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SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues of Boxing Monthly are published per annum
UK annual subscription rate: £59.88
Europe annual subscription rate: £72.00
USA annual subscription rate: £72.00
Rest of World annual subscription rate: £78.00
Find current subscription offers at:
shop.kelsey.co.uk/boxing
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UK customer service team: 01959 543747
Customer service email address: subs@kelsey.co.uk
Customer service & subscription postal address:
Boxing Monthly Customer Service Team,
Kelsey Publishing Ltd., The Granary, Downs
Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Kent
ME18 6AL, UK

ONLINE

Website: www.boxingmonthly.com
twitter.com/boxingmonthlyED
facebook.com/boxingmonthlymagazine

DISTRIBUTION

Seymour Distribution Ltd.
2 East Poultry Ave., London, EC1A 9PT
www.seymour.co.uk
Tel: 020 7429 4000

PRINTING

Walstead Bicester Ltd.

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THE FIRST BELL

by GRAHAM HOUSTON

Chavez: A sorry episode

It wasn't a good look when seemingly still-strong Junior stayed on his stool against Jacobs

There is no way to sugar coat it. Julio Cesar Chavez Jr quit against Daniel Jacobs. Chavez was losing the fight but he had flashes of success. He looked much the bigger man in the ring. Jacobs was outboxing him but Chavez never appeared to have been wobbled and never looked like going down.

But, after suffering a cut over the left eye and a bloody nose in the fifth round, Chavez told his chief second, Freddie Roach, that he'd had enough. Boos rang out from all sides of the arena in Phoenix and debris was tossed at the ring when the crowd realised Chavez — who still looked strong — wasn't coming out for the sixth of a scheduled 12-rounder.

Being fair to Chavez, he had an operation to fix what we later learned was a broken nose and he reportedly had 10 stitches in the cut over his eye.

It wasn't as if he was unscathed. He'd been hit and he'd taken on some damage.

The thing is, however, that at the highest level a boxer is expected to fight through pain and to endure in the face of adversity. You could almost say that boxing history demands it.

Boxing has many examples of boxers battling on when common sense says they should call it a night. Antonio Margarito became a disgraced fighter when found to have loaded handwraps before his bout with Shane Mosley but, almost in an act of penance, he stuck it out until the closing bell against Manny Pacquiao even though one of the Mexican fighter's eye sockets had been broken.

James J. Braddock took terrible punishment against Joe Louis in their 1937 heavyweight title fight. Braddock's mouth was

horribly cut. "His face was unrecognizable," according to author Jeremy Schaap in *Cinderella Man*. Braddock's manager, Joe Gould, wanted to retire his fighter after the sixth round.

However, Braddock wouldn't hear of the fight being stopped and, "with the words that remain his boxing epitaph", told his manager he would never speak to him again if Gould pulled him out of the fight. Braddock went on to lose his title on an eighth-round knockout.

A year later, Barney Ross showed legendary courage in his one-sided welterweight title fight with Henry Armstrong. Referee Arthur Donovan twice went to Ross' corner to suggest that perhaps the badly beaten champion had taken enough punishment. However, Ross wanted what the *New York Times* called the "hollow distinction" of never having been stopped.

And so it has continued through the decades. Carmen Basilio fighting with one eye pounded shut against Sugar Ray Robinson, Muhammad Ali battling with a broken jaw against Ken Norton, Arturo Gatti and Micky Ward giving and taking the best that each could throw at each other in an epic trilogy, Chris Eubank standing up to thunderous punches, his tongue cut, before finally outlasting Nigel Benn. The list of bravery in the ring is a long one with countless examples of courage.

So, when a fighter surrenders when he still seems to have fight left in him, observers take a dim view of it.

Of course, no one can know just how badly a fighter is hurt. "I can't put myself inside his body," as trainer and pundit



Ed Mulholland/Matchroom Boxing USA

Teddy Atlas used to say.

Still, the Chavez retirement wasn't a good look. Chavez came in 5lbs overweight for his bout with Jacobs, which was to have been fought at the super middleweight limit of 168lbs. This suggested that Chavez possibly might not have prepared with Spartan-like dedication.

Afterwards, Chavez complained that Jacobs had used his head and his elbow to inflict damage, the sort of comments one associates with a sore loser. All around, it was another sorry episode in a career not unacquainted with controversy and disappointment. Even ex-fighter Sergio Mora, in the DAZN commentary, used — if reluctantly — the word "quit".

No one wants to see a boxer excessively punished in a fight. But the fans have paid their money and they expect to see a fighter give the best he can possibly give in a high-profile bout. If a fighter is losing but hasn't been badly beaten, he's expected to take his lumps. That's just the way it is and the

way it has always been in professional boxing.

There is such a thing as an honourable surrender. But there is also the unwritten code that if a boxer loses, it should be in such a manner that he can leave the ring with head held high. Or as Barney Ross' co-manager Art Winch put it after his man's valiant stand against Henry Armstrong: "He went out the way a champion should."

With Julio Cesar Chavez Jr's retirement against Daniel Jacobs in mind, is it fair that those not taking the punches should express their indignation when a boxer has, in their opinion, given up without giving his all? Promoter Jack Solomons gave his take on this after American heavyweight Lee Oma was jeered for a fourth-round collapse against Bruce Woodcock in 1948. "The fans are pretty good judges and they have two inalienable rights" Solomons wrote in the book *Jack Solomons Tells All*. "The man who pays to see professional punching is entitled to jeer or to cheer as the fancy pleases him."



PREACHER'S CORNER

by BILLY "PREACHER" GRAHAM

There's not much you can teach Tyson

Fury does things his own way but Andy Lee and SugarHill can improve his punch-leverage

I think there have always been more talented fighters than talented trainers but I think things are more imbalanced than I've ever known.

I see fighters who have competed at the very highest level as amateurs turning professional under trainers who are probably less knowledgeable than them. Good fighters need good trainers to get the absolute best out of them.

Ben Davison clearly helped Tyson Fury out tremendously in his private life and if we're honest, that's way more important than anything to do with boxing. I think Ben benefited from circumstance a little. Ben seems like a good guy and he and Tyson are clearly very good friends. He was there for Tyson when he was at his lowest and in between trainers.

Once the weight started falling off, I could understand Tyson keeping Ben on board for those early comeback fights but I couldn't fathom him going into that first Deontay Wilder fight with Ben as chief second. I'm not entirely sure how much faith he really had in Ben. I think Tyson wanted Freddie Roach and Ricky Hatton to be there in his corner for that first fight just in case something went wrong.

Tyson reminds me a little of Muhammad Ali in that he knows his own style inside out and there is very little anybody can teach him or tell him about it. He's his own man.

I'm intrigued by Tyson's decision to go and train with Javan "SugarHill" Steward

and Andy Lee at the Kronk. But I think — and hope — that I know why he's done it.

Punching power is all about leverages. There's this reasoning that tall fighters need to stick behind a jab and move, but when a tall fighter with punching power is bearing down on you it's a whole different game. It's terrifying.

I don't know SugarHill, so it's hard to talk about him too much, but I can tell a boxing man, and although I've never met Andy Lee I can tell he's the real deal.

Lee learned his craft at the Kronk Gym, which was renowned for producing tall punchers who relied on technique and leverages rather than physical strength. Look at Tommy Hearn, Mark Breland and Andy himself. Gerald McClellan was a lanky banger and Adonis Stevenson had big, long arms.

The fact that Tyson — who's a fucking giant — has chosen SugarHill and Andy Lee, who are devotees of the Kronk, shows just how knowledgeable about the sport he is.

I think Wilder will be more dangerous in this fight. It seems to me that he's finally grasped things. I know he was losing the fight with Luis Ortiz but I was actually quite impressed with him. I'm not talking about his boxing ability, I'm talking about his patience. He's very ungainly but he boxed with much more poise. I know Wilder has Mark Breland in his corner but Breland hasn't had to teach him how to punch. They've been teaching him how to be more precise.

Although I've seen nearly all Wilder's fights, I've only noticed real changes and improvements since he fought



Fury. The knockouts of Dominic Breazeale and Ortiz were frightening. Wilder knows he has that fight-ending power. So, rather than panicking and rushing to land his shots, he's realised that he needs to concentrate on getting himself into the right positions and setting traps. If he can do that, he knows he can flatten absolutely everybody.

I don't think SugarHill and Lee should try to change Tyson too much in such a short space of time. If you understand the mechanics of punching power, it should be relatively easy to add to Tyson's game.

Lee and Hill should be more than capable of doing it. Tyson has a decent right hand but it's obvious to me that without even altering his stance, it can be made at least 25 per cent better. If he can do that, he wins. Not only that, he can stop Wilder. Don't forget, though, Wilder was only perfect for two seconds of the first fight and still almost won. I can't wait.

I hope that the style Anthony Joshua used to beat Andy Ruiz Jr in their rematch doesn't become a permanent thing. I think he's a much better fighter when he's aggressive.

I predicted that boxing and moving against Ruiz would be Joshua's downfall but I'm glad I was wrong. I had people asking me if I thought that Ruiz would fuck things up by not training properly but I just refused to believe he'd blow that opportunity.

Ruiz seems a lovely guy but there are fighters all over the world giving their all for a pittance and he let himself, his trainer and the sport down. He doesn't deserve another shot.

I'm hearing Joshua might have to make two mandatory defences before he fights the winner of Fury and Wilder. Here's my advice: fuck the belts and the governing bodies off and let's find out who the undisputed heavyweight champion is.



VIEW FROM NEW YORK

by MICHAEL MARLEY

Tribute to a globe trotter

Saoul Mamby didn't pack much punching power but he was a slick boxer who would fight anywhere

Saoul Mamby, Vietnam vet, “gypsy cab” driver (cruising for fares without a licence to do so) and former world junior welterweight champion, would travel just about anywhere for a fight.

Mamby, who died in December in the Bronx at the age of 72, was a complete craftsman, a feather-fisted hitter but a slicker-than-oil ring general whose jab and footwork served him well in a 45-34-6 pro career.

I distinctly remember, when I was new in New York, enjoying chess-match-like sparring at Gleason’s Gym on West 30th Street, just steps from hallowed Madison Square Garden. Mamby hooked up with polished Harold Weston Jr and they produced high-level work that included smooth moves and slick tricks galore. The year was 1978.

As for Mamby’s travels, he fought in South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Canada, Guyana, Nigeria, Mexico, Jamaica, Curacao, France, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Zambia and Spain.

Talk about spanning the globe. Mamby could jab going forward, backwards and sideways and had the nimble feet of a ballet dancer.

Mamby, for several years a sidekick and roadwork buddy to heavyweight champ Larry Holmes, scored a mere 18 KOs but, on the other hand, was only stopped once in a mismatch that I had a hand in.

Mamby was 46 years old when he began calling me several times a day looking for a desperately needed but small payday against my rising welterweight contender (later to fight Oscar De La Hoya), Derrell

“Too Sweet” Coley, in Coley’s Maryland backyard.

I kept saying “no way”, as Mamby was half-shot at age 46, but he kept calling and calling. I agreed, but took a precaution, imploring the referee to stop it quickly if need be.

I also asked Coley, age 23, to back off if he had Mamby visibly hurt. The off-TV bout went ahead and Mamby was halted with no undue punishment.

That, I surmised, was the end of Mamby’s distinguished if unspectacular career, but I was wrong.

When he was aged 53, the California commission refused him a licence and then, at the age of 60, he fought a 10-rounder in the Cayman Islands and dropped a decision.

Many of our homebody fighters of today would do well to copy Mamby’s globetrotting spirit.

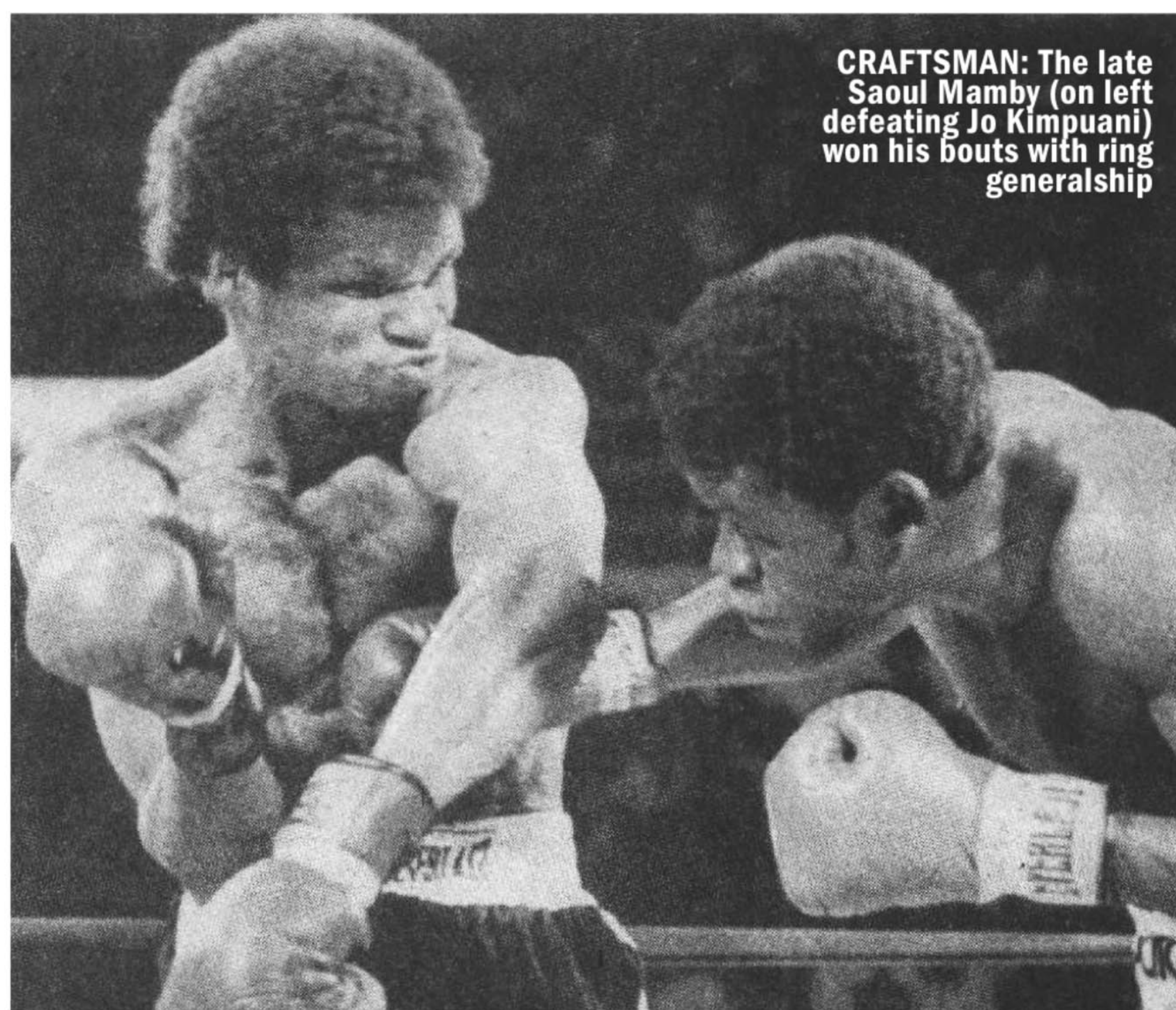
A gloved gypsy, Mamby would fight you in your living room if terms were right.

Mamby will be missed and not just by Holmes and Mamby’s family.

Another notable fistic passing happened on New Year’s Day in Buffalo, New York, as four-time world cruiserweight champion Carlos “Sugar” De Leon died of a heart attack.

Former fighter and now TV pundit Johnny Nelson has memories of the Puerto Rican — the two boxed a world title draw in Nelson’s home of Sheffield on 27 January 1990.

The cruisers, alas and alack, were and remain the Rodney Dangerfield (“no respect”) weight class, either a stopping-off spot for a world heavyweight champion or just a constant revolving door for competent but



CRAFTSMAN: The late Saoul Mamby (on left defeating Jo Kimpuni) won his bouts with ring generalship

not-so-memorable fighters a tad below true heavyweight size and stature.

Hall of Famer Evander Holyfield, who stopped De Leon in the eighth round in 1988, is a prime example of the former, and champs such as Orlin Norris are an example of the latter. Norris, who I co-managed, ping-ponged between the two weight classes but was really a very skilled in-betweeners.

The glitz and glamour of the Big Boys division is a world apart generally from the workaday reality of the cruiser class. (Nelson and Germany’s Marco Huck brought some stability to the division, which had enlarged from 190lbs to a 200lbs limit, both champs making 13 successful title defences.)

One notable exception to this was the torrid first bout between Holyfield and Dwight Muhammad Qawi, nee Dwight Braxton.

Still, please note that De Leon was no joke, going 11-5 in world title bouts. Among his other

losses were defeats by S.T. Gordon, Alfonzo Ratliff and Massimiliano Duran, plus heavies Corrie Sanders and, in the final bout for De Leon, Brian “Super Brian” Nielsen in Denmark.

Another memory-jogging name who was beaten for a world cruiser crown by De Leon was a ring rarity, a Native American boxer from Montana, Marvin Camel. If memory serves, Camel is a member of the Blackfoot tribe.

Lest we forget, De Leon also scored a nationally televised stoppage over Muhammad Ali upsetter Neon Leon Spinks.

With a final pro mark of 53-8-1, 33 KOs, let it be said that this “Sugar” was most times erratic but often sweet in the ring.

Had he been gifted with 25 more pounds and about three inches in added height, De Leon might’ve been a heavyweight marvel. Instead, he played the cards he was dealt.

De Leon was 60 years old.



BIG DADDY BUNCE

with STEVE BUNCE

@bigdaddybunce

True gent called it as he saw it

Boxer, ref and judge Larry O'Connell was unfairly blasted for his Lewis vs Holyfield scorecard

At the Fitzroy Lodge gym in south London, there is a picture of Larry O'Connell in action on the wall. He is lean, moving away from a punch, perfectly balanced. It's a black and white picture and, like all the old photographs on the walls, it is splashed with tiny dots of white paint. A baby-faced Mark Rowe, a child-like Cornelius Boza-Edwards, David Haye when he was 12, all have the same tiny specks of paint.

"We just leave the pictures when we paint," explained Mark Reigate, who runs the gym.

O'Connell was an exceptional amateur boxer at the Lodge, but he met exceptional men. In 1963 and 1965, he lost twice in the ABA final to Dick McTaggart. However, it is as a professional referee and judge that O'Connell is best known.

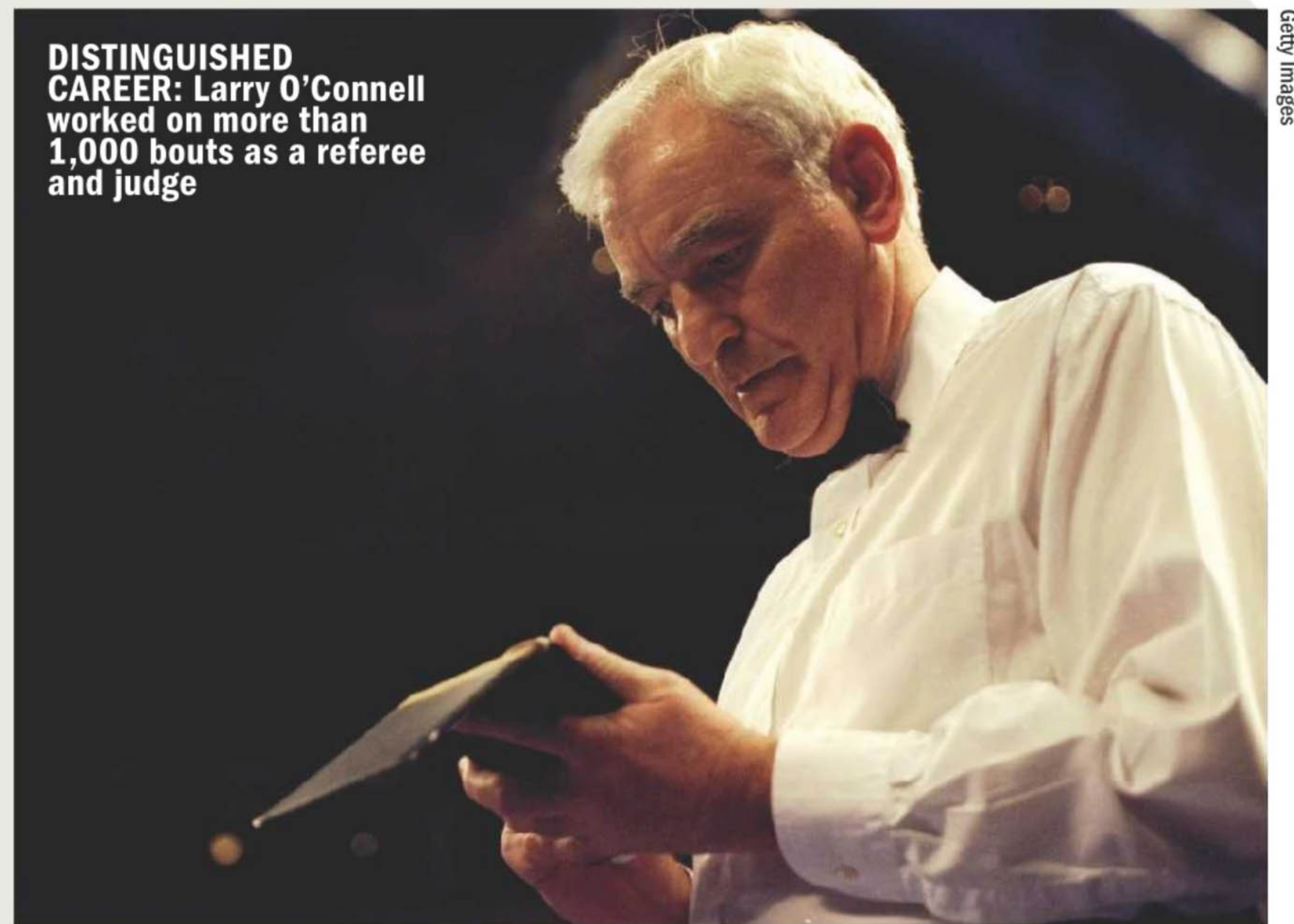
In 1999, O'Connell was judging at ringside in front of

a 21,284 crowd at Madison Square Garden in New York for Evander Holyfield against Lennox Lewis. The fight was not a great spectacle, an ugly maul with both boxers having their moments.

At the end, it looked like Lewis had done enough to unify the heavyweight titles. At ringside the immediate opinion was closer than people recalled later. Lewis deserved it. Some had it 10-2 for Lewis, but most had it a lot, lot closer. One judge went for Lewis by three rounds, one judge went for Holyfield by three rounds and Larry came in with a drawn verdict. There was bedlam, chaos, nastiness, accusations and the FBI, the president and just about everybody was going to investigate.

"I handed my slip in at the end of each round," O'Connell said. "I feel sorry for Lennox — I scored it as I saw it but my overall impression was that Lennox had won." That declaration confused some

DISTINGUISHED CAREER: Larry O'Connell worked on more than 1,000 bouts as a referee and judge



Getty Images

people, when in reality it was just an honest observation.

Larry was crucified at the boxing cross. The referee Harry Gibbs, who died later that year, telephoned Larry. Gibbs, remember, had been lashed to the same bloody boxing cross after raising Joe Bugner's hand in his epic fight with Henry Cooper. Gibbs knew a thing or two about being hated and hunted.

"Harry told me: 'You have to call it how you see it and that is that.' I needed that chat," said O'Connell. The FBI investigation of the bad decision — that was all it was — went quiet and Larry went back to work.

The aftermath of the decision in that New York fight was vicious, stupid at times, and

Larry came under serious fire from people who had not seen the fight live and had never previously had to pass judgement on a man scoring a title fight.

Frank (now Kellie) Maloney called for O'Connell to be banned for life. There were false claims, and like all false claims in the boxing business they are hard to correct and erase. Frank Warren, who disagreed with O'Connell's score, came to his defence.

