 10 Ryad Merhy (Belgium), 29-1

LIGHT-HEAVYWEIGHT

175lbs/12st 7lbs

- 1 Artur Beterbiev (Russia), 15-0
- 2 Dmitry Bivol (Russia), 17-0
- 3 Oleksandr Gvozdyk (Ukraine), 17-1
- 4 Sergey Kovalev (Russia), 34-4-1
- 5 Eleider Alvarez (Canada) 25-1
- 6 Jean Pascal (Canada), 35-6-1 (1NC)
- 7 Badou Jack (Sweden and US), 22-3-3
- 8 Joe Smith Jr (US) 25-3
- 9 Gilberto Ramirez (Mexico), 40-0
- 10 Anthony Yarde (GB), 19-1

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT

168lbs/12st

- 1 Callum Smith (GB), 27-0
- 2 David Benavidez (US), 22-0
- 3 Billy Joe Saunders (GB), 29-0
- 4 Caleb Plant (US), 19-0
- 5 Daniel Jacobs (US), 36-3
- 6 John Ryder (GB), 28-5
- 7 Bektier Melikuziev (Uzbekistan), 4-0
- 8 Fedor Chudinov (Russia), 22-2
- 9 Steven Nelson (US), 16-0
- 10 Juergen Braehmer (Germany), 52-3

MIDDLEWEIGHT

160lbs/11st 6lbs

- 1 Canelo Alvarez (Mexico), 53-1-2
- 2 Gennady Golovkin (Kazakhstan), 40-1-1
- 3 Jermall Charlo (US), 30-0
- 4 Demetrius Andrade (US), 29-0
- 5 Sergiy Derevyanchenko (Ukraine), 13-2
- 6 Ryota Murata (Japan), 16-2
- 7 Chris Eubank Jr (GB), 29-2
- 8 Jaime Munguia (Mexico), 35-0
- 9 Liam Williams (GB), 22-2-1
- 10 Willie Monroe Jr (US), 24-3

SUPER WELTERWEIGHT

154lbs/11st (junior middleweight by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Jeison Rosario (Dominican Republic), 20-1-1
- 2 Julian Williams (US), 27-2-1 (1NC)
- 3 Jarrett Hurd (US), 24-1
- 4 Erislandy Lara (Cuba), 26-3-3
- 5 Jermell Charlo (US), 31-1
- 6 Brian Castano (Argentina), 16-0-1
- 7 Erickson Lubin (US), 22-1
- 8 Patrick Texeira (Brazil), 31-1
- 9 Michel Soro (France), 35-2-1
- 10 Sergio Garcia (Spain), 31-0

WELTERWEIGHT

147lbs/10st 7lbs

- 1 Terence Crawford (US), 36-0
- 2 Errol Spence Jr (US), 26-0
- 3 Manny Pacquiao (Philippines), 62-7-2
- 4 Shawn Porter (US), 30-3-1
- 5 Keith Thurman (US), 29-1 (1NC)
- 6 Danny Garcia (US), 36-2
- 7 Yordenis Ugas (Cuba), 25-4
- 8 David Avanesyan (Russia), 26-3-1
- 9 Vergil Ortiz (US), 15-0
- 10 Jaron Ennis (US), 25-0

SUPER LIGHTWEIGHT

140lbs/10st (junior welter by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Josh Taylor (GB), 16-0
- 2 Jose Ramirez (US), 25-0
- 3 Regis Prograis (US), 24-1
- 4 Ivan Baranchyk (Belarus), 20-1
- 5 Jose Zepeda (US), 31-2 (2NC)
- 6 Viktor Postol (Ukraine), 31-2
- 7 Maurice Hooker (US), 27-1-3
- 8 Mario Barrios (US), 25-0
- 9 Subriel Matias (Puerto Rico), 15-0
- 10 Shojahon Ergashev (Uzbekistan), 18-0

LIGHTWEIGHT

135lbs/9st 9lbs

- 1 Vasiliy Lomachenko (Ukraine), 14-1
- 2 Luke Campbell (GB), 20-3
- 3 Teofimo Lopez (US), 15-0
- 4 Gervonta Davis (US), 22-0
- 5 Devin Haney (US), 24-0
- 6 Ryan Garcia (US), 19-0
- 7 Rances Barthelemy (Cuba), 27-1-1 (1NC)
- 8 Lee Selby (GB), 28-2
- 9 Javier Fortuna (Dominican Republic), 35-2-1 (2 NC)
- 10 Richard Commey (Ghana), 29-3