"Larry is one of a handful of world-class officials we are lucky to have and I feel the criticism he has come under is a disgrace," Warren said.

Here is a tiny piece of forgotten boxing news: Two fights and 16 months later, O'Connell was the referee when Lewis stopped Frans Botha in London. "They gave me a bit of stick, not much," O'Connell told me that night. He smiled as he said it.

Larry worked on over 1,000 fights, shared a ring with the finest fighters during his distinguished 30 years as a referee, a gentleman moving with grace and style on both sides of the ropes. Larry O'Connell was 81 when he died in the final hours of 2019, too late to be part of any list of the great sporting dead. Pity. Adios.

THE BIG QUESTION

If you had one wish for boxing in the decade ahead, no matter how far-fetched it might seem, what would it be?

MARK BUTCHER: I'd like to see regular "Matchroom vs Queensberry" cross-promotional events, pitting leading contenders and prospects from the rival camps against one another. A team format could deliver spicy lower key match-ups as well as meatier fights like Whyte-Dubois, Buatsi-Yarde down the line. Eddie Hearn and Frank Warren's pre-and- post-fight exchanges could be as riveting as the contests themselves. It would give British fans the best fights available at all levels. Dream on.

LUKE G. WILLIAMS: The abolition of day-before weigh-ins, the destruction of the four main sanctioning bodies and stricter bans for drugs cheats would all be on my wish list. However, if I could make one change I would reduce the number of weight classes from 17 to nine (the eight traditional weight classes, plus cruiserweight). At a stroke, such a move would reduce the number of world champions by almost half and ensure the nine remaining weight classes would be incredibly competitive.

DANNY FLEXEN: I want a genuine supercard, reminiscent of Don King's 1990s shows, and one that transcends promotional and broadcast boundaries. It would feature Anthony Joshua vs the Deontay Wilder-Tyson Fury II victor, Canelo vs Callum Smith, Errol Spence vs Terence Crawford, Josh Taylor vs Jose Ramirez and Vasilij Lomachenko vs Gervonta Davis. It could even be a split-venue event (earlier fights in the UK, later bouts in the US) with the consensus best commentators and presenters.

FURY'S

The Gypsy King says he wants to KO Wilder this time but, RON BORGES warns, that could be the wrong mindset against a puncher who needs just two seconds out of 12 rounds to get it right

BACKSTORY: Fury feels he's already proved he's the true king and plans to leave nothing to doubt in the Wilder rematch

What will determine the outcome of the **Tyson Fury-Deontay Wilder** heavyweight championship rematch at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas on 22 February is the answer to a classic question only asked in rematches such as this one.

It is not the universal boxer vs puncher debate, although much will be made of that and, to a certain degree, it will play a significant role in deciding the outcome.

The more significant question is which of the two can and will most significantly improve upon his performance of 14 months ago?

Will it be the surprisingly slick 6ft 9ins Fury, who controlled much of the first fight with his quick and accurate jab, deft use of angles and long, octopus-like arms that tied Wilder up in knots throughout much of that confrontation?

Or will it be the one-punch knockout artist Wilder, whose power was twice on

display that night but which for long stretches was negated by an over-reliance on an obsessive effort to land the megaton bomb he carries in his right hand to the detriment of even the most rudimentary attempt to set it up with a proper delivery system?

Certainly Fury remains the lineal heavyweight champion primarily because of his supreme boxing skills. His jab negated Wilder's effort to press him for long stretches of their first fight, stopping him

TYSON FURY
GYPSY KING

DILEMMA



in his tracks and forcing him to reset time and time again. Because Wilder is not much of a counter puncher (not at all, frankly), he relies primarily on the ability to launch a straight right that can put an opponent to sleep faster than an anesthesiologist, but to do it he needs to reach a proper distance relatively unhindered. Fury did not often allow him to get in that position, boxing nearly flawlessly.

Wilder's is the kind of punch rarely seen because it needs no follow-up. It carries

DONE IT AGAIN: It's become a familiar sight to see Wilder in triumphant mode after obliterating an opponent





Top: Fury's long left jab was a problem for Wilder in the first meeting

Above: It was difficult for Wilder to connect cleanly on target for much of the contest

with it what bombastic promoter Don King used to call “double-shock power” when he spoke of Mike Tyson. To be honest, it carries more single-shot power than even Tyson’s, whose devastating knockouts most often came from combinations that landed so fast and accurately that opponents crumbled not from one bomb but a cargo load. Wilder needs no such follow-up.

The undefeated WBC champion has knocked out 41 of the 43 men he’s faced (a remarkable knockout percentage of 95.35), dropped all 43 of them at some point and remains undefeated (42-0-1, 41 knockouts), although the draw he was awarded on 1 December 2018 when he faced Fury

remains debatable.

That night, Wilder sent Fury to the canvas with a right hand to the side of the head that didn’t land flush in the ninth round and a crushing right-left combination in the 12th round that did, the latter a devastating knockdown that appeared to leave Fury out cold as referee Jack Reiss began his count. Then, as if an electric shock suddenly jolted him, Fury bolted up at the count of nine, clear-headed and able to win the final minute, although not the round that proved the most pivotal.

“How did I get up?” Fury said after the fight. “I don’t know. I had a holy hand upon me tonight that brought me back. I’m not the lineal champion

for nothing. I’m not going to lay down because I got punched in the face and got knocked down.”

Because of what even Fury conceded required divine intervention, the fight went to the scorecards and, not surprisingly, everyone saw things a little differently. Judge Alejandro Rochin scored the fight 115-111 for Wilder, judge Robert Tapper had it 114-112 for Fury and judge Phil Edwards had a 113-113 draw after giving Fury seven rounds but deservedly two 10-8 rounds to Wilder among the five he scored for him.

Rematch resonates

That unsatisfactory outcome in the opinion of many is one reason this fight figures to be the most talked-about, and arguably the most significant, heavyweight rematch since Tyson-Holyfield II, the fight that led to the ear bite heard round the world.

Fury-Wilder I attracted only modest interest, doing considerably less than a million pay-per-view buys (325,000 in the US and 420,000 in the UK), but Fury is such a master salesman, Wilder so talkative and the first fight so dramatic in its ending that the rematch figures to engender considerably more interest.

What, then, will decide it is who can do more to improve upon their first performance and that is where Fury (29-0-1, 20 KOs) would seem to be at a disadvantage. When a boxer gets knocked flat twice he can obviously improve, but the truth is Fury boxed nearly flawlessly at Staples Center that night. He kept Wilder at bay with his jab, forced him into wildly inaccurate swings and misses, and rendered him ineffective when they got close for much of the night.

It was Fury who dictated the pace and decided at what range the fight would be contested, which is critical against a power puncher like Wilder. He kept the fight in the middle of the ring and at long range most rounds as he piled up points on the scorecard and frustrations in Wilder’s head. But that may have led to an odd disbelief on his part of what the proper course should be this time.

As Fury recently said during an ESPN interview: “One thing I won’t do this time is believe there will be a fair playing field because it will not be. I clearly won that last fight. I outboxed him every round but the two he knocked me down in. How do you not lose a fight when you lose 10 rounds and win two? Clearly it’s not possible for me to get a points victory so I have to change my style, which I’m happy to do.

“It’s either going to be him or me. I’m not going to tip-tap around

boxing because we know where it got me last time, don't we? I'm definitely going to knock him out."

Later, he posted on his Instagram account a disturbing message when he said "... licking my lips thinking about @bronzebomber right hand, can't wait to taste it again, counting the days down."

This may very well be meaningless pre-fight bombast but Fury's supporters had best hope so. If there is one thing he doesn't want to do, it is to "taste it again" because if he does the taste of that right hand — and the result of it — will likely be bitter indeed.

Fury certainly understands that his best chance for victory is a rerun of the first fight in which he boxed Wilder blind and often made him look amateurish and undisciplined. In truth, the 34-year-old Wilder often looked as wild and untutored as he was when he first began boxing at the advanced age of 19. His gift is not boxing. His gift is mayhem.

Fury understands this because he is as smart a boxer as anyone in the ring today. He knows his size, 85-inch reach and long jab can, when used properly, leave opponents bewildered as to how to reach him. Certainly that's how Wilder appeared that night. But that reality is also Fury's biggest problem.

Can he go 36 minutes without making a single mistake? He couldn't the first time, in part because he began to tire from the physical effort and mental demands of moving and tying up Wilder while keeping a constant vigil at the altar of that right hand. Wilder once put it best what Fury's problem remains.

"My opponents have to be perfect for 36 minutes," Wilder once explained. "I gotta be perfect for two seconds."

Proving a point

The accuracy of that statement was reinforced in his last fight. Wilder lost at least five of the first six rounds in his rematch with hard-punching Luis Ortiz but in the seventh landed one straight right to Ortiz's forehead and Ortiz sunk to the floor like a broken beach chair and was counted out. That is the problem when facing Wilder. You seldom get to learn from your mistakes.

So if Fury actually believes he has to engage Wilder in a firefight, he is very likely making a loser's bet. In that regard, the fact that he dumped trainer Ben Davison, who helped rebuild him body and soul after he ballooned to 400lbs and was losing a personal battle with depression, drugs and alcohol after winning the lineal title from Wladimir Klitschko and then not fighting for 31 months,



is worrisome. Davison had Fury perfectly prepared for the first Wilder fight after only two low-level tune-ups yet was inexplicably replaced this time by Javan "SugarHill" Steward.

Hill is a good trainer and the nephew of Hall of Fame trainer Emanuel Steward. He knows his business. But, like Steward, he favours a more attacking style. That's fine, but not in this case.

Hill must be careful not to encourage Fury's public declaration that he can't win a decision, because the truth is it's very likely the only way he can win. The thought that he might survive a prolonged firefight — or even a brief one — is, well, nearly inconceivable.

That is where the question of who has the most room to improve tends to sway this fight towards Wilder. Fury boxed almost perfectly the first time and still went down twice and was nearly left unconscious in the final round. It is to Fury's credit that he survived and boxed brilliantly at the end, but it also illustrates his problem. There is simply far more room for Wilder to improve in a rematch than Fury.

By his own admission Wilder became anxious, impatient and frustrated in the first fight, totally abandoning the game plan of trainer Jay Deas. That's what Fury's style can do to an opponent, so Wilder must find ways to cope better with those

Top: Wilder staved off defeat in the final round when a left hook completed the two-punch combination that floored Fury

Above: Even though Fury boxed a near-perfect fight he suffered two knockdowns, this one in the ninth round

■■■■ FURY vs WILDER II



Top: It only takes one punch from Wilder, as he demonstrated in the rematch with Luis Ortiz

Above: The first fight with Ortiz went into the 10th round, three rounds longer than the second meeting and lending strength to the argument that Wilder does better in rematches

emotions, which are bound to surface at some point. Whether he can remain to be seen but he seems to at least understand the issues he must confront.

"I'll be more patient," Wilder says now. "I was overshooting my punches [loose translation meaning he was often missing badly]. I was too anxious. My emotions got the best of me and my game plan went out the window. This time I'm going to knock Fury out. Point blank. Period. I'm not worried about what anybody says. I'm proven."

While true, what is also proven is that Wilder fought in much the same

often fruitless style against Ortiz. He didn't use his jab effectively and seemed to be waiting, waiting, waiting to land the one shot he needed. He did, but Ortiz is not the Rubik's Cube Fury represents.

What Wilder must do is make far better use of his own long jab, which can be as much of a problem as Fury's if used properly. With the same 85-inch reach as Fury, if Wilder throws that jab with authority rather than in the lazy, often pawing fashion he did in their first fight — and for most of the night against Ortiz — it will more easily open a path for the straight right behind it that can

devastate any opponent.

That's exactly how he finished Ortiz, distracting him for a moment with his jab just enough that Ortiz moved his head right into the crosshairs of Wilder's straight right. Good night.

Tipping the balance

So while Fury cannot waver for a moment or allow himself a single distraction or instant of relaxation, Wilder does not have to be as exact. He need only improve his focus and patience and work smarter enough to dictate the pace more, thus putting Fury more often in dangerous places. Those are the issues each must confront and cope with to alter the outcome.

Can Fury box for 12 rounds without making a momentary error that can leave him on the floor? That's a very demanding set of circumstances. It is one he nearly accomplished last time but it's a razor's edge for improvement that could lead to disaster and, frankly, a very high bar to achieve. If you think not, consider the cases of Max Schmeling and Billy Conn.

Schmeling knocked out Joe Louis in the 12th round in 1936. Two years later, Louis broke him apart in less



than a round. Conn nearly outpointed Louis in 1941 before deciding unwisely to go for a knockout in the 13th round and getting stopped. Five years later, after the end of World War II, their rematch ended the same way but Louis needed only seven rounds to break the slick boxer down and knock him out. In both cases, their margin for error and road to victory were narrower than Louis' and they paid for it the second time around.

That, in the end, is what will decide this fight and from this vantage point, Wilder seems to be in the more enviable position because there is vastly more he can improve upon than Fury can. The latter's margin for error is all but nil, as Ortiz and 40 other opponents learned the hard way. While Fury's minions claim they saw many flaws in Wilder that Fury can expose, Wilder raised a good point in that regard.

"No one is perfect in a fight," Wilder said. "If they seen so much, why didn't they take the rematch immediately? I was the one demanding a rematch as soon as possible. I'm only getting better."

How much Wilder can improve at 34 is debatable but one thing is not. His track record in rematches indicates he, like Louis, learns from his mistakes.

Bermane Stiverne went the distance with Wilder when they first



met, losing a decision and the WBC title to him. Two years later, Wilder knocked him out in barely two minutes.

Ortiz lasted into the 10th round with Wilder and hurt him badly several times before succumbing in their first fight. In the rematch 18 months later, he won the early rounds but never hurt Wilder and ended up getting cold-cocked in the seventh from one punch.

That is something Tyson Fury must remember every minute he spends in the ring on 22 February. He must remember history shows Deontay

Wilder is more dangerous the second time he sees you. If that holds true again "The Gypsy King" may be in for a difficult night... and a shorter one than he expects.

This is really a toss-up. Wilder is so flawed that one can certainly see Fury again outboxing him. But he only needs to be right once where Fury must be right all night. Billy Conn couldn't do it twice to Joe Louis and I don't think Fury will against Wilder. That's why I'm picking Wilder by eighth-round knockout at a time when he will be trailing badly on the scorecards.

Top: Bermane Stiverne was down and out in the opening round of his rematch with Wilder

Left: Wilder won practically every round but couldn't get Stiverne out of the fight inside the distance when they first met

THE REMATCH

FOCUS ESSENTIAL: While Fury presents a serenely confident image to interviewers there is universal accord that he cannot afford a lapse in concentration



IT'S TYSON, BUT WITH A CAVEAT

Boxing insiders' poll favours Fury but, as MICK GILL discovers, Wilder's right-hand equaliser has the experts concerned

Barry Jones (former WBO junior lightweight champion; ringside analyst): I think **Fury** by two or three points on the cards, in a very similar fight. I expect we'll see an even better version of Tyson this time. He's had another two fights and come through the adversity of those horrific cuts. Knowing Wilder carries the arsenal to hurt him, he'll be more, fearful and, as a consequence, even sharper. He also knows he has the technical tools to stand Wilder on his head.

Wilder has the greater scope for improvement from the first fight, mind. Given he has the power to put any heavyweight to sleep, Wilder must know he needs to start faster but failed to implement that in the rematch with Ortiz. He doesn't seem to learn. If he allows Fury to get comfortable early, Tyson will lead him a merry jig.

That said, Wilder will have some successes. As a non-puncher myself, I know how hard it is to have to stay focused for the full 36 minutes. Though Wilder is technically poor, he's very brave, always prepared to put it all on the line and have a firefight. That makes him a dangerous animal. However, the best version of Fury does a job on the best version of Wilder.

Dave Coldwell (trainer/manager): This is soooo hard! I expect Fury to comfortably outbox him but, with Wilder, all it takes is one split-second lapse of concentration. It's irrelevant how widely he's been outboxed. Wilder looks shit but one single, clean right hand is all he needs to get the job done. Fury had two lapses in the first fight, remember, and 12 rounds is a heck of a long time. Wilder is capable of beating anybody because of that back hand.

Another concern is his change from Ben Davison, who understands Tyson's unorthodoxy, to Javan Hill, who's more textbook. If Tyson becomes more conventional, he might be easier to hit and present Wilder with more chances. I pick

Tyson on points, provided he concentrates fully for all three minutes of every round, but it's not with 100 per cent conviction.

Anthony Farnell (trainer): I believe **Fury** has got Wilder's number. Before the first fight, he'd been out of the ring for a long time, had only a couple of run-outs against poor calibre, yet still comprehensively outboxed Wilder. He definitely deserved the decision, though the knockdowns he suffered made it closer. This time Tyson will have had far more training. He'll not let his weight drop too low so will have more strength and will win by late stoppage.

Billy Nelson (trainer): **Wilder** stops Tyson this time. If the best Tyson Fury turns up, he boxes the head off Deontay but Tyson didn't look himself in his last start against Wallin. He got hit far too often and Wilder just needs to land once to hurt you. Boxing's not a sport where you can just turn it on, then turn it off. Consistency is crucial at the highest level.

Ashley Theophane (former British super lightweight champion): I go with **Fury** to stay away from those power shots and outbox Deontay again. Last time, Tyson was compromised by the three-year layoff. This time, he should turn up at his absolute best. Thirty-six minutes is a long time but Sugar Hill is a good coach and he'll get Tyson to stay away. Though Tyson doesn't look good in mark-time fights, he always comes alive when it matters.

Carl Frampton MBE (former two-weight world champion): I expect an even better fight with Wilder being a lot more aggressive, a lot more gung ho, in the rematch, now that he knows he can hurt Fury. But I thought Fury won the first fight by a mile and this time I expect a repeat with **Fury** rightfully receiving the decision.

Carl Froch MBE (former unified super middleweight champion): It's flip of a coin. Will Fury prevail with his fuck-around tactics or can Wilder catch him early? I expect Fury to repeat the tactics that beat Klitschko and frustrated Wilder first time. He's a big, heavy, awkward messer. But that shock element won't be there any more, the arms behind the back, the sticking the tongue out.

This time, Wilder will know what he's getting. I expect Deontay to start earlier, get his range and throw more frequently. You can never write Tyson Fury off because he's three stone heavier but I expect **Wilder** to chin him.

Colin Hart (Hall of Fame journalist): I see this going similarly to Wilder's second fight with [Luis] Ortiz, a tactical rather than exciting affair. Both know exactly what the other will try to do. It's down to who executes their plan better.

I expect Tyson to fiddle him again and be a mile ahead on points but he'll not knock out Wilder if he couldn't knock out Otto Wallin. Wilder will have learnt more, improved more, from the first fight.

Over 12 rounds, Fury has to leave at least one loophole and, this time, I expect **Wilder** to capitalise, probably around rounds nine and 10. It's conceivable that Fury will get up from the canvas but he'll not survive, won't avoid the explosion.

Darren Barker (former IBF middleweight champion): **Fury** wins on points. Bar the knockdowns, he completely dominated the first fight. He's all wrong for Wilder and has a far better boxing brain. Cuts aside, Wilder only has one chance and that's to land that nuclear right hand flush. Deontay won't have changed from the first fight. He can't outbox Tyson to win on points. Most rated heavyweights have the ability to beat Wilder. Tyson will step back, take the sting out of his shots and school him. ▷

THE REMATCH

PATIENT: Wilder knows that even if he's behind on points it takes him only one punch to bring down an opponent, and he has 12 rounds in which to land the big bomb



Dom Ingle (trainer): Fury. Points. Though Wilder has knocked out everybody with that back hand, he seldom looks any good before he lands it. Of all the heavyweights, Tyson is best equipped to avoid it. He's tricky, doesn't allow opponents to settle. With Wilder, you only have to focus on one thing and, even if Wilder does connect, Tyson proved he's capable of rising from the floor.

No one gave Fury a chance first time because of his lay-off compared against Wilder's activity. Yet, even though he wasn't in the best place mentally, he still deserved the victory in most eyes. Tyson's a very smart fighter, an adjuster. Provided he rolls up in shape, he wins.

Dom Negus (trainer): Tyson. Last time, he took a huge gamble. This time, he'll be sharper, better conditioned for 12 rounds and even more confident.

The best way to prepare to face Wilder would be in a Bermondsey pub. He throws one shot from his knees, the next one from behind his head. No doubt he'll be targeting Tyson's brows, legally or illegally. Though I expect Tyson to be even more dominant, we'll all be on the edge of our seats until the last second of the last round. I'm really looking forward to it.

Duke McKenzie MBE (former three-weight world champion):

It's a really intriguing fight for a number of reasons. The drawn decision was very

controversial but I actually thought it was just. Though Tyson was a million miles ahead, those heavy knockdowns allowed Wilder to pull it back.

Fury has the tools and psyche to infuriate anybody, force them to fight uncharacteristically, but he can't get inside Wilder's head. Wilder has the patience of a saint and knows he only has to catch anyone once to put their lights out.

It'd be great for boxing if Fury wins because he's a natural-born entertainer but the smart money has to be on **Wilder** to close the show inside 10 rounds. He'll not stand for Fury's antics.

Brian Lawrence (trainer): I fancy **Wilder**. Fury put up an amazing performance first time and probably got robbed, but Wilder is such a dangerous puncher. It only takes one slip-up and you're a goner.

Technically, Wilder is one of the worst heavyweight champions ever — which is strange given his trainer [Mark Breland] was so polished — but that right hand isn't just freakishly powerful, it's seriously quick. Man's gonna land!

Dereck Chisora (former heavyweight title challenger): I can see another **draw!** The first fight was a perfect draw. Though Fury was winning easily, the knockdowns changed it. Wilder turned the fight in a split second. Credit the man. Both will be better prepared, so I expect an even better fight.

Anthony Crolla (former WBA lightweight champion): **Fury** will have to endure a few rocky moments — might have to get off the floor again early on because Wilder brings mega power — but should come through on points. He's such a clever back-foot boxer, picking and poking, making opponents fall short.

I see him touching Wilder all night long, keeping him at bay, but the suspense will make it very exciting. We all know what can happen when the Alabama slammer connects clean. For me, Luis Ortiz is the best heavyweight on the planet technically but Wilder still managed to find him!

Glyn Rhodes MBE (trainer): **Fury**, definitely. He suffered a horrible cut in his last fight with the Swede and changing gyms is also a worry, but he's done that successfully several times before.

Tyson's by far the better boxer. People underestimate how good he is. His size, jab and movement are exceptional. What's Wilder got? Bar the punch, he's very limited; chucks shots off the floor. Wild by name and nature. And I don't like him. Claiming he "wants a body" on his record brings disrepute to our noble sport.

James Cook MBE (trainer): I expect **Wilder** to win by late stoppage. I just think he didn't take the first fight very seriously, didn't expect Fury to be ready. If Wilder stands off, he knows he'll get outboxed but not hurt. Knowing what Fury brings, Wilder

will be prepared to take more bumps to land the equaliser. It's not good for Tyson to switch his coaching team six to eight weeks before the fight. These American coaches are a different kettle of fish and it's not enough time to properly adjust.

Jay Harris (European flyweight champion): **Fury** will win quite wide on points, then have a crack at AJ, the fight everyone wants to see. Tyson's the better all-round boxer. Even allowing for the knockdowns, I thought Fury won in LA. We all know Wilder brings incredible power but I don't see him connecting with it. Wilder has no boxing ability, really. Tyson will move around him and he won't know what the hell is going on.

Johnny Nelson (former WBO cruiserweight champion, Sky TV pundit): **Fury** cops the decision because he's technically the far better boxer and Wilder has shown he can be outboxed many times. Wilder just might be the hardest puncher in heavyweight history but, provided Tyson exercises due caution, he wins well. He already knows the extent of Wilder's power and how to negate it. If he's sharp and smart, he'll get the job done.

Joe Gallagher (trainer): Wilder will go in full of confidence knowing that his back hand has always got him out of trouble. By contrast, Tyson is coming off horrific cuts and is experimenting with a new training camp. And we know if Wilder connects flush, Fury will go over. Can Tyson stay away for 36 minutes again? Can Wilder fathom the Fury puzzle? Questions, questions.

Ortiz provided the blueprint to beating Wilder but switched off and Wilder only needs a split second. Deontay will have a better chance if he throws more uppercuts. But I predict that **Fury's** boxing skills will be too much and he'll prevail on points. He's got good ringcraft and judges distance well, so will keep offsetting Wilder, denying him a sitting target.

Joe Joyce (unbeaten heavyweight): I go with **Wilder** by stoppage. His track record shows he usually wins his rematches quicker. That said, I thought Tyson beat him hands down in 2018 but, with it being in the US, Wilder got lucky.

But can Fury go 12 rounds again without getting tagged clean? It's a long time and, though Wilder's level of boxing isn't amazing, he's very patient. In the rematch with Ortiz, he was widely outboxed but, out of nowhere, lined his opponent up and landed a massive shot. If Fury stays focused, it's possible he outboxes Wilder. But will he be given the decision in the US, against an American favourite?

Jamie Moore (former champion, trainer): I think **Fury** wins handily. First fight he entered with less ring time and in worse shape but still deserved to get his arm raised. Though he didn't look great in his most recent fight, Tyson always raises his

level against elite opposition. I doubt he'll make the mistake of getting over confident in the later stages again. Even if he does get tagged clean, he has the courage and nous to muddle through.

Barry McGuigan MBE (former WBA featherweight champion, promoter): I can't give you a definitive answer. I thought Tyson did enough to merit the decision first time and there's every chance the rematch will be a replica. Will Tyson get a fair decision against the big American star in Vegas? He'll need to win well, which entails throwing more shots and placing himself into the danger zone.

Fury should win by dominating from distance with his guile and finesse but you just can't write off Deontay Wilder. He hits so goddam hard and with that 83ins reach can land from the back of the room. As he showed against Luis Ortiz twice, lose concentration for a split second and it's "Bang! Good night, Vienna!" It's genuinely pick 'em.

John Conteh MBE (former WBC light-heavyweight champion): I definitely side with **Fury**. He brings a better all-round game, has more talent. It seems he's taking the game more seriously since that long lay-off and, in his last but one fight [a second-round demolition of Germany's Tom Schwarz], he showed greater aggression, really took the guy out.

Wilder is definitely improving but Fury has proven several times that he absorbs a good shot. He brings a very positive mental attitude. He'll use all his assets — his height, chin, talent and power — to mess Wilder around and win a decision.

Martin Bowers (trainer): **Fury** should win. He's too good technically. He's already done 12 rounds with Wilder so knows the importance of maintaining focus and concentration. The upheaval of trainers is a concern, but hopefully Tyson will develop the same relationship with Sugar Hill that he had with Ben Davison, who deserves a lot of props for restoring Fury to full health.

Wilder brings nothing new to the table and if Tyson decides to box southpaw for 12 rounds, Wilder wouldn't have a clue. But Deontay's record speaks for itself. He's a worthy champion and a very exciting, very explosive one. Once that first bell rings, don't put the kettle on!

Look, a fighter might upset a boxer first time round, but they seldom repeat it. Duran v Leonard is a prime example.

Dillian Whyte (WBC mandatory heavyweight contender): **Tyson Fury** will win easy this time because he's in a better place and better shape than 14 months ago. He now knows he can take Wilder's power so will enter with more belief. He's a good technical fighter.

The cuts incurred in his last fight are a big, big worry — Tyson should have waited longer because only time can truly heal —

but it's part of being a professional boxer. You have to deal with it and plough through.

If I were fighting Tyson, I'd apply pressure very early, batter his body, but Wilder doesn't seem the most confident. He has bad balance and no technical ability.

Liam Smith (former WBO junior middleweight champion): **Fury** comfortably on points. I think the fight will go the same as last time but, having sampled Wilder's right hand, Fury will take less risks in the rematch. He'll need to keep his head out of the way, though, 'cause I doubt he'll be able to get up again if he's caught as clean on the chin as he was last time.

Brian Magee (former WBA super middleweight champion): My money is definitely on **Fury** to do it this time. He's really matured of late, become far more confident and, at 31, he's not even reached his prime as a heavyweight. His body is still maturing and he'll get even stronger. Now's his time to really shine.

Of course Wilder has a puncher's chance, but the boxer usually beats the fighter in top class. When Deontay did land right on the button last time, Tyson still got up. Fury has more assets in the bank and more upstairs. He wins this fight with his brain.

Matt Macklin (three-time world middleweight title challenger, promoter): Last time, I think Wilder seriously underestimated Fury. He'll take him far more seriously this time. Also, he made the mistake of chasing Fury around. This time, expect him to be far more patient, to find his range and timing before detonating.

I've never seen power like Wilder possesses. Luis Ortiz outboxed, outmanoeuvred and, at times, outfought Wilder but, one lapse: "Over!" That said, I expect **Fury** will win. He'll be a lot better prepared physically because he entered the last one with just two gentle public spars following that three year lay-off. He'll systematically outbox Wilder but can't afford any lapses.

Glenn McCrory (former IBF cruiserweight champion): I don't like to pick against my pal Tyson but at some stage over a championship fight, I think **Wilder** will get to him, if I'm honest. Tyson has done well to keep himself in shape — all praise to him — but 12 rounds is a very long time to survive against a beast capable of flattening him with just one punch at any time. Wilder is just ruthless.

It's a mark of Tyson's confidence and courage that he's prepared to face a prime Wilder for a second time but I expect Wilder to go for it furiously from the start, similar to how he came out for the final three rounds last time. Though Tyson's a good mover, Deontay's very patient and eventually I fear he'll force Tyson to fight with him.

FINAL SCORE: WILDER 8, FURY 22, UNDECIDED 2

KING OF CHARISMA

An ebullient and entertaining Tyson Fury tells LUKE G. WILLIAMS that life is fantastic and that he's become a superstar in the US. He also says he'll flatten Deontay Wilder in two rounds – but it's difficult to know when the big man is being serious



Tyson Fury has always been something of an enigma. By turns charismatic and unpredictable, playful and perplexing, the Gypsy King is more than capable of swinging between profundity and flippancy in the same breath.

Highly elusive in the ring, outside of it Fury's real personality is equally hard to pin down.

He has a tendency to tease, tantalise and befuddle the media in much the same way he has the majority of his opponents in a 29-0-1 professional career that began in 2008, the only blemish being that contentious draw against Deontay Wilder in December 2018.

As he counted down the final hours before the first major press conference

ahead of his eagerly awaited rematch with Wilder at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas on 22 February, Fury spoke to *Boxing Monthly* by phone from Los Angeles. He proved to be in a typically mercurial yet undeniably entertaining mood.

"Fire away, mush!" he declared ebulliently before the start of the interview, during which it was never quite clear when the 31-year-old lineal heavyweight champion of the world was being serious or when he was joking.

A case in point? His excited declaration that under his new trainer Javan "SugarHill" Steward "we've brought in a new training method", namely "a Japanese sensei to help with my focus and help with my senses and reawaken my senses all the time.

"We are training with blindfolds on to reawaken the senses. It's all good, all new stuff."

The mental image of the Gypsy King boxing blindfolded is certainly an arresting one.

It's also a declaration that, in its fanciful nature, is reminiscent of Muhammad Ali's famous insistence to *Sports Illustrated* in 1961 that he was training underwater ahead of his ninth pro fight against Alex Miteff. (A tale "The Greatest" later admitted was a publicity-seeking invention).

Many see Fury as the natural successor to Ali, both in terms of his personal charisma and his willingness to attach his name to a wider cause. In the case of Ali, it was the anti-Vietnam war movement; with Fury it's his crusade to raise awareness of mental health issues. ▷



TYSON FURY ■■■■■

SUPERSTAR: Fury says he has had a fantastic reception in the US, with colourful outfits no doubt part of his appeal

TOGETHER AGAIN: While Fury always has plenty to say, Wilder showed he, too, can make point at the Los Angeles press conference that officially launched the rematch



Getty Images

Although no heavyweight boxer's fame or renown could ever match that of the almost universally beloved Ali, Fury certainly enjoyed a high-profile 2019 as he embarked on his new promotional agreement with Top Rank.

Guided by promoter Bob Arum, Fury built his brand in the United States with stay-busy fights against rank outsiders Tom Schwarz and Otto Wallin, while also regularly doing the rounds of US talk shows and appearing in a highly publicised WWE wrestling event against Braun Strowman.

There is a sense now, however, that it is time for Fury to get serious again.

"They absolutely didn't prepare me for my next contest," Fury said of the Schwarz and Wallin bouts, won via a second-round TKO and a tougher-than-expected unanimous points decision respectively.

"But those fights helped build my profile in America and I was already prepared to step into the ring with Deontay Wilder. They also gave me two things to look forward to in 2019. Overall, it was a great year, a fantastic year.

"It was one of the [best] years of my life — one that will probably never be equalled. But now I'm looking forward to this year and setting new precedents.

"I've had an absolutely fantastic reception [in the USA], I've got superstar status. Wherever I go, people want to do interviews. All the big TV shows want to get me on as a guest. You know the sort of stuff that goes

on. But I'm in training camp now. I'm here to fight and fight only."

The fact that Fury parted company with trainer Ben Davison ahead of his preparations for the Wilder rematch was a surprise to many — although it is worth remembering that in the immediate aftermath of the Wallin contest in September, Fury's father John questioned his son's training set-up, telling BT Sport that "if he keeps hold of that team, that whole team, they will cost him his career. Ben Davison and everyone".

In conversation with *BM*, Fury neatly sidestepped an enquiry about why he split with Davison while exuding only positive vibes about his new coach.

"Me and SugarHill are training unbelievably well together," he said of his relationship with the nephew of the great Emanuel Steward. "We go together like salt and pepper. Training is going absolutely great."

The link-up with SugarHill brings full circle a connection with the Steward dynasty that began in 2010, when Fury spent a month training under Emanuel Steward in Detroit. Speaking in 2012, shortly before his untimely death aged 68, Steward insisted that Fury would become the world's next "dominant heavyweight".

Victory against Wilder would further validate Steward's prophecy as well as Fury's oft-stated claim to be the world's premier big man, albeit within a heavyweight landscape

that is consistently ebbing and flowing.

Fury certainly recognises the significance of once again locking horns with Wilder, 14 months on from their controversial draw at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

Indeed, it's a fight that he argues is the most significant heavyweight match-up since the 1970s.

"It's gonna be the biggest heavyweight title fight since Muhammad Ali fought Joe Frazier in the *Rumble in the Jungle* [sic]. I'm ecstatic about this rematch and I'm feeling absolutely fantastic. I cannot wait.

"I'm gunning for 22 February like a tiger that's been locked in a cage for a year and wants to get out on the open plains."

Fury admits he was impressed by Wilder's pair of stunning stoppage victories in 2019, but says that it is the "Bronze Bomber" who will be counted out come February.

"He looked absolutely fantastic. It was a dominant knockout of Dominic Breazeale and an absolutely fantastic knockout of Luis Ortiz.

"But I'm gonna knock him out in round two. Yep, you don't get paid for overtime, as Amir Khan once said, so I'm gonna knock him out in round two.

"I'll feel him out in round one and detonate my big right hand on him in round two. It'll be curtains and they're gonna need to call the Bomb Squad [the name Wilder gives to himself and his team] to evacuate him off the canvas.

“My message for Deontay Wilder is that the Gypsy King is coming out of your nightmares and into reality. I’m going to knock you out in round two so be prepared. Have your excuse-making sheet ready for after the fight.”

When asked how he will combat Wilder’s hugely destructive right hand, which twice sent him to the canvas in the first meeting between them, Fury once again adopted the persona of the joker.

“I’m going to look to headbutt his right hand and break it on me head. You know the forehead is the toughest part of the body? I’m aiming to let him hit me on the forehead with that big right hand and hopefully he breaks that hand and he won’t be throwing it much. I’ve got a head like a bowling ball.”

His light-hearted mood continued when I reminded him that the last time we spoke, ahead of the Wallin fight, when he conducted the entire interview in a faux American accent.

“My American accent is on hold at the moment,” he reassured me. “Although I’ll be speaking fluent American at the press conference.”

After entering the ring against Schwarz in Apollo Creed-style Stars and Stripes garb and adopting a Mexican sombrero and poncho for his ring walk against Wallin, Fury playfully dangled the possibility of another eye-catching entrance against Wilder, while also insisting: “I’m not going to divulge anything to you on the phone because then it wouldn’t be a secret, would it? No, not even a clue!”

Turning his attention to his frequent verbal sparring partner Anthony Joshua, Fury offered guarded praise of AJ’s rematch victory against Andy Ruiz Jr, before lobbing a verbal grenade or two at his British rival.

“I thought AJ done what he had to do [in the rematch with Ruiz]. He nicked a boxing decision, got his belts back and his life back on track and moves on to bigger and better things.

“I accepted his offer [to spar in the lead-up to the Wilder fight] but as usual he has shit himself and he is not coming over for sparring. They are disinclined to acquiesce to my request — that means they’re not coming.”

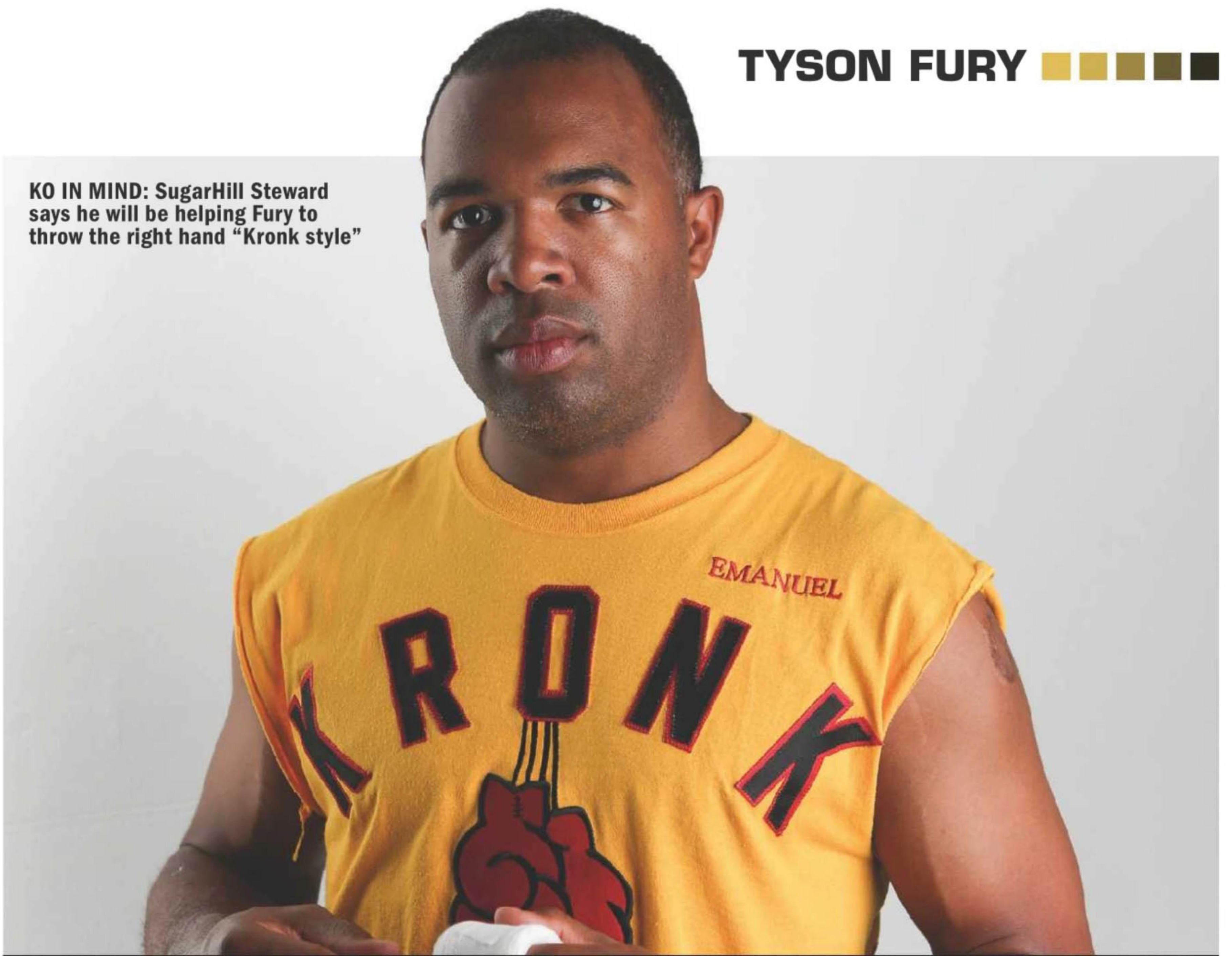
“Whether it’s this year or next year [that Fury and AJ fight] it doesn’t matter to me as long as we get into the ring together at some point.”

By the end of our interview, *Boxing Monthly* was no closer to understanding exactly who the real Tyson Fury is, but his charisma certainly cannot be denied.

It’s the sort of charisma that will likely guarantee a substantial British presence at the MGM Grand come 22 February, and Fury concluded with a message for his travelling supporters that makes it sound like he is preparing for a spell on the sun lounger rather than the most significant prize fight of his career.

“It’s going to be absolutely fantastic, so get your sunglasses out and get your straw hat on — it’s gonna be a nice holiday in Las Vegas!”

KO IN MIND: SugarHill Steward says he will be helping Fury to throw the right hand “Kronk style”



Legacy of the Kronk

Tyson Fury’s new trainer Javan ‘SugarHill’ Steward — nephew of the great Emanuel Steward — explains to LUKE G. WILLIAMS how his link-up with the Gypsy King came about

“It was one cold morning in December,” Javan “SugarHill” Steward announced in a mock portentous voice when asked how he became Tyson Fury’s new head trainer. “Well, Tyson called me and asked if I would be interested in working with him. He said Ben Davison would still be there, we’d all be a team.”

“I was excited and I was kind of shocked he called me. But happy. It made me think about the past, how we’d worked together before, how Emanuel worked with him [in 2010 Fury spent time training with the Stewards in Detroit]. He’d been part of our team. So for us to be back together again was great.”

“A week later, I called Tyson to ask him about the camp and he told me that Ben wasn’t going to be a part of it and I would have control of the whole training camp.”

Steward, who has worked with Anthony Dirrell, Johnathon Banks and Ruslan Chagaev among others, is adamant that he is not seeking to change Fury’s style.

“I’m here to help him. He wants to do some more technical things, go back to some basics. That’s what I was brought in to do, not to change him as a fighter. I’m just trying to sharpen up the tools that he does have, enhance the tools and the skills that he has.

“I’m also trying to help him get a knockout. He wants that Kronk style and he called me because of that. I’m a part of Kronk. Emanuel taught me everything about the boxing game and we had so many fighters at the Kronk who knocked

people out — Tyson wants a knockout and to throw that right hand like Tommy Hearn, Lennox Lewis, Milton McCrory. He wants to throw it Kronk style.”

Steward emphasises the close bond he has already forged with Fury since they reconnected.

“We clicked right away. He trusts me, he believes in me and I believe in myself. Training has been so easy, because he knows what he wants and he’s open to listen to me.

“We’re both free spirits. We’re serious but we like to have fun. Outside of training we play poker, we talk, we go for walks. We’re not two people sat round not talking or looking at our phones. We have conversations about things in life, what’s going on today, the past, family. We do a lot of laughing.

“Tyson has everything that Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua has put together plus things they don’t have. He’s the complete package. He also has charisma, character. He can deliver a message. When he speaks, people listen. He cares about people, their problems and their situations. He has things that are a part of his character that you can’t teach.”

And how does SugarHill think his uncle would feel about Fury returning to the Kronk family?

“I imagine him smiling. That’s all I can see. Him smiling and being so happy that I’m continuing what he left and finishing the job he started with the Kronk and with Tyson Fury to make another one of his predictions come true.”

WILDER

THE BIG MISCONCEPTION

THEY DON'T GET IT:
After years of working
with Wilder in the gym,
trainer Deas sees a
skill level in him that
others might miss



R: RECEPTION



Everyone knows the 'Bronze Bomber' can punch, but people don't realise that he also possesses a high level of boxing skill, trainer-manager Jay Deas tells LUKE G. WILLIAMS

Jay Deas and Tuscaloosa, a sleepy Alabaman city nestled in the foothills of the Appalachians, are well nigh inseparable. Rather like the 51-year-old trainer and his power-punching charge Deontay Wilder, whose career Deas has guided as both manager and trainer since the "Bronze Bomber" first laced up a pair of gloves in 2005 as a 19-year-old with no prior pugilistic experience.

Both men are Tuscaloosa born and bred, and Wilder regularly refers to Deas as his "brother". The WBC heavyweight champion has remained loyal to the man who taught him how to box throughout a remarkable amateur and professional career that has already encompassed an Olympic bronze medal and 10 defences of the green and gold belt he won against Bermane Stiverne in January 2015.

Wilder possesses a larger-than-life personality and has been known to make outrageous and controversial pronouncements, but he is a canny judge of character. The 34-year-old appreciates and values Deas' depth of knowledge of the boxing game — knowledge that has been forged over several decades, extending back to Deas' days as a student at Central High School in Tuscaloosa when he would religiously collect fight tapes and constantly talk boxing with his older brother Tommy, an experienced and respected sports writer.

Together, the Deas brothers opened the Skyy Gym in Northport, a small city adjacent to Tuscaloosa, in 1995.

Ten years later, in Deas' words: "[Wilder] walked in and I thought: 'Wow! He's tall!'"

From the start, Deas was convinced he had a special talent on his hands. "[Deontay] told me he wanted to be a boxer but, of course, I hear that every day. So I showed him a few basics and then left him alone.

"I wanted to see what he would do when he thought I wasn't watching and he actually worked even harder when he didn't know I was watching. That's very unusual. [That's when] I thought I may have something here."

Deas' incredible achievement in moulding a 19-year-old with no prior boxing experience into an Olympic medallist in less than three years, and a world heavyweight champion in less than a decade, has often been overlooked and underrated.

It's a puzzling oversight that probably owes something to the fact that Deas is refreshingly free of ego and steers clear of self-aggrandisement. He is also scrupulous in his care and desire to give credit to others

within the Wilder set-up, such as co-trainer Mark Breland, who Deas brought on board in the latter days of Wilder's amateur career.

Despite his relatively low profile, Deas harbours no bitterness or resentment — an unusual quality in a sport that sometimes seems to thrive on such negativity. Indeed, he is as far removed from the popular stereotype of the grizzled and cynical boxing trainer as it is possible to be. Fresh-faced with a youthful air, Deas possesses a keen analytical mind, honed by his former career as a television crime reporter.

He also oozes southern gentlemanly charm and displays a fierce pride in his Alabaman roots. For example, although it is seldom thought of as a boxing hotbed, he points out that there has been a proud lineage of heavyweight punchers born in the "Cotton State" — "[Earnie] Shavers, [Joe] Louis, [Evander] Holyfield and then today Deontay Wilder — all Alabama guys! All born in Alabama! Country power!"

Adept and often playful in his use of words, Deas builds a convincing and painstaking case that Wilder will emerge triumphant from his eagerly awaited rematch with Britain's Tyson Fury at the MGM Grand, Las Vegas on 22 February.

The bout will take place just three months after Wilder's win over Luis Ortiz on 23 November. Deas sees no problem with this. "The quick turnaround is perfect for Deontay as he loves staying active," Deas said. Wilder, he said, is looking forward to the rematch with Fury.

"The last time these two met, everyone was saying Deontay was the more active guy but in truth, going into Wilder-Fury I, Fury had had two fights [against Sefer Seferi and Francesco Pianeta in June and August 2018] since Deontay had last fought [in March 2018 against Luis Ortiz] so Fury was actually the more active one.

"This time Deontay will have competed most recently, by two to three months [Fury fought Otto Wallin in September], so I think that's in our favour."