SUPER FEATHERWEIGHT

130lbs/9st 4lbs (junior lightweight by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Miguel Berchelt (Mexico), 37-1
- 2 Leo Santa Cruz (US), 37-1-1
- 3 Joseph Diaz (US), 31-1
- 4 Tevin Farmer (US), 30-5-1 (1NC)
- 5 Rene Alvarado (Nicaragua), 32-8
- 6 Jamel Herring (US), 21-2
- 7 Carl Frampton, (GB), 27-2
- 8 Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov (Tajikistan), 15-0
- 9 Oscar Valdez (Mexico), 27-0
- 10 Chris Colbert (US), 14-0

FEATHERWEIGHT

126lbs/9st

- 1 Josh Warrington (GB), 30-0
- 2 Gary Russell Jr (US), 31-1
- 3 Shakur Stevenson (US), 13-0
- 4 Kid Galahad (GB), 27-1
- 5 Xu Can (China), 18-2
- 6 Tugstsogt Nyambayar (Mongolia), 11-1
- 7 Mark Magsayo (Philippines), 20-0
- 8 Jesse Magdaleno (US), 27-1
- 9 Ruben Villa (US), 18-0
- 10 Claudio Marrero (Dominican Republic), 24-4

SUPER BANTAMWEIGHT

122lbs/8st 10lbs (junior featherweight by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Emanuel Navarrete (Mexico), 30-1
- 2 Rey Vargas (Mexico), 34-0
- 3 Murodjon Akhmadaliev (Uzbekistan), 8-0
- 4 Daniel Roman (US), 27-2-1
- 5 TJ Doheny (Australia), 22-1
- 6 Brandon Figueroa (US), 20-0-1
- 7 Carlos Castro (US), 24-0
- 8 Ryosuke Iwasa (Japan), 27-3
- 9 Azat Hovhannisyan (US), 18-3
- 10 Angelo Leo (US), 19-0

BANTAMWEIGHT

118lbs/8st 6lbs

- 1 Naoya Inoue (Japan), 19-0
- 2 Luis Nery (Mexico), 30-0
- 3 Nonito Donaire (Philippines), 40-6
- 4 John Riel Casimero (Philippines), 29-4
- 5 Nordine Oubaali (France), 17-0
- 6 Guillermo Rigondeaux (Cuba), 20-1 (1NC)
- 7 Jason Moloney (Australia), 20-1
- 8 Takuma Inoue (Japan), 13-1
- 9 Reymart Gaballo (Philippines), 23-0
- 10 Joshua Greer Jr (US), 22-1-1

SUPER FLYWEIGHT

115lbs/8st 3lbs (junior bantamweight by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Juan Francisco Estrada (Mexico), 40-3
- 2 Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (Thailand), 47-5-1
- 3 Kazuto Ioka (Japan), 24-2
- 4 Jerwin Ancajas (Philippines), 32-1-2
- 5 Khalid Yafai (GB), 26-0
- 6 Andrew Moloney (Australia), 21-0
- 7 Chocolatito Gonzalez (Nicaragua), 48-2
- 8 Pedro Guevara (Mexico), 36-3-1
- 9 Francisco Rodriguez Jr (Mexico), 33-4-1
- 10 Israel Gonzalez (Mexico), 25-3

FLYWEIGHT

112lbs/8st

- 1 Kosei Tanaka (Japan) 15-0
- 2 Moruti Mthalane (South Africa), 39-2
- 3 Julio Cesar Martinez (Mexico), 15-1 (1NC)
- 4 Artem Dalakian (Ukraine), 20-0
- 5 Junto Nakatani (Japan), 20-0
- 6 Jay Harris (GB), 17-0
- 7 Angel Acosta (Puerto Rico), 21-2
- 8 McWilliams Arroyo (Puerto Rico), 20-4
- 9 Gielmel Magramo (Philippines), 24-1
- 10 Muhammad Waseem (Pakistan), 10-1

LIGHT-FLYWEIGHT

108lbs/7st 10lbs (junior flyweight by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Kenshiro Teraji (Japan), 17-0
- 2 Hiroto Kyoguchi (Japan), 14-0
- 3 Carlos Canizales (Venezuela), 22-0-1
- 4 Felix Alvarado (Nicaragua), 35-2
- 5 Elwin Soto (Mexico), 16-1
- 6 Edward Heno (Philippines), 14-1-5
- 7 Tetsuya Hisada (Japan), 34-10-2
- 8 Carlos Buitrago (Nicaragua), 32-5-1 (1NC)
- 9 Daniel Matellon (Cuba), 11-0-2
- 10 Armando Torres (Mexico), 25-18