Wilder's most recent performance in his rematch against Ortiz was greeted with mixed reviews; acclaim for the truly spectacular one-punch finish in round seven being offset by criticism of the fact that most felt the Alabaman lost the majority of the first six rounds.

Deas, however, disagrees with the consensus opinion, arguing that Wilder's performance was far more skilful than he has been given credit for.

"I thought Deontay was poised, precise and calculating [versus Ortiz]. It took a ▶



while to line Ortiz up because he's a great fighter, but once Deontay did, it was over.

"There are battles — the rounds in a fight — and there are wars, the final result. We didn't mind if we were down a bit losing a battle, as long as strategically Deontay was getting where he needed to get to win the war."

The simplistic perception that Wilder is merely a one-dimensional banger is something that Deas takes firm issue with, albeit without recourse to ranting and raving.

"Everyone can have their opinion and that's all well and good, it keeps it interesting," he says. "There's an old saying: 'Listen to the people in the stands and one day you'll be one of them.'"

"We have a plan, a programme and understand that many people don't see, truly see, what's taking place in the ring sometimes. Timing, spacing, footwork, positioning are all things Deontay does exceptionally well.

"[He's] very mature, he has a fantastic ring IQ and he has so much more in his arsenal than the right hand. A great jab, a vicious left hook, he punches really hard to the body, and on and on. To think of him as the guy who doesn't have skills but can punch is a false narrative that's been put out there.

"Let's face it, guys are not trying to get hit. Deontay can't just walk out there swinging because these guys are good! Fury, Ortiz and the rest at this level, they are doing all they can to avoid shots while trying to win the fight.

"Timing, spacing, distance, positioning and throwing the right punches at the right time is skill. Perhaps the best and most intricate of skills."

Turning his attention to the Fury contest, Deas is generous in his praise of the Gypsy King's performances in his two contests since he and Wilder fought to a draw in December 2018.

"I thought he showed power and finishing ability against [Tom] Schwarz and mental toughness in overcoming adversity against [Otto] Wallin. He needed those fights and both served him well."

Deas shrugs off speculation that Fury's recent split from trainer Ben Davison may adversely affect his performance in the rematch.

"I'm not privy to exactly what happened and I don't know what the make-up of Team Fury will be top to bottom, but Fury knows what he's doing in there so we're expecting the best Tyson Fury."

With the charm and good nature that characterise his personality, Deas also has some kind words for Davison.

"I like Ben and think a lot of him as a trainer and as a person. He will have a long, successful career in this sport. He's intelligent and willing to go to great lengths to give his guy the best chance to win. I was looking forward to being in the opposite corner to him.

"Sometimes things happen behind closed doors and guys part ways. I believe Tyson will always be thankful for having Ben in his life and his career.

"Guys who want to come in at the top are a dime a dozen, or more accurately a dime a billion. Guys who were there and believed in you when there is nothing, or in Fury's case, when he was at the worst point of his life, are very rare. Sometimes parting ways is a good thing but I hope they remain friends because they did amazing things for each other and together."

Despite his magnanimous attitude towards both Fury and Davison, Deas disagrees strongly with the view that Fury was the victim of an injustice on the scorecards back in December 2018.

"I thought Deontay won last time," he says with conviction. "He threw 100 more punches, landed 15 less, pressed the fight, threw the harder shots *and* scored two knockdowns!"

Deas also argues that the landscape of the last fight proves that Wilder has got a handle on Fury's idiosyncratic style.

"Fury is tricky, but Deontay scored two knockdowns not in rounds one and four, but in rounds nine and 12. That shows he was figuring Fury out from a biomechanical standpoint. [In the rematch] I think he picks right up where he left off."

Referring to Wilder's devastating victories in second showdowns with both Stiverne and Ortiz, as well as a facility in the amateurs for turning the tables on his former conquerors, Deas adds a final warning shot for the Fury camp.

"Deontay is devastating in rematches so we are very much looking forward to the biggest fight in boxing. When Deontay wins in spectacular fashion the world will know what we already know, that he's the baddest man on the planet and the true heavyweight champion of the world.

"He's the only one who is must-see TV, where you can't turn, blink, go to the bathroom, go to the concession stand, drop your cell phone... because you might miss it!"

"I'm not one to predict rounds and all that. It's cool if Deontay and Tyson want to do that because they're the ones in the ring — trainers shouldn't do that.

"But I will say we are 100 per cent confident Deontay will win and do so in memorable fashion."

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INSIDER VIEWS

All photos: Getty Images



MEANINGLESS: Suspensions of up to 12 months aren't viewed as a deterrent for fighters who (like Jarrell 'Big Baby' Miller) fail a drugs test

As boxing enters a new decade, MICK GILL gets the opinions of Josh Warrington, Tony Bellew and Ricky Hatton on the sport's key issues

What can be done to solve boxing's escalating PED problem?

JW: The only way it'll stop is if you have a straight life ban as soon as they're caught. I've been out for 12 months with injuries so these six-to-12-month bans [similar to the suspension imposed by the WBA on Jarrell Miller] are meaningless. Also, they should be

fined 50 per cent of what their wage [purse] would have been. It's up to fighters and their trainers to keep up to date with the UKAD [UK Anti-Doping] and WADA [World Anti-Doping Agency] directives. We keep saying it, but it's a matter of time before we have a ring death at the hands of a drugs cheat.

TB: For me, there's a huge difference between failing [a test] for something you carelessly

bought over the counter and someone injecting anabolic steroids. You still need to be punished for the former, a six-to-12-month ban, but for steroids it's an immediate life ban.

RH: More random testing and far harsher penalties. Far too many are at it and only a fraction are getting nicked. It's seriously harming the image of our honourable sport.

To what extent does the ever-increasing interest in MMA/UFC pose a threat to boxing's fanbase?

JW: I don't see a problem. Most fans take some interest in other combat sports. There's a lot boxing can learn from MMA/UFC. If a fighter is sparked out in the UFC, they're quickly back into contention. That seldom happens in boxing. Also, UFC doesn't have a zillion different titles at the same weight.

TB: They're completely different sports with different fanbases, different markets. I'm a fan of both but at UFC when nothing's happening, you'll get some donut randomly screeching: "Whoooooaaaa!" UFC is more like American-style pro wrestling. Each to their own. The sports can co-exist.

RH: They've always been separate sports in their own right and I think they always will be. I certainly don't see the rise of MMA as a threat. Good luck to them. I'll tell you one thing, there's far more even fights going on in a UFC promotion than on a boxing card. The one thing I dislike is licensed boxers trying their luck in UFC and MMA. They don't belong in it.

To what extent have the major sanctioning bodies' world championship belts become insignificant?

JW: I think the major sanctioning belts are still coveted by the fighters. It's all the Inter-Continental, Regular, "interim", Gold, Silver, Diamond nonsense that fans don't understand. They take away what being world champion is all about. In my division, I'm the only IBF champion but the WBA have three champions and the WBC two. So how can you possibly go about having unification matches? It makes a mockery of the sport. Before we know it, everyone in the top 15 will have a belt.

TB: They've become less significant but not yet insignificant. Fighters want to say they were a world champion. As a kid coming through, I was hellbent on becoming WBC world champion, that green belt worn by legendary figures such as Ali, Tyson, Sugar Ray Leonard, Mayweather and my all-time favourite Roy Jones Jr. However, the moment I'd won and successfully defended it, I was only interested in chasing the mega money, regardless of titles. The fans know who the

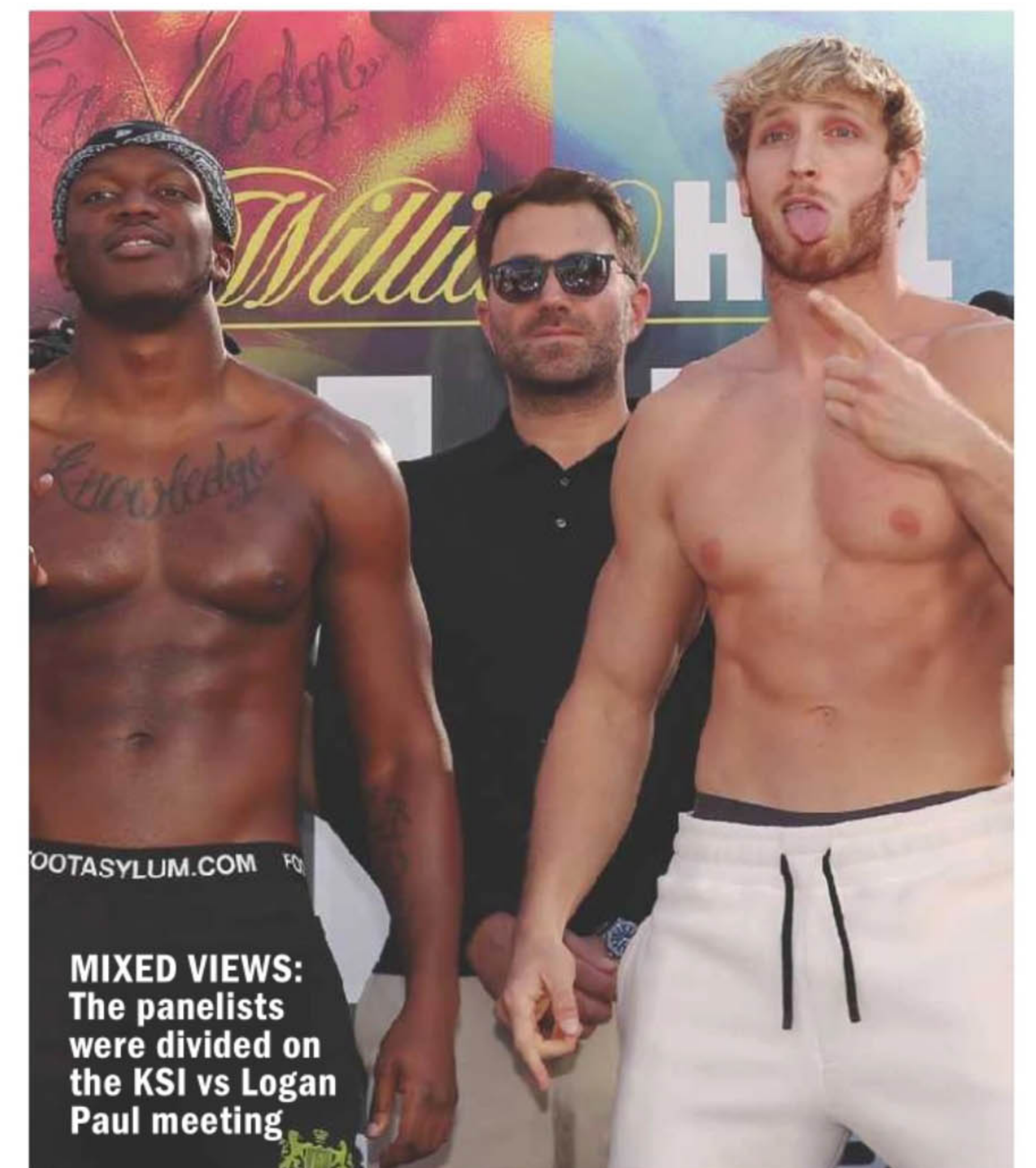
real champions are, they aren't fooled by "interims" and "regular" belts.

RH: I know the traditionalists don't like it and will beg to differ but boxing is a business and the fighters do it to get a wage. Consequently, the more belts there are, the more money there is for the fighters. However, the ranking systems need to improve to prevent some of these farcical world championship fights that compromise the sport's credibility. We need more meaningful title fights. Too many so-called champions today don't want proper fights, they just want to parade with a belt.

The recent fight between YouTubers KSI and Logan Paul attracted a higher PPV take-up than Ruiz-Joshua I. Did the match-up enhance or embarrass the sport?



STILL IMPORTANT: Tony Bellew achieved an ambition by winning the WBC title and argues that championship belts have not become insignificant



MIXED VIEWS: The panelists were divided on the KSI vs Logan Paul meeting

JW: A bit of both. It's insulting that one of them claimed they were a bit like "Mike Tyson and Lomachenko rolled into one". Neither would last two minutes with a proper pro. What I will say is that, unlike when you get someone fresh off Team GB debuting against a Latvian, at least it was a fair match-up. And I'd have been happy to have defended my title on the undercard because it brought huge fresh exposure to the sport. Billy Joe [Saunders] got decent wages without having to do any work on promoting the event.

TB: I believe that's a myth being circulated. I'm hearing AJ-Ruiz I did three times that. The YouTubers was a complete cash-grab. We know it wasn't very good, but I don't think it embarrassed the sport. The lads did well and I expect a lot more similar [events] in the future. Where there's demand, there'll always be supply.

RH: It was an embarrassment, 100 per cent. Honestly, what is the sport coming to when you get those donuts ahead of Billy Joe Saunders on the card? That said, before their first fight, they used our gym for a publicity shoot and, my life, the place has never been so packed. Ever! That's the power of the 'net.



BOXING 2020

VERDICT VOIDED: Instant replay was used to good effect when Julio Cesar Martinez was shown to have landed an illegal blow vs Charlie Edwards

How could an instant replay system be implemented to improve boxing?

JW: You can't allow it to stop the momentum of fights. Fouls happen all the time. The ideal scenario would be to check for whether cuts are caused by head clashes or punches, or whether a contentious knockdown was legit, missed by the ref or caused by an illegal punch. It should be monitored by a qualified ref or judge at ringside.

TB: I thought [WBC president] Mauricio Sulaiman used it to excellent effect — and against his fellow Mexican — when he turned Charlie Edwards' WBC flyweight loss into a no-contest after the video replay showed Julio Cesar Martinez hit Charlie when he was on the floor. It was the right thing to do. Video replays can also be used to clarify if cuts were caused by heads or gloves, if a low blow ended a fight. It can be effectively used if the incident ends a fight, or at the end of a round. The ref could take a sneak peep, or the sanctioning body's commissioner could make the judgement.

RH: I don't really think it can. Boxing isn't really like football. How could it work? Check the replay after every punch to see if it was delivered correctly or landed on the target area? It's spoiling football and I don't want it to spoil boxing. Boxing's a fight. You can't have it sanitised. Perhaps it's 'cause I was a rough and ready fighter!

What was the biggest boxing controversy of 2019?

JW: The number of ring deaths. I believe five. That's a heck of a lot for one year. I think part of it is down to fighters trying too hard to make unrealistic weights, then attempting to rehydrate. They're being poorly advised by people who don't know what they're doing and who shouldn't be associated with the game. I think the IBF's ruling, where boxers must be no more than 10lbs heavier than they weighed in at a second weigh-in on the day of the fight, is a very good thing.

TB: The way drugs cheats have been handled. Punishments don't come close to fitting the crimes. Anyone caught injecting should be ribbed from boxing. Soon, a boxer will be killed at the hands of a drug cheat. Is that murder? It is in my eyes.

RH: The amount of failed drugs tests. It's just cheating and degrades the sport.

What was the most startling upset of 2019?

JW: Andy Ruiz Jr knocking out AJ, though I guess it's less of a surprise with heavyweights. Everyone assumed AJ was boxing a joke [in Ruiz] but he [Joshua] hadn't a clue what to do, was desperately seeking advice mid-fight.



DISTURBING: Ring fatalities (such as the Patrick Day tragedy in October) were a cause for concern

TB: Definitely Ruiz stopping AJ. Biggest shock at heavyweight since Rahman knocked out Lennox Lewis.

RH: Andy Ruiz doing a number on AJ. Nothing else comes close.

What were the best performances in 2019, firstly by a British boxer, then an international boxer?

JW: Domestically, Josh Taylor beating Regis Prograis to win the WBSS. The way he managed to bring himself back when the fight was slipping away was unbelievable.

Abroad, I'd go with [Naoya] Inoue outpointing Nonito Donaire. After previously banging everyone out with his crazy, monster power, Inoue proved he also had plenty of guile and the balls to battle on. He also showed for the first time that he might be beatable.

TB: Josh Taylor beating Prograis. He was written off by almost everyone before that but he got the job done and he's a diamond of a lad. He beat a top fighter in every department and at his own game.

Internationally, I'd have to say Ruiz ripping the heavyweight belts from Joshua. On the scales, he looked like a spectator, not an athlete. I'd seen Ruiz at his previous best, losing narrowly to Joseph Parker when he weighed around 18st 3lbs [255lbs]. He was another stone heavier against Josh and it was a stone of fat, so I thought: "Absolutely, no way." But Andy kidded the bollocks out of everyone. Animal! He got up from a heavy knockdown, kept himself composed and really turned it on. Fantastic display.

RH: It's not a single performance as such, and this might surprise a few, but Josh Warrington is the Brit who's impressed me the most these last 12 months. His level of improvement has been little short of phenomenal. Internationally, you can't look past Vasiliy Lomachenko, who bashed up Crolla and had that great, great fight with Luke Campbell. Absolute class act.

Who is your pick as the best prospect in British boxing, and the best world prospect?

JW: British, I think flyweight Sunny Edwards is super talented. He's a delight to watch and makes easy work of what beforehand appear competitive matches.

Overseas, I go with Ryan Garcia. He tries to bang everyone out straight away and has plenty of speed. He's very entertaining and destined to be a major star.

TB: Leeds super bantam Hopey Price is a very slick southpaw who's just signed with Dave Coldwell, so is in good hands. Apparently, he really impressed sparring over in Los Angeles recently. He won gold over at the Olympic Youth Games in Argentina, plus two European [youth] titles and a barrowload of national titles. On the world scene, look out for Israil Madrimov, an Uzbek super welter who's based in California. He's the standout for me.

RH: I know Daniel Dubois has a British title but he's still only 22 so, to me, he still falls into the prospect bracket. He beat my lad



BRIGHT FUTURE: Sunny Edwards (seen defeating Marcel Braithwaite) is regarded as a top British prospect

[Nathan Gorman] and proved a lot quicker than we expected. He's got a great jab, good feet, fabulous concentration, good all round. I'd be very surprised if he didn't make it to world level. Internationally, I'd pick Mayweather's flash lad, Devin Haney, who's even younger than Dubois. In time, I see him as a unified champion and he has the size to go through the weights.

Who is your pick as the best P4P boxer in the world?

JW: Loma. He's the sport's Mastermind. He's got everything; he can defend but doesn't mind getting wet, throws quality punches from incredible angles. It's mind-boggling how quickly he's stormed through the weights — especially after that early loss —

and he targets the very best champions, whereas Canelo Alvarez tends to manipulate his way through the divisions, rather than challenge the top dog.

TB: Lomachenko. He's got the best balance since Roy Jones Jr who, in his prime, was the greatest that ever lived. You can't explain some of the stuff Loma does and he doesn't mug off B-and-C-listers, he makes fellow world champs look foolish, forces them to quit.

RH: Lomachenko. Every time he steps up, he targets the best man in the division and then whoops 'em. He's got it all: defence, distance, balance, angles. He makes very good fighters miss, then leathers 'em.

Might external distractions prevent Tyson Fury from realising his full potential as a boxer?

JW: No. Tyson needs to be kept busy, boxing or otherwise. His mind works differently to your average man. It's when he's not busy that the bad stuff creeps in. It's unbelievable how he's turned his life around from being roundly booed at the Sports Personality of the Year a few years back to receiving a standing ovation at the wrestling recently. Obviously, he needs to focus when in camp, but doing these other things will make him an even bigger star.

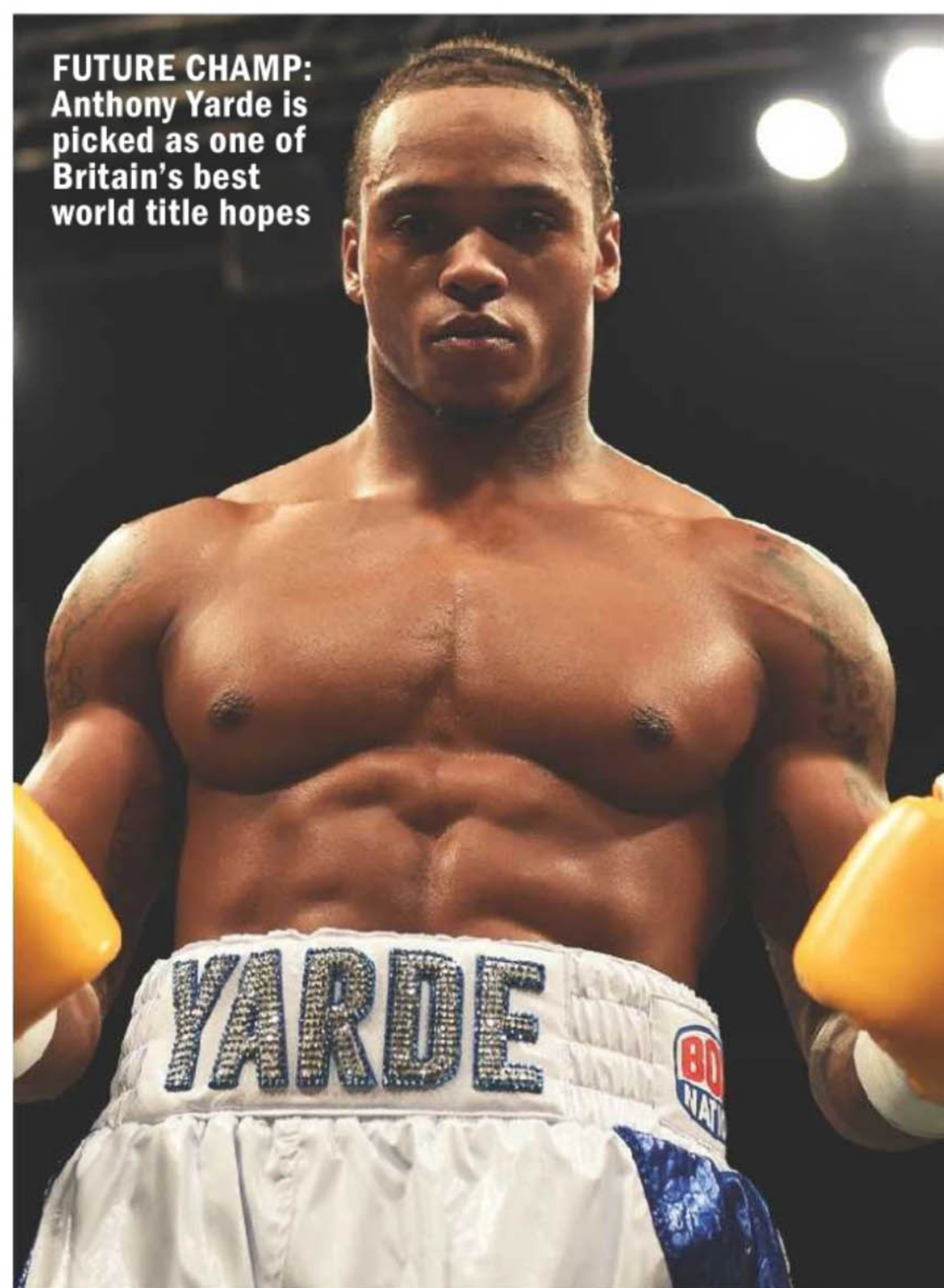
TB: That's unfair. Many things can distract any boxer; the high life, women, drink, drugs. The wrestling and MMA have helped Tyson overcome his demons. He's now in a positive frame of mind, happy in himself. It's when he's unhappy that sometimes he does silly things. He realises there's more to life than

UNANIMOUS CHOICE: The panel agrees that Vasiliy Lomachenko is the world's best at any weight





NO WORRIES: Tyson Fury's venture into WWE (to meet Braun Strowman) is OK with the panel



FUTURE CHAMP: Anthony Yarde is picked as one of Britain's best world title hopes



MUST SEE: Errol Spence Jr (pictured) vs Terence Crawford would be a 2020 dream match

boxing. He's the best heavyweight in the world right now. For me, he's already beaten Deontay Wilder.

RH: Not at all. His head is in the best place it's been for years. What he does might be deemed controversial by some — but welcome to Tyson's world! Given the opportunities, he'll dominate the division again.

Which British boxers do you expect to win their first world title in 2020?

JW: I'd say Jack Catterall, who's been chomping for a chance for some time now, and Anthony Yarde. You'd expect both to make challenges in 2020 but it largely depends on which champions they get to fight as to whether they win or not.

TB: So many, so much talent, storming through. Lawrence Okolie has already cruised to British, Commonwealth and European belts and against the right opponent could win the big one in 2020. Luke Campbell still has a world title in him. John Ryder could possibly nick a proper world title in the new year. Anthony Yarde and Joshua Buatsi are both capable of becoming world champions next year at light-heavy.

RH: I expect Anthony Yarde to come back stronger, following his gutsy challenge to Kovalev. He's always had the power. Now he has the experience. I also expect Daniel Dubois to get there quicker than people think. He's almost ready now.

Which domestic match-up would you most like to see made in 2020? And which international match-up?

JW: Billy Joe Saunders against Callum Smith in a super middleweight world title unifier. They're two of the best pound-for-pound that we have, both unbeaten and, skill wise, it'd be a very high-level fight. They've two very different styles and I'm sure fans would be evenly divided on the outcome.

Internationally, I'd like to see welterweights Errol Spence and Terence

I HEAR GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE MCCORMACK TWINS, A PAIR OF REAL RING ANIMALS — TONY BELLEW

Crawford meet. Both are in most people's top five pound-for-pound. Both are very technical yet both can also have a fight. Though Shawn Porter took him to a split, I think Spence has still got other gears to show and might just pip Crawford.

TB: I'd actually love to see a rematch between Dillian Whyte and Anthony Joshua. Dillian must be the most improved heavyweight in the world and he gave AJ a real go first time. Both guys would really sell the fight.

Overseas, Terence Crawford vs Manny Pacquiao. Crawford needs to get due recognition for his outstanding talent and Pacquiao is the perfect high-profile name for him to deliver. Good as Bud is, I fear Errol Spence would simply be too big for him.

RH: For me, it's still Tyson Fury against Joshua. We need to know. And I expect Tyson to put a clinic on him. He came back to our gym 28 stone and, straight off, gave Dave Allen a lesson over eight rounds. He then banged out another four on the pads. A freak. Phenomenal. Overseas, I'm still intrigued by Canelo-Golovkin III. With those two, you're guaranteed a high-quality war.

2020 is Olympic year. Which boxers do you expect to shine in Tokyo?

JW: I no longer follow the amateurs as closely as I should but you can't look past those McCormack twins from Birtley. They'll be 25 by the time of the Games and have both already proved they can medal at the very toughest international tournaments.

TB: You can never look past the Cubans and Russians but don't ask me about any names. I hear great things about the McCormack twins, a pair of real ring animals who'll make great pros, but the problem is you seldom get to see the Team GB boxers now. They're never on the TV.

RH: I'm not too clued up on the overseas lads but there's a bantam from Oldham called Will Cauley who's real class. He just won a gold over in Belarus and he's looked brilliant against world-level guys in the gym. I see him doing very well in Japan if he gets a chance.

With regard to the sport's rules and regulations, what one thing would you most like to see changed, introduced or eliminated to improve the sport?

JW: I'd like to see all the sanctioning bodies having a second weigh-in on the day of the fight as I think it'd help reduce ring deaths. That'd make fighters more cautious and encourage them to compete in their natural division. This has to be controlled.

TB: Just one true champion in every division and, for that to happen, after a fighter first wins the world title, he needs to oblige his mandatory challenger immediately then face another world champion in his second defence. The quicker we unify the better. One face, one name, for each division.

RH: I've a huge issue with fighters failing weight but still copping a decent wage fighting at catchweight. It's blatant cheating. Something needs to be done, and soon, to eliminate that because it's a trend that's increasing.

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FIGHTS AND FIGHTERS OF THE YEAR

The old decade ended on a punch-packed note and GRAHAM HOUSTON reviews the action to pick 2019's best from at home and abroad

BLOOD AND GUTS: Josh Taylor dug down deep to earn a narrow victory over Regis Prograis in a classic contest



BRITISH FIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Taylor won battle of wills against Prograis

Britain's fight of the year had to be the marvellous meeting between **Josh Taylor** and **Regis Prograis** for the IBF and WBA "super" 140lbs titles at London's O2 Arena on 26 October. Taylor, in his toughest test, prevailed narrowly in a fight that was also the World Boxing Super Series final in the 140lbs division.

Everyone agreed that this was a special type of fight, "a close encounter with elite boxing skills and brutal intent" according to the *Daily Telegraph's* Gareth A. Davies, while in the words of *Daily Mail* reporter Jeff Powell: "Prograis obliged Taylor to counter his technical brilliance with strength of will, relentless effort and raw courage."

The two unbeaten southpaws fought each other to a standstill. Prograis, sharp, relaxed and skilful, did damage with left hands that had Taylor's right eye swollen shut by the closing rounds. Taylor, however, dug in and took the fight to the visitor from Houston, Texas (by way of New Orleans).

It was Taylor's pressure and gritty, two-fisted fighting that tipped the balance in a fight that was as evenly contested as the pre-fight pick 'em (identical) odds suggested it would be.

Prograis was a shade quicker and slicker in the first four rounds but Taylor started to force Prograis back in the fifth. Taylor was in command in the middle rounds but his right eye started to swell ominously.

The action went back and forth in the last four rounds, with Taylor cut over the right eye from a head clash in the 11th. At the finish, Quebec judge Benoit Roussel had it all-even, 114-114, but judges from Italy and Mexico had Taylor ahead, 117-112 and 115-113, for a well-deserved majority decision win.

British fight of the year runner-up was the tense and absorbing all-Scottish fight for the British and Commonwealth bantamweight titles title that saw **Lee McGregor** edge out **Ukashir Farooq** on a highly debatable split decision at Emirates Arena in Glasgow on 16 November.

The bout between undefeated boxers was another one that lived up to expectations. Farooq, the British champion, forced the fight early and ripped in body shots, while his head and upper-body movement had McGregor missing. McGregor, bigger and stronger, came back with solid, fundamentally sound boxing and rocked Farooq with a right uppercut in the seventh round.

Farooq was cut under the right eye in the fourth round and over the left eye in the eighth while McGregor's nose was bloodied. Edinburgh's McGregor clinched to slow Farooq's advance and had a point deducted for holding in the 10th, but now the

Pakistan-born fighter from Glasgow was starting to tire. With the fight in the balance, it was McGregor who came on at the end, sweeping the last two rounds on all three judges' cards. Judge John Latham had Farooq winning, 114-113, but judges Phil Edwards and Mark Lyson saw McGregor ahead, 114-113 and 115-112.

An absolute barn-burner between **Alex Dilmaghani** and the Dominican Republic's **Francisco Fonseca** for the IBO's junior lightweight title at York Hall on the same night as McGregor vs Farooq takes third place. It was difficult to argue with the decision of a draw because this was punch for punch in round after round. Dilmaghani, having his second bout back home in Britain after five years of training and boxing in Mexico and Canada, banged to the body from out of his southpaw stance but two-time world title challenger Fonseca

surged back with a high-volume attack.

Dilmaghani needed to win the last round to snatch victory but Fonseca staged the stronger finish. British judge Howard Foster had the visitor winning, 115-114, but judges from Poland and Puerto Rico had the fight 114-114, thus making it a majority draw.

At No. 4, we have **Scott Fitzgerald** clinching a desperately close win by dropping **Anthony Fowler** in the last round in a clash of unbeaten 154-pounders.

Lewis Ritson outscoring **Robbie Davies Jr** in a high-quality welterweight 12-rounder is our No. 5 choice.

Special mentions go to **Chris Jenkins** winning a rousing bout with **Johnny Garton** for the British welterweight title and **Josh Taylor** vs **Ivan Baranchyk**, with the "Tartan Tornado" scoring two knockdowns in the sixth round on his way to a unanimous decision victory in the WBSS semi-finals.

MUTUAL RESPECT:
Dilmaghani (left) and
Fonseca battled on even
terms for 12 rousing
rounds



Getty Images

BRITISH FIGHTERS OF THE YEAR

Taylor maintained top-level momentum

Scotland's **Josh Taylor** stood out as Britain's fighter of the year with two big wins in 140lbs title fights against undefeated opponents, in the process capturing the World Boxing Super Series' Muhammad Ali Trophy.

Taylor was in a tough battle with Belarus' Ivan Baranchyk in May but came on strongly from the sixth round to pound out a unanimous decision.

Then, in October, Taylor overcame adversity in the form of a swollen and battered right eye to win a close but deserved decision over Regis Prograis in an all-southpaw, even-money fight.

Taylor's 2019 campaign continued a trend of wins against well-regarded opponents. His last four — Viktor Postol, Ryan Martin, Baranchyk and Prograis — had a combined record of 94-1. That's what they call mixing it in tough company.

Unfortunately there was an early-hours, out-of-the-ring incident in December in which Taylor made inappropriate remarks to a nightclub doorman. Apparently drink was involved. Taylor took ownership of unbecoming conduct and issued an apology on social media. His contrition seems genuine and he acknowledges he let himself down.

This appears to have been a one-off incident in which a celebration with friends got out of hand. We believe Taylor when he says he'll make sure nothing like this happens again, and for what he achieved in the ring in 2019 he stood out as the logical British fighter of the year.

Our runner-up is Wales' **Liam Williams**, who moved up in weight from 154lbs and scored three dramatic KO wins in the middleweight division to establish himself as a world title contender.

First up was Joe Mullender, a tough guy who had never been stopped in 14 fights. Williams blew him out in the second round.

Rugged Karim Achour, of France, had never been stopped in 50 fights and he'd been the full distance of 12 rounds against Quebec's heavy-handed David Lemieux 14 months earlier, but Williams blasted him out of the fight in two rounds in July.

This led to a WBO title eliminator against the towering Alantez Fox in December. Fox's only loss in 28 fights was on a 12-round decision against Demetrius Andrade. On paper, this looked like a long, difficult fight for Williams. But boxing



WHAT A NIGHT: Taylor won the Muhammad Ali Trophy as well as another championship belt when he defeated Prograis

Damon Gonzalez

matches are fought in the ring, not on paper. Williams went right through Fox, broke him down and overpowered him in five rounds.

These were world-class performances from Williams. If we had an award for most improved fighter of the year, Williams would be our choice.

Third place goes to **Scott Fitzgerald**, of Preston, who lived up to his potential with big wins over Anthony Fowler and Ted Cheeseman in the 154lbs division.

Fitzgerald was the underdog against unbeaten British Olympic representative Fowler but he pulled out the win by knocking down the Liverpool boxer in the last round in one of the best fights of the year in Britain.

That was in March, and in October Fitzgerald captured the British super welter title with hard-fought but unanimous decision over Ted Cheeseman, who shuffled the deck by producing a boxing, moving display instead of steaming straight ahead. Cheeseman boxed beautifully in the early rounds and was in front on the scorecards as the fighters came out for the eighth



IMPROVED FIGHTER: Liam Williams put the seal on a superb year by banging out Alantez Fox

Getty Images

round but Fitzgerald closed out the fight strongly with pressure and body punching.

In fourth and fifth spots we have **Daniel Dubois**, who made a supposedly tough test look easy by banging out Nathan Gorman in the fifth round of their British heavyweight title showdown, and **Lerrone Richards**, who showed southpaw skills in wins over Tommy Langford and Lennox Clarke to end the year as British and Commonwealth super middleweight champion.

OVERSEAS FIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Ruiz vs Joshua I had thrill of the unexpected

We had so many good fights worldwide from which to choose in 2019 that it was a challenge picking the year's best.

For sheer drama and the "theatre of the unexpected", as veteran broadcaster Larry Merchant likes to call it, plus the global importance of the bout, we go with **Andy Ruiz Jr's** seventh-round victory over **Anthony Joshua** in a major upset at Madison Square Garden.

The first two rounds were clearly Joshua's and the fight looked all over when he dropped Ruiz heavily with a left hook in the third round. It looked a formality that Britain's undefeated heavyweight champion would finish off his pudgy challenger. Instead, Ruiz fired back, scrambling Joshua's equilibrium with a left hook that landed in the temple area, then dropping him twice before the round was over.

Joshua boxed his way back into the fight, picking up points with the jab. However, Joshua had never looked all the way back to his earlier dominant self and Ruiz started to come on again in the sixth. The seventh was a disaster for Joshua, dropped twice and rescued by the referee as he stood with his back to the ropes, his body language suggesting he had had enough.

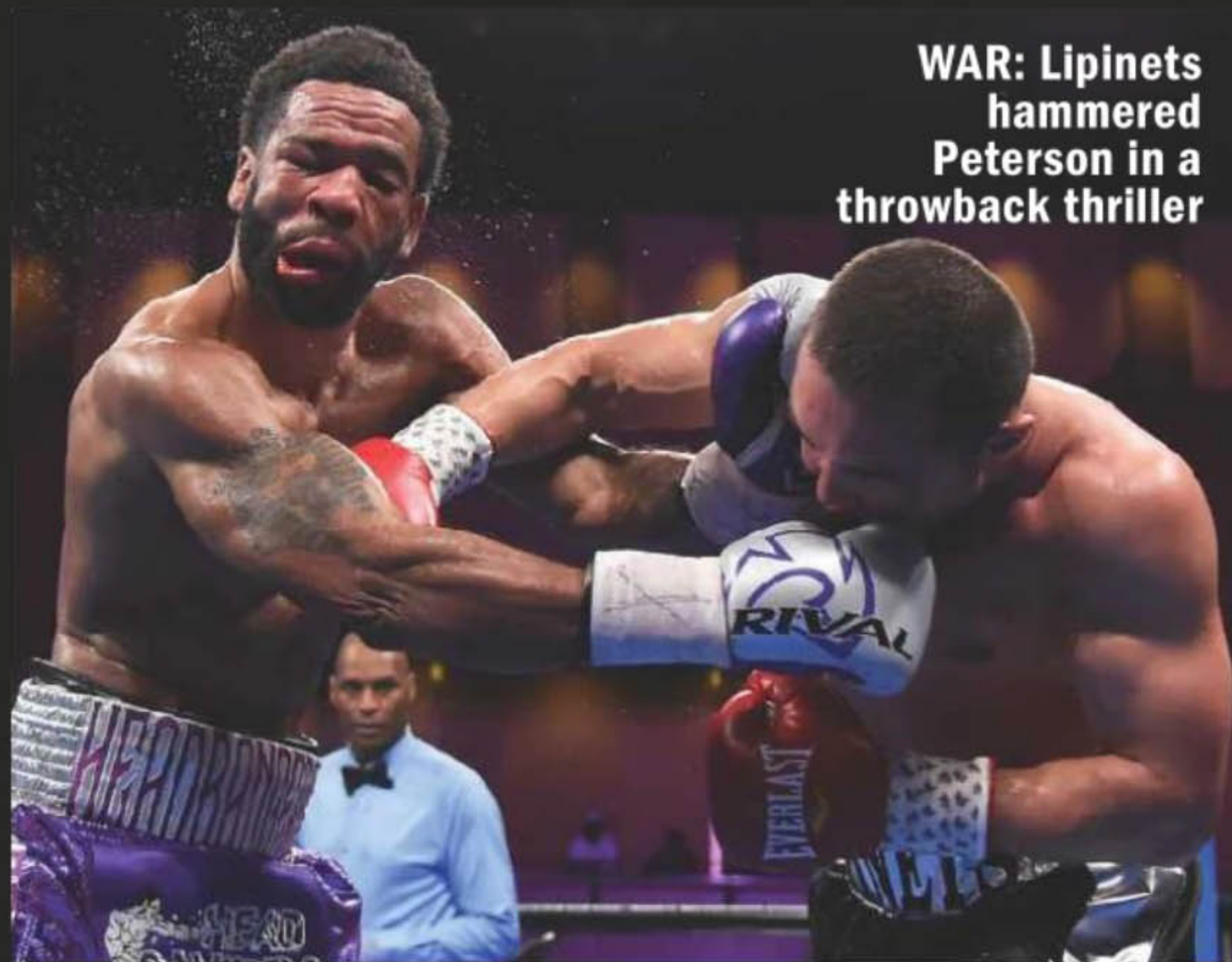
Ruiz's win was a shocker. However, Joshua got his revenge with a comfortable points victory in Saudi Arabia before the year was out.

For our runner-up, we go for **Naoya Inoue** vs **Nonito Donaire** in the World Boxing Super Series bantamweight final in Saitama, Japan. True, Inoue won by wide margins on two of the judges' cards (the third judge had it just a one-point fight). But mere scorecards do not reflect the fierceness or intensity of the fight. Inoue was in by far the most desperate battle of his career against a 36-year-old veteran who turned back the clock with his best performance in years.

Inoue, 26, suffered a cut over the right eye from what looked like a left hook in the second round. It was learned later that he had suffered a fractured eye socket. Inoue had Donaire almost out on his feet in the fifth round but the four-weight world champ from the Philippines rallied, sweeping the seventh, eighth and ninth rounds on the scorecards, rocking Inoue with right hands. Inoue's face looked a mess in the ninth, nose bloodied, blood streaming from the cut over his right eye. Yet Inoue came back, outfighting and outpunching Donaire in the last three rounds, which including dropping the older man with a left hook to the body in the 11th.



UPSET: Andy Ruiz Jr shocked the boxing world when he stopped Anthony Joshua



WAR: Lipinets hammered Peterson in a throwback thriller

For the No. 3 fight of the year we go with **Patrick Teixeira** of Brazil winning a unanimous decision over undefeated **Carlos Adames**, of the Dominican Republic, in a bloody, thrilling 154lbs title bout in Las Vegas. Behind on points, cut under both eyes, Teixeira turned things around by knocking Adames down in the seventh round. Teixeira actually seemed to be having fun as he dominated the last five rounds with high-volume punching from out of his southpaw stance.

In fourth place we go for **Sergey Lipinets** stopping **Lamont Peterson** in the 10th round

of an old-school welterweight war. This was like one of those 1950s fights, two tough pros going toe-to-toe before Peterson finally wilted.

Artur Beterbiev proved just too strong for **Oleksandr Gvozdyk**, grinding down his more stylish opponent in the 10th round of a classic light-heavyweight title bout between unbeaten champions, and this clash of Eastern Europeans gets the No. 5 spot.

Special mentions:

- China's **Xu Can** throwing punches at an astonishing rate to win a unanimous decision over **Puerto Rico's Jesus M. Rojas** in a featherweight title bout.
- **Julian Williams** knocking down and outpointing the unbeaten **Jarrett Hurd** in a 154lbs title fight upset.
- **Errol Spence Jr** winning a split that should have been a unanimous decision over **Shawn Porter** in a high-quality boxing match between welterweight champions.
- **David Avanesyan** weathering early pressure to stop big-punching **Kerman Lejarraga** in the ninth round to win their European welterweight title fight on his unbeaten opponent's home ground in Bilbao, Spain.

OVERSEAS FIGHTERS OF THE YEAR

Teo Lopez backed up a bold prediction

Getty Images



PROPHECY FULFILLED: Teofimo Lopez promised his title fight with Richard Commey wouldn't go six rounds and then went out and stopped the dangerous Ghanaian in the second

Teofimo Lopez talked the talk and he certainly walked the walk in 2019. Disappointing when winning a 12-round decision over Masayoshi Nakatani, a fighter he was expected to defeat inside the distance, Lopez promised his fight with Richard Commey wouldn't go six rounds and proceeded to stop the dangerous Ghanaian in the second round to win the IBF lightweight title.

Lopez' post-fight exuberance while KO victim Diego Magdaleno lay stretched out on the canvas came in for critical comment. His marriage created family friction, leading to a less-than-stellar showing against Nakatani. But was it really such a bad performance? Nakatani had an 18-0 (12 KOs) record and at almost 6ft had the height and reach to cause problems. But Lopez won almost every round on the judges' cards.

Edis Tatli, a European champion with a 31-2 record, was no match at all for Lopez, who outclassed the Finnish boxer and knocked him out in the fifth round. Now Lopez (15-0, 12 KOs) eyes the ultimate challenge, against Vasiliy Lomachenko.

Japan's **Naoya "Monster" Inoue** takes second place. Inoue was devastating when knocking out the competent and undefeated Emmanuel Rodriguez in two rounds in the World Boxing Super Series bantamweight semi-final. In the WBSS final, Inoue showed he can overcome adversity. Bloodied, eye-socket

damaged, Inoue gritted it out to win a unanimous decision over heavy-handed veteran Nonito Donaire.

Sometimes, fighters accustomed to dishing it out aren't always good at taking it. However, Inoue showed real fighting guts in coming through the fire, dropping Donaire in the 11th round and almost stopping him. Inoue took his record to 19-0 (16 KOs) with the win over Donaire.

Mexico's **Emanuel Navarrete** was 4-0 in 2019, stopping all his opponents, although his biggest win by far was the last-round stoppage of Isaac Dogboe in their rematch for the WBO junior featherweight title. He takes third spot. Navarrete had outpointed Dogboe to win the title in December 2018. He proved this wasn't some sort of fluke when he destroyed Dogboe in their return bout in May in what ESPN commentator Joe Tessitore described as "a cascade of punishment".

Navarrete went on to overwhelm three outclassed challengers, Francisco De Vaca (three rounds), Juan Miguel Elorde (four rounds) and Francisco Horta (four rounds). He was expected to win these fights inside the distance and he didn't disappoint as he took his record to 30-1 (26 KOs).

Lightweight champ **Vasiliy Lomachenko** might very well be the world's best fighter and he was an overwhelming favourite in his two fights in 2019, knocking out Anthony Crolla in



GUTSY: Bloodied Inoue overcame adversity against Donaire

the fourth round in Los Angeles and then outpointing Luke Campbell in London. Likewise, welterweight champion **Terence Crawford**, Lomachenko's rival for world No. 1 status, was a huge favourite for his two bouts in 2019, the stoppage wins over Amir Khan and Egidijus Kavaliauskas. Still, with their commanding displays we put Lomachenko and Crawford in our fourth and fifth spots.

Deontay Wilder? Yes, he won two heavyweight title defences by KO, and the first-round demolition of Dominic Breazeale was certainly impressive, but Wilder looked ordinary and was behind on points before blasting out Luis Ortiz with a right hand in the seventh round. It was a vivid finish but not what one could call an impressive performance in its totality.

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BACK ON TOP: Defeating Bob Ajisafe has put new life in Burton's career after a spell in the boxing wilderness



GOLDEN SALVATION

Hosea Burton's career was at a standstill until MTK Global's light-heavy tournament offered fresh hope. Now, he tells MARK BUTCHER, the only way is up

Originating from The Bible, the name "Hosea" means salvation and, fittingly, the lucrative *Golden Contract* tournament appears to have provided a long-awaited deliverance and career lifeline for one of British boxing's most avoided fighters.

Hailing from a distinguished line of fighting men, Manchester light-heavyweight **Hosea Burton** has finally emerged from the boxing wilderness to find himself on the brink of the major paydays that eluded him for three hard, unforgiving years.

A dramatic last-round defeat to Frank Buglioni in December 2016 (while leading on the scorecards) cost Burton his British crown and something more, as rival contenders withdrew from title eliminators and championship contests in the years that followed. One would have expected Burton to remain a fixture in the title picture. Instead he was cast back into the chasing pack.

A place in MTK Global's groundbreaking *Golden Contract* tournament has revived Burton's career, with the Mancunian impressing during a decisive quarter-final win over tricky southpaw Bob Ajisafe. With two more victories, Burton will hold boxing's golden ticket, courtesy of a two-year, five-fight contract guaranteeing life-changing six-figure purses.

"I was frozen out for being too dangerous," Burton, 31, told *Boxing Monthly* in January. "I was a prime example of the 'Who Needs Him?' club. I only lost a short period of that fight with Frank and I suffered hugely from it. I had six fights in three years

and I was unfit for about two weeks of that. I'm one of those people who stays in the gym [within a stone of his fighting weight]. I just got burned badly for one mistake. But that win over Bob has put me back in a good place."