MINIMUMWEIGHT

105lbs/7st 7lbs (mini flyweight by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Wanheng Menayothin (Thailand), 54-0
- 2 Niyomtrong CP Freshmart (Thailand), 20-0
- 3 Wilfredo Mendez (Puerto Rico), 16-1
- 4 Pedro Taturan (Philippines), 14-2-1
- 5 Daniel Valladares (Mexico), 22-1-1
- 6 Ginjiro Shigeoka (Japan), 5-0
- 7 Byron Rojas (Nicaragua), 27-4-3 (2NC)
- 8 Victorio Saludar (Philippines), 20-4
- 9 Joey Canoy (Philippines), 15-3-1 (1NC)
- 10 Simpiwe Konkco (South Africa), 19-6 (1NC)

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Neutrality amid Troubles

Author McRae's sympathies are obvious but nevertheless he does a commendable job in chronicling how a boxing gym showed the possibility of a better way for Belfast's warring factions

IN SUNSHINE OR IN SHADOW: HOW BOXING BROUGHT HOPE IN THE TROUBLES

By Donald McRae

Simon & Schuster UK, 2019
371 pages/12 b&w photos,
9 colour photos
£20.00/£9.99

The first point to be made about Donald McRae's *In Sunshine or in Shadow: How Boxing Brought Hope in the Troubles*, published last year and due out in paperback this month, is that it is very much a Donald McRae book.

Ever since his first foray into boxing writing, with *Dark Trade: Lost in Boxing* (1996), it has been blindingly obvious that Mr McRae's choice of subjects has been determined by his own background as a middle-class, white South African, along with a conflicting urge to both disavow that inheritance while at the same time using it to inform his approach to his work. Not for nothing, one might suggest, was his 2002 dual biography of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens entitled *In Black and White*.

The latter book, his most satisfying and coherent to date, was followed in 2015 by *A Man's World: The Double Life of Emile Griffith*, in which, regrettably, vital details of his subject's ring career were subsumed by the author's desire to burnish his impeccable liberal credentials by lecturing his readership on the historical and social significance of the Stonewall riots of 1969.

In his latest effort, Mr McRae has chosen to immerse himself in the murky waters of Northern Irish history via the springboard of boxing in the province in the period 1972 to 1985; that is to say, from the events of Bloody Sunday to the epic night at Loftus Road when Barry McGuigan defeated Eusebio

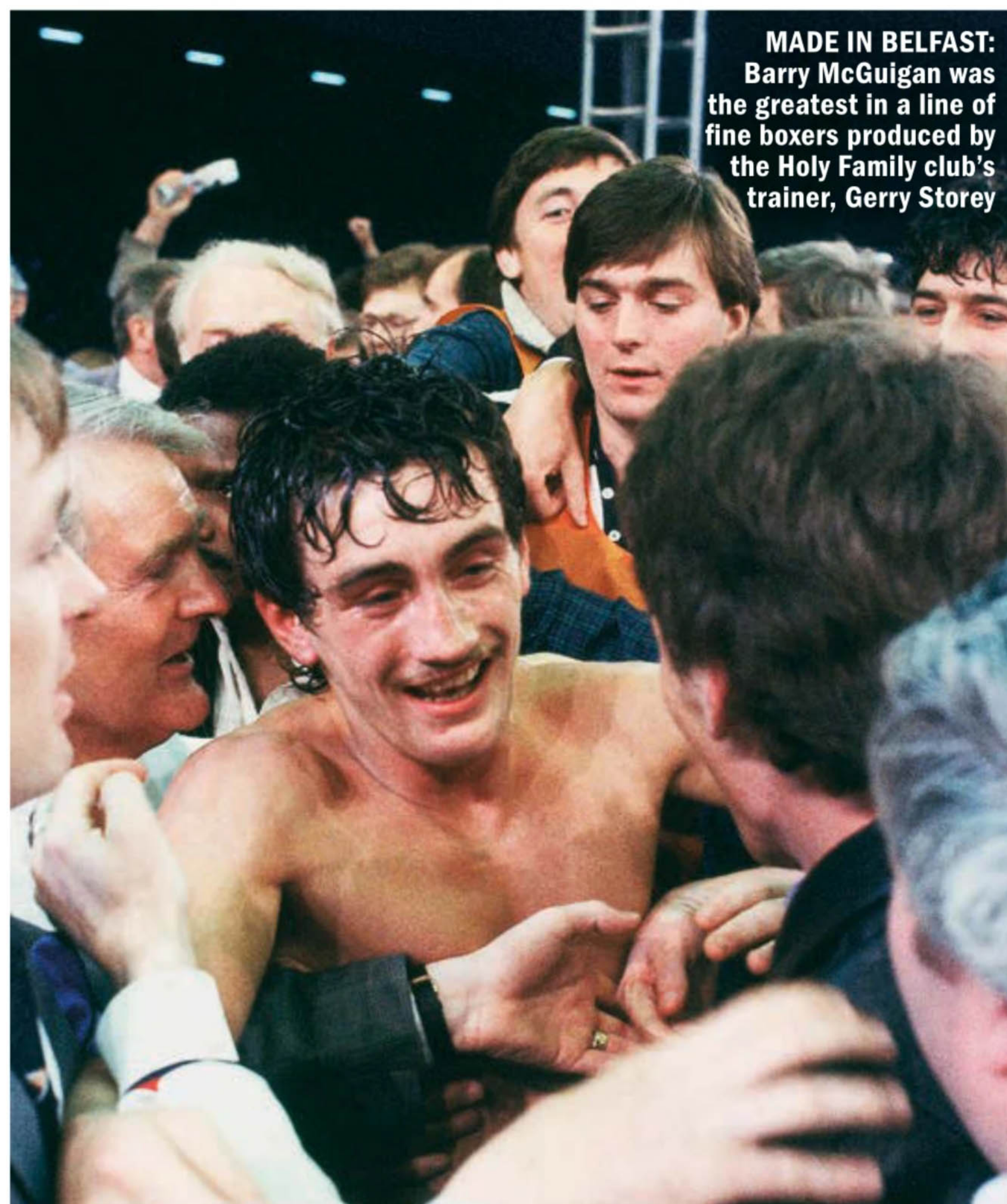
Pedroza for the WBA featherweight title.