Fights had fallen through with alarming regularity. The Buglioni rematch never transpired, while Anthony Yarde withdrew from a British title eliminator and Joshua Buatsi relinquished the British title after Burton had agreed to fight him. This left Burton in boxing limbo. For one reason or another, no-one wanted to fight him.

Out of the shadows

"I was in total domination of that [Buglioni] fight until I got done," he said. "It's just one of those things. Who wants to really fight me unless they have to? The same in the *Golden Contract* with the draw — I got a red ball [fighters with a blue ball chose their opponent] and I was stood there right to the very end because the three people who could have picked me thought 'no'. No-one wants to fight me because I am high risk, low reward at the moment. But soon I will be high risk, high reward because I'm going to win this *Golden Contract*, then a world title."

From Buglioni in December 2016 to Ajisafe in December 2019, Burton fought in the shadows, contesting four six-rounders and two eight-rounders in that time. With a wife and four children to support, such a long period without significant fights proved testing. Doubts crept in. But Burton (25-1, 11 KOs) never lost hope. He stayed in shape and waited for the call.

Opportunity finally knocked with a place in MTK Global's eight-man tournament. Given bitter past experience, Burton held his breath, but this time the fight materialised. The 6ft 4ins Burton dealt with former British and Commonwealth champion Ajisafe with surprising comfort, scoring a knockdown inside six seconds before controlling the distance with a snapping jab and incisive right hand.

"Nobody beat Bob Ajisafe as easily as I beat him. I always said if I meet him, that is the final," Burton said. "I'm the best man, he's the next best man in the competition. I knew I was going to beat him, but I wasn't going to knock him out as he doesn't get knocked out. Tony Bellew couldn't knock him out. I knew how to beat Bob. The harder you try, the less success you're going to have. I had to get him chasing me early."

Now safely in the semi-finals, Burton assessed his rivals in the final four — former British title challenger Liam Conroy, Latvian puncher Ricards Bolotniks and German stylist Serge Michel.

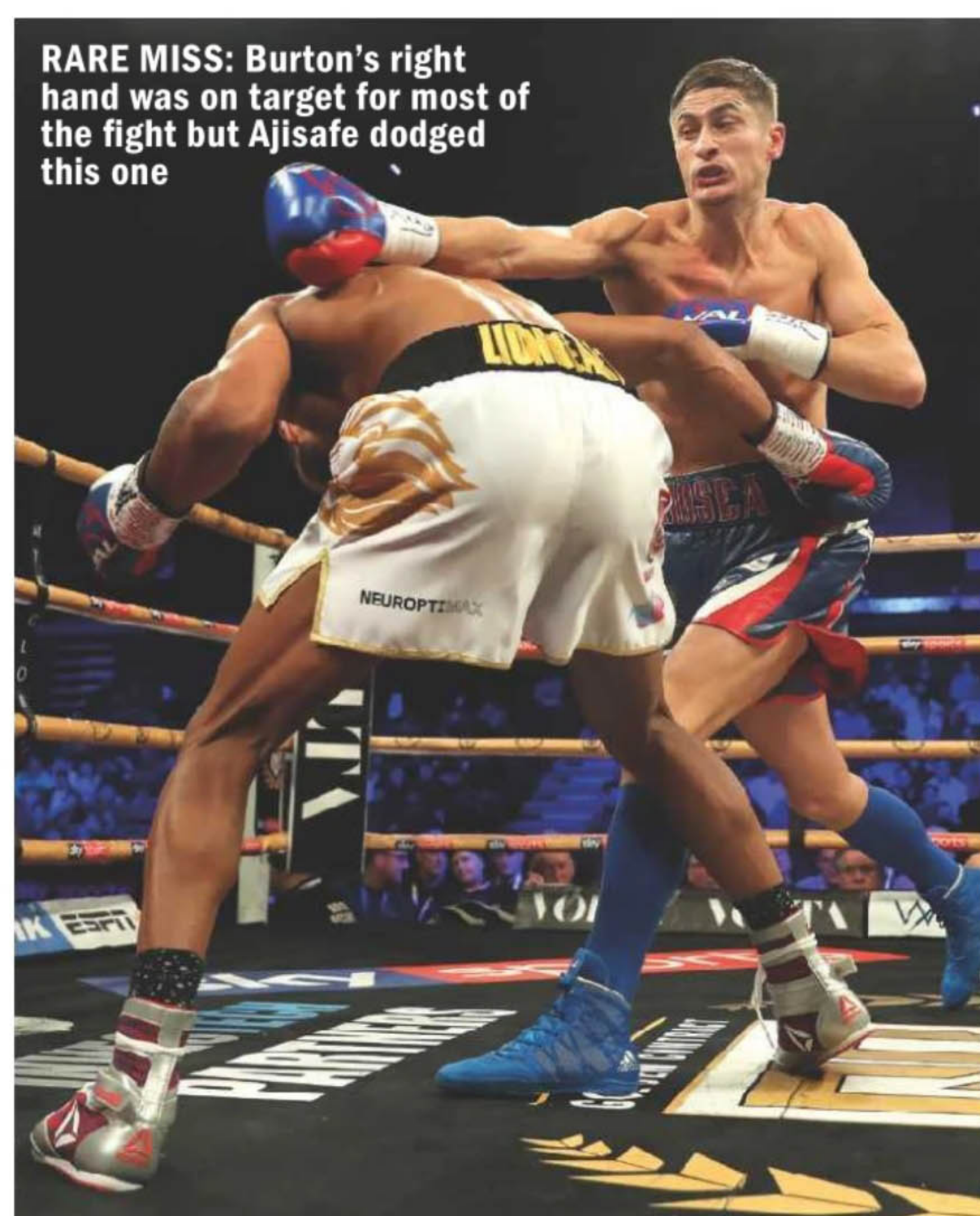
"Either one of them could beat one another. Michel went to the Olympics so he is a good boxer. He ran out of gas [decisioning Tommy Philbin in their quarter-final], but I think he'll be more prepared for the semis," Burton said. "He can box a bit, he can punch a bit, but I don't think he likes to get hit."

"Bolotniks is a tough fight, but I think he can be outboxed with ease. He looked a massive puncher [in the quarter-finals], but I think anybody in the competition would have knocked out Steven Ward that night."

"I'm not running Steven down. I'm just saying that wasn't the Steven we've seen ►



THE RIVALS: Ready for action in the light-heavy tournament semi-finals are, from left, Serge Michel, Burton, Ricards Bolotniks and Liam Conroy



RARE MISS: Burton's right hand was on target for most of the fight but Ajisafe dodged this one

before. Steven was weight drained. So Bolotnik might look a big puncher, but I think he is very basic and a boxer beats him quite easily. I personally think Michel beats Bolotnik, I beat Bolotnik and Conroy beats Bolotnik.

"I've known Conroy for a long, long time. I messaged him before the competition and told him: 'I won't pick you, if you don't pick me.' Not because I'm scared of him in any way, but because he knows and I know I can beat him. He got beat by my little brother twice in the amateurs, but you can't take anyone for granted because Liam can punch. He can box a bit, he's got good inside work,

decent outside work. It's still a live competition, but I think it's mine to lose."

The last three years should have been very different, of course. Ahead on the cards against Buglioni, Burton stunned the north Londoner in the final round and tried to over impress with a late stoppage. Instead he got sucker-punched by a right hand and lost his unbeaten record in heartbreaking circumstances. The loss still stings, but stays with Burton as an incentive to right past wrongs.

"I don't think I'm really over the Buglioni fight now," he admitted. "It's one of them things that hurts every time I really think about it because I think why didn't I just box off that last round? Why did I look to knock him out? I was winning that last round and I caught him with a good one-two, then another one-two and he went backwards. I went forward to get him and copped a right hand over the top. So even when I think about it now, it still hurts and gives me that drive to train hard.

"Because, to be honest, I never trained hard in my life up until that defeat. I used to think I was a naturally better boxer than all of them because I come from a fighting family. I've got more heart than everybody else so I don't need to train as hard because I'm more talented, which is a stupid way of thinking when you think about it now.

"I just don't understand how naïve I was. Since that loss, I've got a strength and conditioning trainer and work with a nutritionist so that loss [taught] me a hell of a lot. I believe I'm a 30 per cent better fighter."

In a sport in which some fighters change their trainers more often than their phone contracts, Burton has stuck with Joe Gallagher for an astonishing 20 years. He featured on Gallagher's schoolboy squad alongside the Murray brothers John and Joe in an amateur career that peaked with the ABA middleweight title in 2009. Their bond remains as strong as ever.

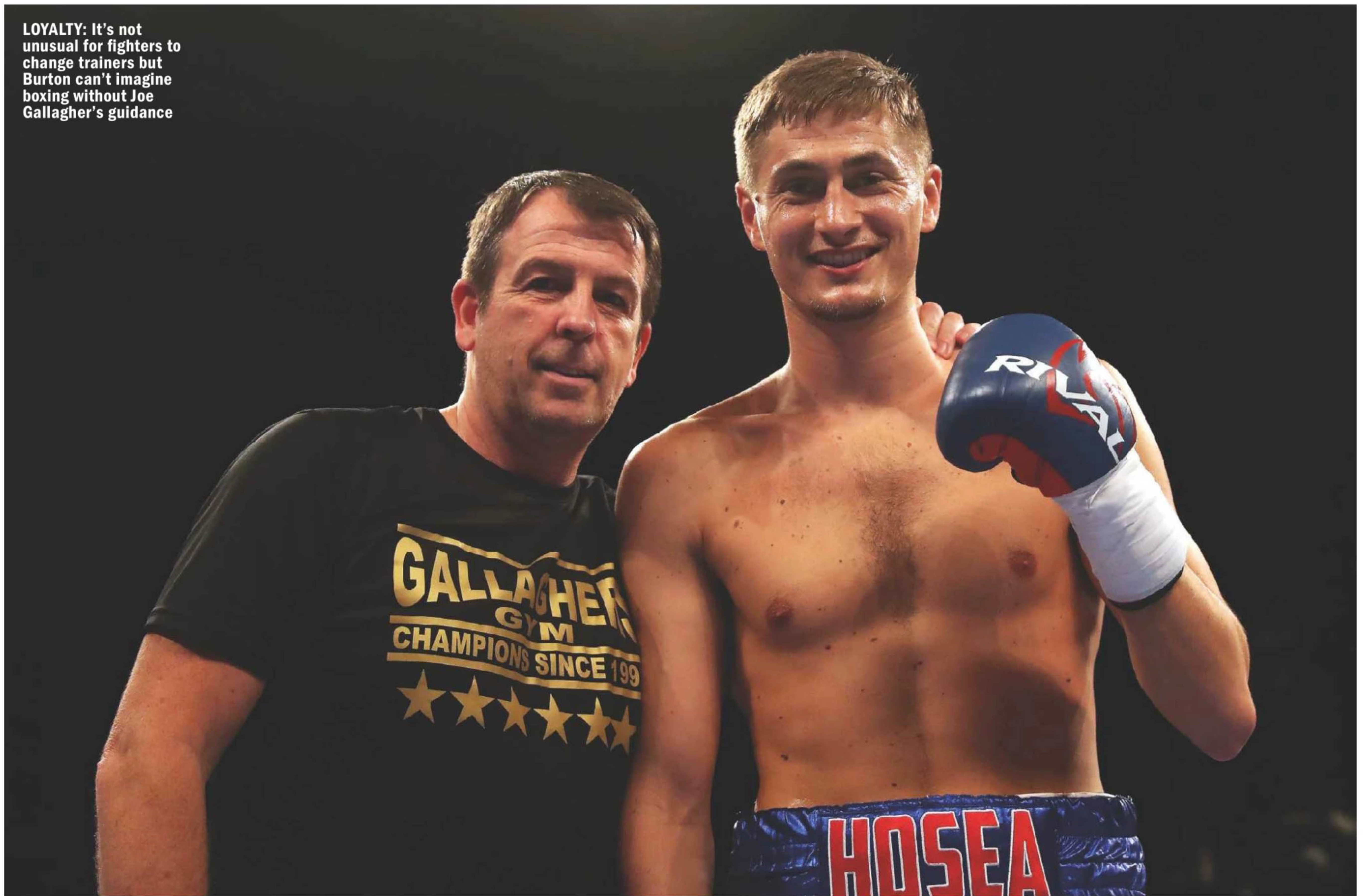
"The first proper training session I done with Joe, I spewed everywhere because the amount of training we done was like a shock to my system," he recalled. "I knew I had to train with Joe because his knowledge of boxing, I think, is second to none. I personally couldn't see me training with anyone else other than Joe."

Burton's boxing DNA is almost unrivalled in the sport, with world champions Tyson Fury and Andy Lee sharing the family bloodline as well as heavyweight hopes Hughie Fury and Nathan Gorman (on the Fury side). It's a rich fighting heritage, as Burton explains.

"The fighting breed [originally] comes from the Burtons. Now Tyson Fury's mother is my auntie, my dad's sister, so me and Tyson are first cousins. My grandmother and Andy Lee's grandmother were sisters," he said. "Big John Fury married my auntie. That's where Tyson's become a super freak because he's got the size from the Furys and the boxing skill from the Burtons.

"My grandfather and his brother were famous in the gypsy community for being bareknuckle fighters who never got beat in their life. It says in Bartley Gorman's book he

LOYALTY: It's not unusual for fighters to change trainers but Burton can't imagine boxing without Joe Gallagher's guidance



MY AMBITION IS TO BE HAPPY IN LIFE. I DON'T WANT TO BE A SUPER-MILLIONAIRE

got the title 'King of the Gypsies' passed down to him from Uriah Burton, who was my grandad's younger brother.

"My grandad was 'King of the Gypsies' then, as he got a little bit older, he passed it on to Uriah Burton and when he got older he passed it to Bartley Gorman. So we come from a line of fighters seen as the pitbull breed. Fighting dogs who have that background in them. Boxing will come out of you."

Cousin Tyson has experienced the highs and lows of boxing and life, as has been well documented. Burton takes huge inspiration from Tyson's triumph over adversity and remembers his cousin's first improbable step back from the edge.

"Look, Tyson was on the verge of destruction. There was no way back for him. He phoned me up one day and said he was going [back] to the gym and I was in shock," Burton remembered. "He stuck at it and I think he's had about four days off since then when he was the best part of 31 stone. So for him to [come] back is amazing."

"Tyson gives me a lot of advice, encouragement. We don't speak every day,

but we've spoken a few times in the last two weeks since he's been over in America. I was with him training for the Tom Schwarz fight for a month. Tyson will give anybody motivation because he's come back from the ruins of life. He is an unbelievable man, to do what he's done."

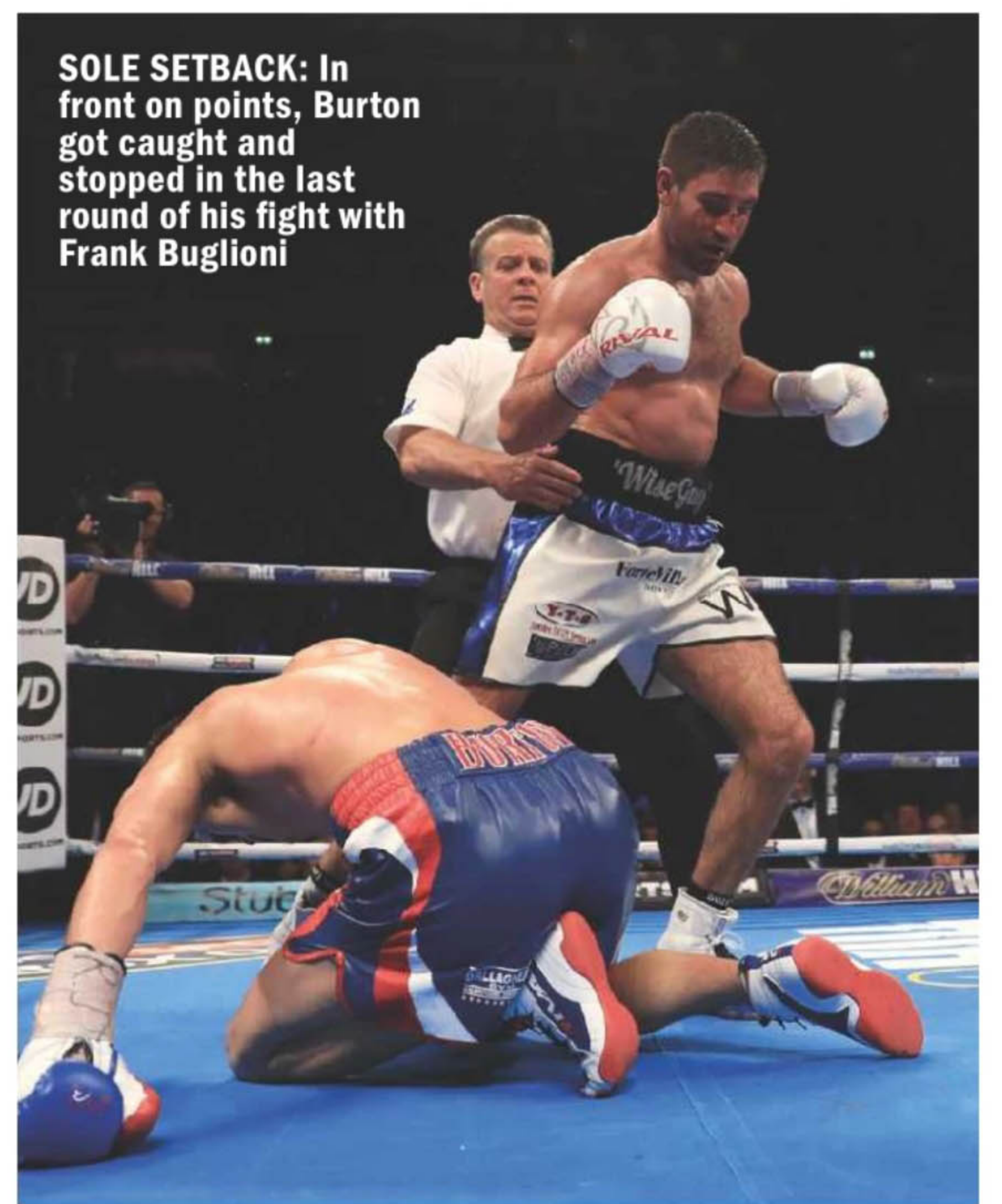
Burton candidly admits he is not a big ticket-seller, social media mouth or one for hitting the town. Instead, he enjoys spending time with his Oxford Game chickens (bred for show) and racehorses that bring him peace away from the complications of boxing.

Now two fights away from the paydays he has long craved for the security of his family, Burton is tantalisingly close to the big breakthrough. But, ultimately, he has an underlying wish to be remembered as a good man.

"I thought it was really close when I was British champion," he said. "I said the next fight or two I'm going to be world champion, have loads of money, retire happily and look after my family."

"But my ambition is to be happy in life. I don't want to be a super-millionaire and live

SOLE SETBACK: In front on points, Burton got caught and stopped in the last round of his fight with Frank Buglioni



for fame. I just want to be in a position where I'm comfortable so I can look after my family how they deserve to be looked after.

"When I die I want people to say: 'That Hosea Burton, he wasn't a bad lad. He was a good boxer.' Like my grandad was. My grandad is known as a really good man in the gypsy community, but I want to be a known as a really good man in the world."

"If people say to my grandchildren: 'Your grandad, he was a good lad. It will be all right if you're a chip off the old block' — that would be really nice, to build a legacy. Not just now, but for when I'm dead and gone. That's how I would like to be remembered." ■

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **CRAIG RICHARDS**

All photos: Getty Images

MOVING ON: Craig Richards has put a disappointing result behind him as he looks forward to boxing for the vacant British light-heavy title



STATUS INTACT

Craig Richards doesn't see a debatable draw in his last fight as a setback. As 'Spider' tells **Danny Flexen**, he took a risky bout, feels he won, and doesn't believe his standing has suffered

One of the more nerve-racking parts of a boxer's regular routine is surely the sometimes-agonising period between the final bell being tolled and the announcement of the decision rendered by the judges or, on occasion in the UK, the referee.

Even fighters who feel they have won clearly cannot completely relax until the all-important words have left the MC's mouth.

I was ringside for the eight-rounder between in-form light-heavyweight **Craig Richards** and late-notice opponent Chad Sugden at York Hall shortly before Christmas. I had remarked to one of my peers at the start of the Bethnal Green show, televised on Sky Sports, that the choice of Sugden seemed an unnecessary risk.

Sure, Crystal Palace's Richards was heavily favoured, riding a 2019 wave that had seen him vanquish solid domestic opposition in Jake Ball and Andre Sterling. However, Sugden came from Newark with an 11-1 record, impressive kickboxing pedigree and, crucially, nothing to lose. For the Londoner, who had a vacant British title showdown with unbeaten Shakan Pitters scheduled for the New Year and promoter Eddie Hearn hinting at even bigger battles to come, quite the opposite was the case.

At the end of eight hard-fought and entertaining sessions, I had witnessed a close and competitive bout, but equally I understood why Richards believed there was no doubt regarding the rightful victor. He had hurt Sugden early on, connected with the harder shots throughout and inflicted substantial facial damage. Despite Sugden having landed several fast combinations and moved well around the target, Richards *looked* like the winner; he felt like the winner. Hence, as he awaited official confirmation, "Spider" was not worried.

"No, not at all, you know as a fighter if you win or lose," Richards told *Boxing*

Monthly over the phone around three weeks after his surprise 77-77 draw. "Even Chad said afterwards: 'You won that fight.' His dad said it, too. As a fighter, when you're in there, you know.

"I felt so comfortable in there, I didn't really go through the gears. I was walking him down, hitting him with the heavier shots. He was throwing flurries here and there but it wasn't enough to win. To be honest, I was shocked at the verdict and a little bit irritated. I showed a little bit of frustration afterwards but I've seen worse robberies. It doesn't jeopardise my position or my rankings.

"I think I'm at that level, the No. 1 domestic fighter in the country at my weight. I can't afford to be fighting a journeyman. It's one of those fights where you learn again; I thought: 'I know I'm better than this guy,' and I kind of went through the motions a little bit. I hurt him early and thought I'd get him out of there. That's the wrong mentality to have. I'd probably have been forgiven for taking an

easier fight, but I've not taken many easy fights and I think that's helped me progress."

Richards' dogged refusal to accept a softer touch can be both admired and criticised. Even if he'd lost to Sugden, as their contest was not over the championship distance Richards would have retained his mandatory co-challenger status alongside Shakan Pitters for the coveted Lonsdale Belt, although the draw appeared to take some of the shine off that anticipated showdown.

Hennessy Sports had secured, via purse bids, the rights to stage Richards vs Pitters and planned to put it on terrestrial television in the early part of this year. This happened after efforts to make the match for the Matchroom show on which Richards ultimately met Sugden came to naught, leading to public acrimony between the two camps.

"He said he wasn't ready in the end," Richards insisted and, having spoken to Pitters, this assertion is accurate, ▶



ARE YOU KIDDING?: Richards was sure he'd done enough to get the verdict over Chad Sugden



OPENING UP: Richards says he felt comfortable in the bout with Sugden and it showed whenever he let his hands go



although only part of the story, as the 29-year-old went on to explain. “We were having negotiations with Matchroom about a British title fight — without Pitters or a specific opponent — and we had certain figures in our head.

“It became a [JD] NXTGEN show [an event with a comparatively lower budget] and Pitters was the opponent, and the figures we weren’t happy with. Purse bids were postponed. I spoke to Eddie [Hearn] again, made an agreement, and we said: ‘The fight’s on.’

“Eddie phones Jon Pegg [Pitters’ manager], who said ‘Shakan’s not ready.’ We proposed March 28 at the O2 instead but they said: ‘Nah, let’s go to purse bids.’ Obviously in their head, they already had an idea that they wanted to do this Channel 5 thing. I think he’s avoided those earlier opportunities to make a future with Channel 5.

“It’s just frustrating him saying I was avoiding him; why would I? The difference between me and him, maybe they had some different plan and that’s fine, but I didn’t go online and say he’s dodging me or he’s scared of me.”



CLASSY: Uppercuts such as this one were part of Richards' repertoire in the Sugden fight



PUNISHING: Blood and bruises don't always mean a boxer is losing but Sugden's features showed the effects of Richards' blows

opportunity. Could he step in against fellow Matchroom 175-pounder and former world title challenger Callum Johnson in March, in a vacant European title clash that would feasibly double as an eliminator for the WBA, a sanctioning body that ranks both men in its top 15? Johnson was, at press time, slated to face Russian Igor Mikhalkin for the continental crown in Manchester on 7 March, but the rumour mill tells us the card could be moved to London at the end of that month and Richards sells an abundance of tickets in his home city.

"That would be a good fight, a progress fight, but I don't really make any decisions on who I fight next," Richards noted. "I think Johnson is a very good fighter, one of the top fighters in Britain, but I don't look at anyone as my rival unless we've got a fight scheduled. I haven't woken up since I was a kid thinking: 'I'd love to win the European.' The only title I've ever wanted to win as a dream is the world title. So I'm not losing sleep. If I retired as a unified champion, I won't be thinking: 'Why did I miss that opportunity?'"

This penchant for plain speaking is part of what makes Richards so popular, and it is a trait shared with his siblings. Craig's sisters, Charlene and Jodie, are ever present at his fights and press conferences, and almost always audible. They can usually be heard either lauding their brother, denigrating his adversary or, most often, alternating passionately between the two. It is quite something to behold and while the boxer does not always like their interventions, he long ago accepted a lack of authority over his biggest supporters.

"They've always been the same," he laughed. "They were at all the amateur shows. They've always been vocal and loud. It's nice that your family support you because you're doing it for everyone, not just yourself. I heard Sterling say in an interview that it bothered him, and opponents said it in the amateurs. I've been telling them from the amateurs: 'Stop, stop shouting so much.'"

If "Spider's" performances match his aspirations, and those of Hearn and trainer Peter Sims for him, it won't just be his immediate family shouting about Craig Richards.

It does appear a fanciful suggestion that "Spider" would fear an opponent, even a formidable operator like Pitters. Richards endured a tough adolescence (see sidebar) and his only defeat came in his second fight at 175lbs, having taken a British title shot against then-champion Frank Buglioni at just five days' notice. Richards acquitted himself well but fell short on points. He has grown as a fighter since and harbours genuine self-belief.

So ambitious is the likeable light-heavy, in fact, that it now appears the Pitters fight may be off the table, at least for the time being, despite their burgeoning grudge. Hearn recently stated there may be a more attractive proposition in the offing for Richards.

"I've got to talk to my team," Richards said. "I saw the interview as well and we'll see what Eddie's got to say. At the end of the day, he's my promoter, his input is important too. I've prepared for Shakan already for ages, so at the moment that's just continuing."

Richards vowed he had no idea what the golden ticket in question could be, but I presented him with a hypothetical

CRAIG RICHARDS ■■■■■

DRIVING FORCE

Craig Richards' route out of gang life is enlightening

The rising tide of gang culture in the UK and closely related knife crime epidemic is a national emergency, but more pronounced in London. While most experts advocate a holistic, multi-agency approach, it is easily forgotten how minor details can have a beneficial effect.

For Craig Richards, once embroiled in a life of crime and violence, it wasn't social services, the police or even boxing that ultimately provided an escape route. It was a black Renault Clio.

"I didn't get involved out of choice," he recalls. "My mum used to work late. I'd be out all the time, at youth clubs. People from other areas say that you hang round 'there', with 'them', and you end up in a back-and-forth by association. That's why I say south London is a bit hard at times because if you're out later in a certain area you're automatically classed as a gang member; originally I just liked pool and table tennis!

"Even when I started boxing at 14, I was still involved a bit with it. The boxing takes you out of situations at times when you're at training, when you're occupied. I was always into sports. Even when the boys would always smoke [marijuana], I was never a smoker. I was never interested in abusing my body.

"It's about being mature. When you're young, you're not driving, but by a certain age, say 17, you start driving. Now you've got a choice, you're not having to cross paths with people or have people jumping on your bus or who know what school you go to; the whole being in control of yourself gives you options."

DANNY FLEXEN

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ KAL YAFAI

BIG PLANS: Yafai aims to add more belts to the WBA one he already owns — but first he has to overcome the formidable Chocolatito Gonzalez



NOTHING BUT THE BEST

Kal Yafai is undefeated and he's made five world title defences. Now, the super flyweight champion tells GLYNN EVANS, he wants the superfights, starting with Chocolatito Gonzalez

Though **Kal Yafai** sports an unblemished 26-fight slate spanning seven years and has reigned as WBA super flyweight champion for the past three, the former decorated amateur star remains Britain's least recognised world champion.

But the cordial, quiet man from Balsall Heath, Birmingham predicts that will change dramatically in 2020. The new year is certainly off to a flying start for Yafai, with a breakout title-defence superfight against Nicaragua's four-division world champion Chocolatito Gonzalez announced for the undercard of the Mikey Garcia vs Jessie Vargas welterweight shootout in Texas on 29 February.

Initially, the Beijing Olympian was primed to unify against WBC counterpart Juan Francisco Estrada earlier this year but, with the Mexican incapacitated through injury, one-time P4P leader Chocolatito represents an ideal replacement to plug the gap between world class and elite level opposition.

"In my three years as champion, I've certainly become a smarter fighter. I now need the superfights to prove it," says Yafai, who won his title by schooling Panama's Luis Concepcion on the Anthony Joshua vs Eric Molina undercard at Manchester Arena back in December 2016.

"After five successful defences, three overseas, I've earned the right. I don't think there's many harder men about at 115lbs

than me. I've had enough routine defences. I need fights that'll really motivate me, bring most credit.

"If I can win just one big one, then others — Inoue, Rungvisai, Estrada, Ancajas, unification with the Japanese kid [WBO champion Kazuto] Ioka — should follow. There's so many great fights to be made at 115 [lbs].

"I thought the whole point of putting me and [Filipino IBF champion Jerwin] Ancajas on the same card in Fresno last year [2018] was to match us straight after, but his lot weren't interested.

"Protecting my unbeaten record isn't an issue. Biggest fights, best opponents. Fans desire to know exactly how good I am.

"Hopefully, they'll see the best of me over the next 12-18 months because I'll be placed against proud, elite-level opponents with whom I can put on technical spectacles. But I'm 30. I need these superfights, unifiers now, not in two years' time."

The bustling, bull-strong bodysnatcher from Brum has done everything asked of him during his 36-month reign yet the names of the overseas stars he cites often resonate more with UK fans than his own.

Concepcion, the champion he conquered, was a two-weight WBA titleholder who'd defeated six world champions, while tough Suguru Muranaka and the tall, tricky Sho Ishida entered with stats of 25-2-1 and 24-0 respectively.

"After Concepcion failed the weight [2.5 pounds over], I could've swerved it, fought for the vacant title in Birmingham a few months after. But I was in the best shape of my life, mentally and physically. I was ready to go. I knew it was my time.

"Luis could punch but, stepping into the ring, I saw so many people, then I looked up, even more people. 'Fuck me, you can't get chinned in front of all these!' Being Britain's first super fly champion meant as much as being Brum's first world champion.

"None of my challengers were anywhere near the class of Gonzalez but those defences have at least acclimatised me to boxing 12-rounders at world level.

"I won the title in Manchester, defended in Brum, did my mandatory on an AJ undercard at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff and the last three have been abroad.

"The Birmingham show sold all right but Brum's a weird one. I got reasonable press about being the city's first-ever boxing world champion when I beat Concepcion, but it never really caught fire and it's forgotten now.

"As a Second City, you think it'd do better. There's not been a lot of sporting success here. I remember [his ex-Team GB coach and fellow Brummie] Rob McCracken saying: 'They'll all go to Leeds on a Tuesday night when it's pissing down with rain to watch their shitty football team, but they get a world champion and hardly any of the Brum sporting public turn out.' ▶

POWERHOUSE: Yafai's superior physical strength was on show when he soundly outpointed Norberto Jimenez



KEY WEAPON: The left jab (here being employed against Israel Gonzalez) is what Yafai believes will secure victory over Chocolatito



"But it's a bit late in my career to stress about spearheading a Birmingham revival. As I'll only be doing this for another couple of years, I just want the best opposition for the most money. I earn noticeably more for defending abroad. It's a no-brainer."

And it's not only in the Second City that this bright, polite and popular boxer remains largely under appreciated.

"A bit more recognition would be nice but all the trash talk and stare-outs at weigh-ins don't interest me. I just like to fight," he says.

"I engage with my fans on Facebook, do Instagram. I send out signed photos, gloves and stuff that I've bought myself but, if your face don't fit, it don't fit. I'm not overly concerned. I just want to achieve the most I can from my ability, and maximise my earnings."

If Yafai's profile has stagnated of late, his bank balance has certainly blossomed through working abroad. Mexico's David Carmona was dumped four times in Fresno, California while his 23-2 compatriot Israel Gonzalez was seen off under the chandeliers of the Casino de Monte Carlo in Monaco.

Most recently, in June, the Dominican Republic's Norberto Jimenez — who'd previously drawn for the WBA title in Japan — was pummelled over 12 rounds in Providence, Rhode Island.

"To get top dollar, you have to do DAZN. I see myself as a road warrior," Yafai states. "Defending abroad is definitely different. It requires mental attributes more than anything."

"At home, on your ring walk, everyone wants to touch your gloves, scream your name. In America, the locals generally

favour a Latino over a Brit. In Rhode Island, I was loudly booed, but that just makes you more determined to show 'em what you're all about."

"Monaco was an absolute nightmare; cold, raining, dull and I struggled making weight, but Fresno was fun. Like Concepcion, Carmona came in well over weight [three and a half pounds]. They offered to compensate me with a thousand dollars but his purse was only 10 grand so I let him keep it. He'd got enough bruises and wounds already!"

"I've been very well received by the fans, the press and ESPN but Fresno and Rhode Island aren't Las Vegas or Madison Square Garden. I want to be involved in big fights at the iconic venues."

Given Yafai's amateur pedigree, it surprised no one when the Arabian ace stormed through the pro ranks, his technical class initially masked by the brute force of his punching.

Of his first 20 victims, 14 failed to finish. He was Commonwealth champion in just his 11th paid bout. IBF Inter-Continental and British titles followed in starts 12 and 17, with Nicaragua's future WBC champion Cristofer Rosales taken to school over eight in fight 14. Within three and a half years of Yafai debuting, promoter Eddie Hearn had navigated him to the front of the WBA's queue of contenders.

It only takes a brief period in Yafai's presence to conclude that he is a thoroughly decent human being, utterly devoid of airs or ego. He is completely at ease existing away from the spotlight, with his partner and Porsche on a sizeable plot in the Upper Warwickshire countryside, and training in solitude with coach Max McCracken at the Lynch Brothers' gym in Garretts Green.



MAKING HISTORY: Yafai became Birmingham's first world boxing champ when he defeated Luis Concepcion

Getty Images

"I like to work hard and live quiet," Yafai says.

"In the gym, it's just me and Max, one on one. I like a peaceful life. I'm a practising Muslim now. The older I'm getting, the stronger my faith has become but Ramadan won't ever be a stumbling block. I'd work round it and make up the fasting later.

"I want to walk away from boxing knowing I'm financially set up and I'm very close. I own multiple properties and I'm currently renovating this nice new house. Each morning I get to look out over an acre of land!

"I'm a focused person. I know what I want and I can go to bed every night in the knowledge that I trained really hard today and that's why I've got what I've got."

Now the 5ft 4ins powerhouse is well placed to meet the premier boxers in and around his division. However, since arriving at world level he has stopped only one of six opponents.

"Challengers say they're coming to have it but once they cop for my power they refuse to engage, make it tricky," he says.

"But my nutritionist is very smart and I still feel very strong, very powerful. I'll be 9[st] 2[lbs], 9-3, in the ring. One hundred per cent I can still deliver knockouts at world level."

He will certainly need to be at his irrepressible, explosive best against the 32-year-old Chocolatito, who has lost to just one man — Thailand's Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, twice — in a 15-year, 50-fight professional career. "It's already getting a lot of attention on social [media]. Fans are really looking forward to it," Yafai says.

"Coming through, Gonzalez was always one of the elite fighters that I followed and I actually travelled to LA in 2015 to watch

FIRST DEFENCE: Japan's Suguru Muranaka had a respectable record but was no match for Yafai



Getty Images

him demolish Edgar Sosa in two rounds at the Inglewood Forum.

"Some will claim Chocolatito is 'shot' but he certainly looked very sharp in his tune-up after 15 months out [a second-round stoppage over a Filipino journeyman in Japan in late December] and we'll be preparing for how he was in his absolute pound-for-pound prime.

"I'll certainly be going in with a bit of fear. His technical ability — the variety in his combinations when he puts his shots together — is unbelievable but his greatest asset is probably his workrate. He just doesn't stop throwing. So I'll need to take my own fitness to another level. It'll require a lot of pad and bag work, going through the gears, going three or four times for every attack.

"I very much doubt it'll be a cagey fight. I expect we'll take turns going at each other,

back and forth, high action, entertaining. Once Chocolatito gets going, he keeps going. He gets in your face rather than tries to outbox you. However, he's not always mindful of what's coming back at him and he's been getting hit more of late.

"It's crucial we get the tactics right. I'll enter with clear advantages in height, reach, youth and freshness. I have to make them count.

"At this stage, an out-and-out war might suit me more than it suits him but I believe it's my very underrated jab that's the key to me winning this fight. Most of the opposition he's previously excelled against didn't possess a jab. He marks up. I'll certainly be looking to stop him rather than win on points.

"After that, I want Estrada for all the marbles."



TARGETING LOMACHENKO

Teofimo Lopez is a super-confident young champion. He has Vasiliy Lomachenko in his sights and tells JAMES LUPTON that if the fight happens he's going to humble 'Hi-Tech'

Confidence is a great thing for a fighter. For lightweight champion **Teofimo Lopez**, though, it is confidence on a whole different level. He just knows he's going to win.

Lopez became a world champion at 22 after just 15 fights when he stopped Richard Commey in two rounds on 14 December.

"I told everybody it won't go past six [rounds]," Lopez told *Boxing Monthly*. "So within those rounds, it's what I expected. I wanted to see what he was able to do. We both were going for the overhand right. I just had a better placed shot than he did, and that was it, the end of the night."

Brought up by his Honduran parents, Lopez represented their homeland at the 2016 Olympics. But his dream had been to represent Team USA.

"I won the US Olympic trials so I did everything [needed] to represent the USA at the Olympics," he said. "I got screwed."

"Four years later, I won my first world title. I think God had everything planned for me. I think this was planned a long time ago. Like I said to everybody, I was a world champion before all of that. I don't need a belt to tell me that. I am what I set out to be."

In the lightweight competition at the Rio Games, Brooklyn-born Lopez lost via unanimous decision to Sofiane Oumiha of France, a verdict that brought a chorus of boos.

"Absolutely, it sucks," he said.

"I knew that after the Olympic Games I'd turn pro. I was excited that it was almost done. Honestly, it was a relief."

Lopez caused controversy last February with his celebratory antics after knocking out Diego Magdaleno.

"I don't regret anything I did," he said.

"Things were talked about. Magdaleno made it a little personal. When I talk shit — sorry for my language — when I talk smack to fighters, I talk directly to the fighter. I don't say anything to their family, about mothers, about fathers, any of those things."

"Magdaleno made it personal. He talked about my parents' home country and it hurt my father. What was done, was done. I know now in the future we are going to control our emotions more and do things differently."

As for the fight itself, Lopez feels that it should have been stopped long before the seventh-round finish.

"The guy was taking too many punches, it was just bad for him," he said.

"People want to see me go rounds in the ring, maybe the whole fight, to see how I look, my stamina and things like that."

"[But] the more rounds I go, the worse it is for the [opposing] fighter and the better it is for me. That's exactly what happened. After every round it just got worse and worse and worse for Magdaleno, and look what happened."

"I ended up taking off this guy's head. I threw two hooks and laid him flat. He couldn't get up from that, and I was hoping he wouldn't. The referee was counting. I was like: 'What the hell are you doing? Stop the fight already!'"

"It's sad. That's why I love the team I have. We know it's not going to happen, but if that day was to come I know my father would say: 'No, enough is enough.'"

At the top of the lightweight food chain, of course, sits Vasiliy Lomachenko, who is the WBA "super" champion, WBO champion and the WBC franchise champion. The WBC has made Devin Haney its champion in recess while he recovers from a shoulder injury, with Luke Campbell and Javier

Fortuna matched for the vacant WBC title.

"The WBC makes me laugh sometimes, that they have the [champion in] recess thing going on," Lopez said. "[But] I think it's a great matchup — I'd be intrigued to watch it."

"Luke Campbell has been WBC Silver champion and he's mandatory for the WBC title. Campbell is an excellent fighter, a strong fighter. We've sparred numerous times and we always give each other good work."

The name Devin Haney has circulated next to Lopez' for a long time. Now they are both young, unbeaten world champions in the same weight class with sparring stories. Lopez, however, is dismissive of a potential Haney fight. He describes their past sparring



TEOFIMO LOPEZ ■■■■■

STRIDING FORWARD:
Lopez has won his first world title; now he wants to take part in a super fight



GETTING IN FIRST:
Commeys has a big right hand but Lopez beat him to the punch



sessions as one-sided and claims “The Dream” would be an easy win for him.

“Devin Haney has a lot to learn,” Lopez said. “He’s still young and he’s not there yet. Devin Haney, when we sparred he just threw one punch, a jab. That’s all he was throwing. Every time the kid wanted to commit, I hurt him. I countered his countering. It’ll be an easy win if we were to fight. But I don’t see that fight happening. I don’t think they will take the fight.”

“With Devin Haney, all that stuff is irrelevant. They are making him sound good when he’s not. I wish him the best and I hope he has a healthy recovery [from the shoulder injury] and hopefully he can make big things happen where he can fight better opposition and maybe we can run it down the line and make a big fight.”

‘I’d show him he’s no god’

It was, however, Lomachenko who joined Lopez in the ring for post-fight photos after he won the IBF title and is strongly rumoured to be his next opponent.

Lopez doesn’t agree that Lomachenko is the lightweight kingpin and gave his reasons why he would be confident of winning a fight between “Hi-Tech” and himself.

“They [people who favour Lomachenko] would think about how he moves side to side — well, he moves to one side to be honest, not even side to side.”

Lopez feels that many of Lomachenko’s opponents have been beaten before the fight started. “They just respect him too much,” he said. “They’re scared. Scared of opening up to him, because he’s going to throw so many punches at them the moment they open up. They get scared and fold.”

“The moment you get a fighter that actually throws [punches] at him and doesn’t stop, that doesn’t care, he ends up getting bruises all over his face and starts getting hurt.

“Lomachenko thinks he’s a god in this sport. If we were to ever fight, I’d show him he’s no god.

“I can tell by the way Lomachenko carries himself that he’s not a humble dude. I’ll humble his ass. I don’t respect him. That’s the difference between me and all these other fighters that put him on this pedestal. Do you know where I put Lomachenko? As a fucking cockroach — and I can squash him.

“It’s a fight my father’s wanted for a long time. Me, I just want the belts.

“We’ll see. It’s something we’re talking about. I have my manager, David McWater, to clear those things out while I’m on holiday with my wife. My father will talk about these things with Bob Arum and ESPN and we’ll figure it out and see if we can make that super fight happen in 2020.”

Mention of his wife, Cynthia, who is five years older than Lopez, brings up the matter of family tensions. It is now common knowledge that Lopez’ family disapproved of the union. Lopez began to suffer from depression. A disappointing performance against Japan’s Masayoshi Nakatani was followed by counselling. The Lopez who



HAVING FUN: Post-fight celebrations are part of the Lopez package

showed up against Commey was a different fighter to the one who went the distance in defeating Nakatani.

Lopez and Commey had the chance to size each other up back in February 2019. While the encounter was on good terms as the pair exchanged selfies, Lopez knew his time to shine was coming.

“I didn’t know about the guy until he fought Robert Easter,” Lopez said. “That’s just me being honest. We fought on the same card when I fought Diego Magdaleno [Commey knocked out Russia’s Isa Chaniev in the second round]. Afterwards, we went back to the lobby. He wanted to take a picture with me and people were like: ‘Oh, are we going to see a fight between Lopez and you?’ He was like: ‘No, no, no, no, he’s my friend.’ I was like: ‘Oh, man!’

“I said: ‘We’re friends for now,’ and I said maybe down the line we’ll meet. He agreed to take the fight. He doesn’t say no to any fighter.”

Lopez has been trained from the beginning by his father, Teofimo Sr, but he also worked for seven weeks with trainer and former champion Joey Gamache in the build-up to the Commey fight. Lopez sparred with the likes of Ivan Baranchyk and the team worked on tactics.

“Joey Gamache and my father, they watched films together of Richard Commey

and things they were telling me, like: ‘You have to come inside and grab the shots. He’s too wide with his shots. You can get him inside.’

“So the things we were working on were closing the distance, working on the inside, trusting our defence, and there was lots of really technical stuff we worked on. I had a really great camp and I trusted in my team.

“Every fight is important but you always have to have a strong team, because the saying goes: ‘United we stand, divided we fall.’ As a team and a unit, I have a great team. I have a great manager. I have a great platform on ESPN. A great promotional group, Top Rank. Everything just falls in line. You have to trust who’s around you.”

Credit is given to Top Rank matchmakers Bruce Trampler, Carl Moretti and Brad Goodman, who shrewdly matched Lopez against Commey at the right time.

“How good are they? They just made an amazing fight happen for all the fight fans,” Lopez said. “They trusted in me to become world champion.

“The matchmakers are phenomenal. I have a great relationship with each and every one of them and they believe in my skills as much as my manager believes in me, as much as my father believes in me.

“All they had to do was get the [right] moment.”

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BRITISH BEAT with STEVE LILLIS

This fighting is no fantasy

One-time child actor Tyrone McKenna missed out on a role in Game of Thrones but he believes success in MTK's Golden Contract tournament will bear out his decision to put boxing first

TYRONE MCKENNA could have waged war in *Game of Thrones* but instead of fantasy fighting he is doing it for real in the boxing ring.

It looks like it's paying off for the Belfast man after he reached the *Golden Contract* super lightweight semi-finals that take place at York Hall, Bethnal Green on 21 February.

The child-acting star won rave reviews when he starred alongside Gillian Anderson and Robert Carlyle in the 2005 movie *The Mighty Celt*, which is now his ring moniker.

The X-Files star Anderson even linked up McKenna, who was then 15, with her Hollywood contacts and although there was an avalanche of offers, boxing won the day.

Although his boxing career is going just fine, life might have been easier had he not turned down a guaranteed part in *Game of Thrones*.

The dad-of-two revealed: "It wasn't even an audition for *Game of Thrones*. The casting director watched *The Mighty Celt* and had a part for me.

"Because I was full-on boxing I no longer had my agent, but he called *The Mighty Celt*'s director and asked if he was still in touch with me.

"He lived up the street from me so called up my granny and asked her to tell me there was a part coming up for a new project.

"She forgot to tell me for a week. I phoned the casting director, who said there was a part for me, and she asked to meet me on the following Saturday.

"I then realised I booked up to go to Manchester for the weekend to watch Jay-Z in concert. It was the first series and I thought: 'I've never heard of this *Game of Thrones*, I'm going to the concert.' And it became the biggest thing in the world."

All photos: MTK Global

SUPERIOR SKILLS: McKenna boxed a disciplined fight to outclass Mikey Sakyi in the *Golden Contract* quarter-finals



Life might have been financially sweeter for partner Catrina and their young family, but effervescent McKenna believes he will be proved right when his boxing career ends.

If he wins the MTK-backed *Golden Contract*, he will earn a six-figure, five-bout promotional deal, and the word is that the fight purses and bonuses in the competition are not to be sniffed at.