Needless to state, Mr McRae was drawn to the period because of perceived parallels with apartheid-era South Africa; as he puts it: "Northern Ireland has always mirrored my own country" — a claim that is certainly debatable, even if this is not the place to debate it.

The author centres his story on the remarkable Gerry Storey, Ireland's leading amateur trainer, and his work at the Holy Family boxing club in the nationalist New Lodge area of Belfast. Self-effacing to an unusual degree, the Roman Catholic Storey determined to ignore as much as possible the sectarian madness then tearing the city apart, quietly insisting that aspirant boxers from either side of the political divide were welcome to come and learn the ropes at Holy Family without fear or favour.

Fortunately for all concerned, the opposing paramilitary forces were united in a strange, unspoken agreement that boxing in general, and fighters from the Holy Family in particular, should be allowed to flourish in (relative) peace, with Storey receiving unsought assurances regarding his and their safety. Thus it was that Storey could put on shows in the loyalist Shankill Road attended by IRA gunmen whose own safety, at least for the duration of the bill, was also guaranteed.

Into this unlikely scenario, Mr McRae interweaves the stories of four Holy Family boxers who went on to make their mark, not only in Northern Irish boxing but further afield: Charlie Nash, British and European lightweight champion; Davy Larmour, British bantamweight champion, Hugh Russell, Lonsdale belt-winning British bantamweight and flyweight champion; and, of course, Wee Barry himself.



MADE IN BELFAST: Barry McGuigan was the greatest in a line of fine boxers produced by the Holy Family club's trainer, Gerry Storey

Getty Images

Storey's apparent immunity was not iron-cast by any means; he narrowly escaped being blown up by persons unknown on three occasions. Nor were his fighters untouched by tragedy: Charlie Nash's brother, Willie, was among those killed on Bloody Sunday, and Larmour's father was maimed by an IRA bomb. Storey's own path also progressed from the merely unlikely to the highly improbable when he found himself requested to provide boxing tuition to both loyalist and nationalist prisoners in the notorious Maze prison.

On the whole, and as usual, Mr McRae does an excellent job in both amassing and presenting his material, even if his own sympathies are, once more, blindingly obvious. Protestants, for example, are on several occasions described as "staunch"

but there is no counterbalancing description of Roman Catholics as "devout" (with neither term ever being used as a compliment in an Irish context), and, as with his Griffith book, he again displays an enthusiasm to disappear down rabbit-holes of his own enthusiasm — in this instance, some 11 pages devoted to the 1981 hunger strikes, which had no specific impact on any of his principals.

Again, and as usual, there are some suspiciously novelistic descriptions of events, and the odd touch of McIlvanney-lite: "It was a contradiction that Charlie [Nash] was so eloquent in a dangerous language." All in all, though, a commendable effort, though perhaps naturally of more interest to younger readers unfamiliar with this most bizarre period in Irish and British boxing.



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