It was a virtual shutout over 10 rounds in his quarter-final win against Mikey Sakyi in November, when McKenna also defended his WBC International championship.

Such are the intricacies of the exciting competition, southpaw McKenna will not discover his last-four opponent until fight week. Bitter enemy Ohara Davies, tournament favourite Mohamed Mimoune and Jeff Ofori are all potential foes.

McKenna, 29, told *Boxing Monthly*: "When I first got called about the *Golden Contract* and who was going to be in it, I was really, really excited.

"I said 'Yes' straight away and that was before I heard about the purses and the promotional contract for the winner. When I was told that, I realised this was everything and I was so focused on winning.

"Winning the quarter-final and knowing the semi-final date, your next fight purse, as soon as you step out of the ring is a complete change.

"Normally you fight and don't know about your next fight for another three or four months.

"If I had the choice of who I face in the semi-final, it would be Jeff Ofori. I don't really mind who I fight but he is the weakest link.

"The money increases with each round, so I want to get to the final in the easiest possible

way. I just see Ofori as the easiest, although I am not worried one bit about anyone else.

"I would love to fight Ohara Davies as I 100 per cent believe I can beat him.

"Mimoune is perhaps the hardest but again I am not worried about facing him. When I win and beat someone like Mimoune, I will be knocking on the door for a world title and have a big promotional contract.

"I don't really care about Ohara, to be honest. He means nothing to me and I don't really think about him, although he can push my buttons when I see him.

"We have crossed paths before and the bad feeling is genuine — nothing fake. He is disrespectful to people. But he would bring out the best in me."

When leading British and Irish boxers are mentioned, McKenna's name is often overlooked.



CHAMPIONSHIP FEELING: Winning the WBC International title was a bonus for McKenna as he earned a place in the tournament semi-finals

His solitary loss in 22 fights came against Jack Catterall in June 2018, when knockdowns in the second and fifth rounds perhaps cost him at least a draw. A narrow win against Lewis Benson was another give-and-take battle.

McKenna used his reach and southpaw skills to beat the bloodied Sakyi. The easy win surprisingly signalled the end of McKenna's relationship with trainer Danny Vaughan.

He is now based in Dublin and training with Peter Taylor alongside Tyrone McCullagh, who left Vaughan at the same time. McKenna's best friend Tommy McCarthy is also in that successful camp.

McKenna, who was based on the US east coast when he turned professional in 2012, explained: "My kids are six and seven but I have been away from them for more than half of their lives because of boxing. I've been based in the United States, Marbella and Scotland with Danny.

"I have missed a lot of their growing up years and it was getting to me a bit.

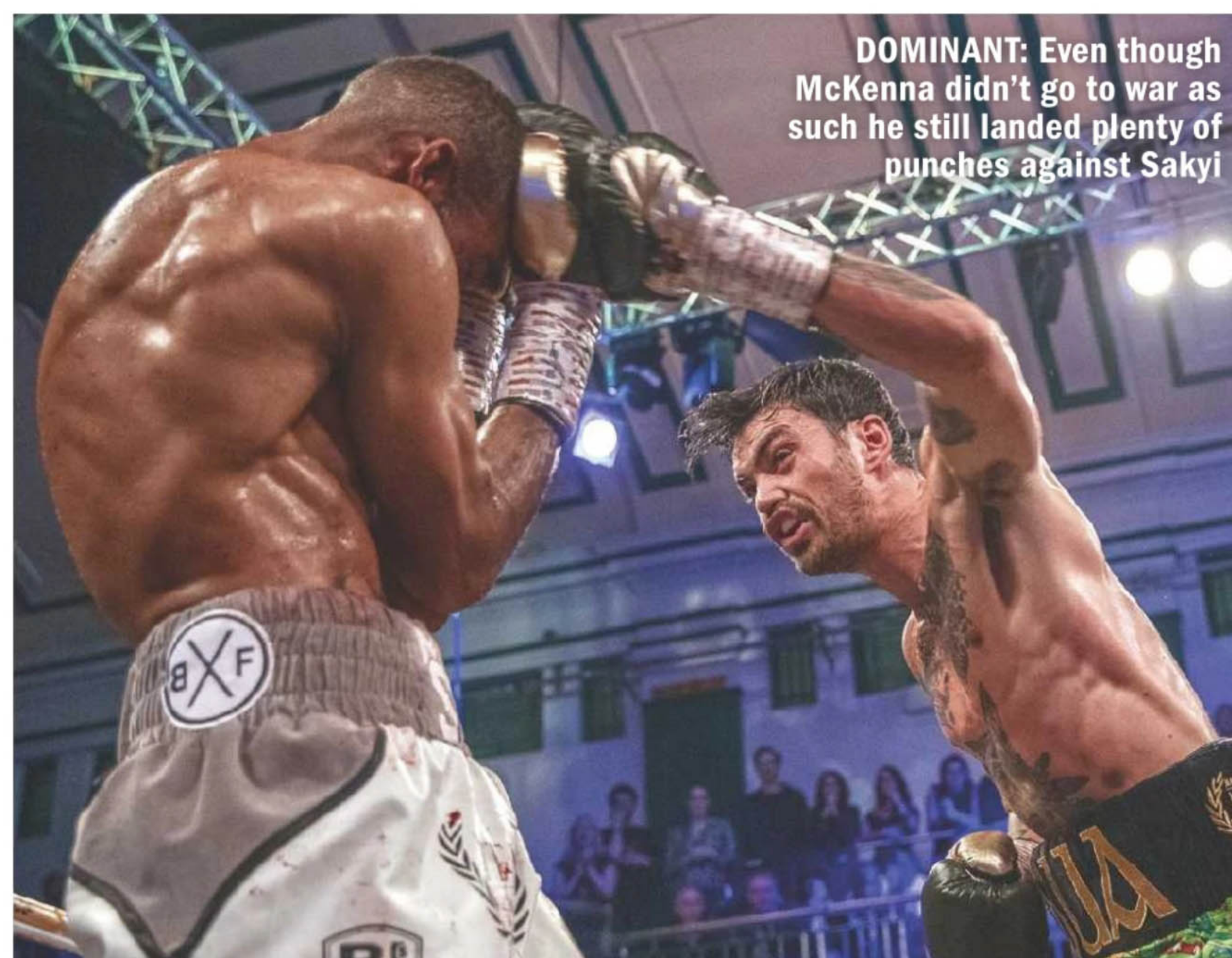
"I had a discussion with Danny and we decided it would be best if I went elsewhere, so I could be in Ireland.

"I think Peter is an unbelievable coach. He has made Katie Taylor what she is today, got Luke Keeler a world title shot and brought back Tommy McCarthy and got him a brilliant win in Italy.

"His knowledge is fantastic and although we have only had a few weeks, I feel confident about how well it will work out."

Although Taylor was delighted to replace Vaughan, who did a top-class job, he has told McKenna to stop the thrills-and-spills fights that have made him popular with fans and broadcasters.

"Yeah, yeah, I guess I am pretty exciting and it has always been like that, even sparring as an amateur," added McKenna, who spoke to *Boxing Monthly* while spending a weekend in



DOMINANT: Even though McKenna didn't go to war as such he still landed plenty of punches against Sakyi

Munich training amateur boxers for a sponsor.

"I have proven that I can fight, and I love to give the fans what they want, but the first thing Peter said was that he wanted the battles to stop. So 'War McKenna' is no more.

"That might not be good for the fans but it's good for me.

"I didn't go to war with Sakyi but I nearly did. He hit me with a body shot in the second round but I thought: 'Stay sensible, just win and get to the semi-finals.'

"I didn't have to be entertaining to get to the next fight in the competition. I didn't have to get into a war.

"It is great to earn big fights by being entertaining but all I want to do is win this competition. Boxing is going to win me the *Golden Contract* and that is what I'm going to do."

To get a glimpse of where his fighting spirit comes from, McKenna recollects getting initially overlooked for the part of Donal in *The Mighty Celt*.

McKenna, who had no drama school experience, said: "The film-makers went around schools in Belfast looking for kids who they could cast in the role and look at further. They picked my friends and not me.

"There was then an advert in the *Belfast Telegraph* for open auditions and I thought: 'I'm not having that. I'm going down.' After six or seven auditions, I landed the part out of 2,300 kids.

"I thought: 'I'm an actor now,' and I was going to give up

boxing. But things never worked out so I started focusing more on boxing.

"After *The Mighty Celt*, a lot of offers came in to my agent, who sent me to voice lessons so I could do English and American accents.

"But they were £150 an hour so I pretended to go and then when it came to auditions and the people were expecting to hear my American accent, I couldn't do it.

"Also, I couldn't give 100 per cent to both — and there will always be acting after boxing finishes."

Besides boxing, his competitive spirit is there to see in crazy but good-natured battles with stablemate McCullagh.

Recently, McKenna lost to his friend at 10-pin bowling and had to have a tattoo of McCullagh eating a burrito put on his body.

The loser of their next duel faces even harder punishment.

"Tyrone and myself are always in sporting competition and always think we're better than the other," McKenna said.

"Everyone calls us Tyrone Number One and Tyrone Number Two and each of us always claim to be Number One.

"We're doing a day of basketball shooting, bowling and pool. The loser has to go to Belfast City Hall and legally change his name to Tyrone Number Two."

That won't be a problem for McKenna as long as he's Number One when the *Golden Contract* final takes place.



WORLD IN ACTION

Getty Images



DOING DAMAGE: Williams was quickly able to find the range against the lanky Fox

BRITISH FIGHT OF THE MONTH

21 December, Hackney Wick

LIAM WILLIAMS KO5 ALANTEZ FOX

Seemingly on the cusp of a world title shot in 2020, **Liam Williams** cemented those claims with a ruthlessly impressive five-round demolition of former WBO middleweight title challenger **Alantez Fox** at the Copper Box.

Originally billed as a final eliminator for the WBO middleweight title (later denied by president Paco Valcarcel), this was still a noteworthy barometer for a fight with the organisation's champion Demetrius Andrade, who travelled the full 12 rounds with Fox in 2017.

In the form of his life, the tenacious Williams (now 22-2-1, 17 KOs) swiftly mastered the range and worked inside Fox's considerable reach and dimensions. The lanky Fox, a purported 6ft 4ins tall, couldn't fend Williams off as the faster Welshman landed a well-timed jab. It set up a right hand that gradually broke Fox's resistance. Williams was slightly cut over the left eye after a graze of heads in the first but otherwise hit the ground running.

Fox detonated a solid right hand at the start of the second

as he gambled under duress. Williams was blinking with his cut but otherwise unfazed. He held the greater firepower and chipped away at the skyscraper-like Fox. The visitor walked straight into a right hand in the third and now Fox was cut on the bridge of his nose.

Fox (now 26-2-1, 12 KOs) couldn't deter Williams. Every Williams shot sent an electric shock rippling through Fox and eventually a big right hand toppled the visitor in the fourth. After rising, Fox was teetering on unsteady legs and barely made the end of the round.

A big right hand had Fox holding and folding before referee Steve Gray deducted a point early in the fifth. Bleeding from the cut on the bridge of the nose and another over the right eye, Fox was in disarray as successive left hooks sent him wilting into the ropes.

Fox desperately grabbed Williams around the legs as he slumped to the canvas and the referee waved it off with one second remaining in the round. Williams now has Andrade in his sights. He's ready. **MB**

14 December, Brentwood

Hosea Burton
W10 Bob Ajisafe

Ricards Bolotniks
K01 Steven Ward

Liam Conroy
W10 Andre Sterling

Serge Michel
W10 Tommy Philbin

After the draw for MTK's *Golden Contract* 175lbs tournament arguably pitted the best two fighters against one another, it was Manchester's **Hosea Burton** who laid down a marker for the rest of the competition by outsmarting avoided switch-hitter **Bob Ajisafe** over 10 rounds at the Brentwood Centre. Scores were 99-90, 99-92 and 98-91.

Both were former British champions at the weight, experienced and widely swerved by other contenders, but the snap in Burton's shots proved decisive. He dropped Ajisafe with a clinical one-two just six seconds into the contest and never looked in danger of surrendering that advantage.

Tall and rangy, Burton (now 25-1, 11 KOs) presented a continual threat with his razor-sharp right hand while the shifty Ajisafe jabbed to the body and landed straight lefts downstairs. But Ajisafe rarely strung enough shots together to break the Mancunian's stranglehold on proceedings.

Ajisafe (now 19-4, 9 KOs) was always a nuisance but

Burton, focused and fresher, kept him in check with a stiff jab and those wickedly accurate right hands. A busier Ajisafe showed greater urgency late but Burton was already home and hosed, negotiating a difficult test with relative ease. He was pleasingly on point.

Latvian danger man **Ricards Bolotniks** stunned Northern Ireland's previously unbeaten **Steven Ward** in the opening round and earned a welcome £5,000 knockout bonus in the process.

Apparently bone dry at the weight, the well-schooled Ward had been contemplating a move to cruiserweight, but found the lucrative *Golden Contract* opportunity too tempting to turn down.

Bolotniks (now 16-5-1, 7 KOs) served early warning with dangerous right hands before a left hook deposited Ward on to the seat of his trunks halfway through the opening round. Ward rose but his legs were gone and he was under fierce pressure before a right uppercut had him dipping backwards into the ropes, where a second count was administered by referee Phil Edwards.

A right hand near the back of the head sent Ward (now 12-1, 4 KOs) down a third time and the towel came in after two minutes, 21 seconds. Ward lacked his usual strength and pop, but Bolotniks, riding high on a five-fight win streak, was in no mood for hanging around.

Barrow-in-Furness' **Liam Conroy** was too cultured for



LASER ACCURACY: Burton scored with the right hand all night

Getty Images

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

Getty Images (2)



ONE-ROUND STUNNER: Overwhelmed by his opponent's fast start, Ward hits the deck for the first of three knockdowns

sturdy Londoner **Andre Sterling**, who nevertheless pushed him hard late on despite being dropped in the seventh round. Scores were 98-91, 96-94 and 97-92.

Conroy illustrated greater poise against the speedy Sterling, who brought bulldozing pressure but lacked the required finesse. Better at range, Conroy controlled the tempo behind a stiff jab and usually smothered Sterling in close.

The buzzsaw Sterling, shorter but strong, caused problems on the inside, ploughing Conroy to the ropes. Conroy finally pulled away in the seventh after dropping the Londoner with a pinpoint left hook. A right hand later in the round forced a stumble from Sterling and he was repeatedly tagged as Conroy assumed control.

With his better fundamentals, Conroy (now 18-5-1, 9 KOs) landed the cleaner blows, though he had to withstand some sustained bodywork from Sterling in the closing stages.

Conroy unloaded in the ninth but the battle-hardened Sterling took everything and came back for more. Two right uppercuts stunned Sterling (now 10-2, 4 KOs) in the last as Conroy stemmed a strong finish from the Londoner to prevail after 10 uncompromising rounds.

Like the other defeated quarter-finalists, Edinburgh's **Tommy Philbin** chose his opponent in the draw but he was picked off and dropped twice by "Bavarian Sniper"

Serge Michel. Scores were 99-90 (twice) and 98-90.

Philbin stepped up from super middle at relatively late notice and endured a torrid time early but then showed dogged resistance in a losing cause. Michel (now 10-1, 7 KOs) looked a whole division bigger, manoeuvring the Scot around the ring and bullying him with his strength and thudding jab.

A series of left hooks to the body took a toll in the third before a final one dropped Philbin (now 13-1, 4 KOs) by the ropes. He weathered the following assault and thereafter took the fight to the German to stop the rot, backing Michel up with left hooks to the body in the seventh.

The Scot's fighting spirit kept Michel at bay until the final round when a jarring right hand to the temple buzzed him and he looked down, visibly shaken by the shot. A further right floored Philbin in the dying seconds of the fight but the bell rang just in time. **MB**

19 December, Bethnal Green

Richard Riakporhe
W12 Jack Massey

Walworth banger **Richard Riakporhe** edged out a spirited **Jack Massey** to clinch the vacant British cruiserweight title at York Hall, but off-key officiating provided the main talking points of the fight.

Scores were 115-113 (twice) and a wide 117-111 for Riakporhe from judge Bob Williams. Pictures later surfaced online suggesting Williams may



TOUGH GOING: Riakporhe was pushed to the limit by the determined Massey

not have had a clear sight of the ring with photographers obscuring his view.

Riakporhe was also the beneficiary of an erroneous knockdown call in the 10th round when Massey dropped to one knee after being struck by the inside of the Londoner's elbow and he was given an eight count. That debatable knockdown effectively cost the Derbyshire man a draw. (The scores suggested the 10th was scored 10-9 to Riakporhe but it was a round that Massey mostly controlled).

To compound matters, referee Phil Edwards allowed a fatigued Riakporhe to hold with impunity late on with no point deductions despite numerous warnings earlier (for both men). Massey had every right to feel aggrieved.

Riakporhe (now 11-0, 8 KOs) is a natural puncher who can box a bit. An ever-present threat with his vaunted right hand, Riakporhe started brightly enough but was gradually outhustled. Massey had seemingly seized the initiative when Riakporhe landed a thumping right in the third to flip the script and have the East Midlander under furious fire.

Yet Massey (now 16-1, 8 KOs) regrouped, stepping in close to negate Riakporhe's range and unleash a wicked left hook to the body. Referee Edwards' repeated warnings for holding fell on deaf ears with no docked points as he evidently believed both men were culpable, though Riakporhe was usually the instigator. The fourth to the seventh really were anyone's rounds so a close call on the cards was expected, though it seemed Riakporhe's bodywork and harder blows were being trumped by Massey's workrate.

Riakporhe, however, won his rounds big. He exploded into life late in the eighth with a succession of hurtful right hands that had Massey scrambling to safety. His nose streaming blood, a rapidly tiring Riakporhe benefited from that knockdown call in the 10th and survived another "last warning" for holding as Massey cranked up the pace.

Crucially, Riakporhe's right-hand bombs returned in the last to bail him out of a tough spot and it was Massey's turn to hold. Yet Massey's stock rose in defeat and, in a late flourish, he had Riakporhe holding at the bell. Rightly or wrongly, the big shots of Riakporhe rescued him in a close one. **MB**



WORLD IN ACTION

19 December, Bethnal Green

Luther Clay
W10 Freddy Kiwitt

Emerging welterweight contender **Luther Clay** stepped into the television spotlight with a pleasing points win over the capable **Freddy Kiwitt** at York Hall. Scores were 97-93 across the board.

In this battle of African-born road warriors on Sky Sports, Clay, a smooth skill merchant, held sway with a right hand to the body as he kept the solid-hitting Kiwitt at bay.

London-based Kiwitt (now 17-3, 10 KOs) fired his jab from almost waist height and contested every round, but Clay always had that bit more in the tank, with his bodywork stealing the show.

The more incisive Clay (now 14-1, 5 KOs) sent the wiry Kiwitt back on his heels with a right hand in the sixth as the Bracknell fighter wrested control. A left hook backed Kiwitt into a corner, where Clay unloaded a fast flurry of punches. Kiwitt, defensively astute, rode the storm and was back on the front foot soon afterwards.

An adroit body puncher with a deceptive dig, Clay impressed throughout with the right hand, especially downstairs, in a technical but engaging encounter that illustrated the defensive prowess of both men.

Clay eclipsed Kiwitt by a fine but discernible margin in most rounds and had that extra gear to pull away in exchanges, with a big left hook and right hand catching Kiwitt — and the eye of observers — in the final act of the fight. **MB**

20 December, Phoenix
Julio Cesar Martinez
TKO9 Cristofer Rosales

Giving a sensational display of boxing and fighting, Mexico's **Julio Cesar Martinez** outclassed and overwhelmed Nicaragua's **Cristofer Rosales** in nine rounds to win the WBC flyweight title that was vacated when Charlie Edwards moved up in weight.

Martinez switched seamlessly between the orthodox and southpaw stances as he hammered the taller Rosales with a variety of punches to head and body.

By the ninth round Rosales had blood streaming from his nose and it was a relief when referee Raul Caiz Jr stopped the bout after one minute, 19 seconds of the round.

Instead of using his height and reach and boxing from the outside, Rosales went toe to toe with Martinez but it was if he was fighting a veritable buzzsaw. Rosales did seem to buckle Martinez' knees with a right hand in the second round but apart from this brief success he was getting outpunched and outfought.

Martinez was especially effective with the left hook and left uppercut from the orthodox stance. His speed of punch had Rosales looking bewildered, as if he couldn't believe he was getting hit this often and this easily. Martinez was cut over the right eye from a clash of heads in the second round but he kept the punches flowing.

Rosales was soon fighting just to stay in the contest rather than fighting to win and he couldn't

stem the tide of punishment. He scored with a one-two in the fourth round but Martinez blasted him with left uppercuts and sent his head snapping back with a thudding left jab and now Rosales' nose was bloody.

By the fifth it was simply a matter of how long Rosales could last. He finally tried to box and move in the eighth but he was on borrowed time and when Martinez wobbled him back across the ring to the ropes in the ninth, the referee had seen enough.

Martinez will now defend his title against Wales' undefeated Jay Harris in Texas on 29 February. **GH**

21 December, Hackney Wick

Daniel Dubois
K02 Kyotaro Fujimoto

With his larger-than-life personality and lurid red and green hairstyle, Japan's **Kyotaro Fujimoto** brought a welcome dash of colour just before Christmas but the seasonal cheer ended in the ring as he was clinically despatched in the second by heavyweight hope **Daniel Dubois** at the Copper Box.

This was a marking-time fight for "Dynamite" Dubois, who rounded off an excellent year in emphatic fashion, scoring his fifth KO in as many fights (most notably downing big rival Nathan Gorman in July).

Moving in behind the jab, Dubois had the visitor beating a hasty retreat after a hard right hand. With Japan not noted for capable heavyweights outside the sumo profession, a shell-shocked Fujimoto (now 21-2, 13 KOs) sensibly chose a path of avoidance with Dubois in measured pursuit.

The south Londoner's jab has evolved into a destructive weapon and it floored Fujimoto almost a minute into the second. On resumption, Dubois stalked patiently before blasting Fujimoto to the ropes with a series of right-hand howitzers.

After soaking up a substantial bombardment, Fujimoto drifted away from the ropes with the danger seemingly passed when Dubois (now 14-0, 13 KOs) knocked him out cold with a perfectly timed right hand.

More dangerous beasts loom on the horizon in 2020, perhaps intriguingly Joe Joyce, with Dubois set to grace a major Frank Warren promotion in April. **MB**

Getty Images



LINING HIM UP: Dubois' stiff jab paved the way for a second-round KO

21 December, Hackney Wick

Sunny Edwards
W12 Marcel Braithwaite

It wasn't quite the nightmare before Christmas but **Sunny Edwards** endured a brief fright after suffering a seventh-round knockdown against Liverpool's **Marcel Braithwaite** before recovering to claim the vacant British super flyweight title at the Copper Box.

Scores were 118-109 and 117-110 (twice). Braithwaite was sturdy throughout but ultimately couldn't compete with Edwards' slick shots and fast feet.

Edwards (now 14-0, 4 KOs) flourished with space and time but Braithwaite posed problems with his strength when he drew him into a maul. Braithwaite didn't win many rounds but remained a disruptive presence.

At range, it was one-way traffic but Braithwaite (now 9-2, 0 KOs) dug in, switching in the third but generally picked off at distance by Edwards' rapier lead and long left hook. The Londoner had a spring in his step, turning beautifully off the ropes to unleash a sharp right hand after a glancing right had him losing his balance in the fifth.

Yet Braithwaite shook off Edwards' right hands and began to present issues with his physicality and endeavour. Winning rounds without dominating them, Edwards was surprisingly felled by a right hand, left hook salvo in the seventh. He rose in control of his faculties and skated away from peril before regaining his mojo at the end of the round.

Braithwaite wasn't able to build on the knockdown, chasing a single shot in the eighth rather than working his way in. Edwards recaptured momentum with right hands while Braithwaite lost his way in a pivotal round.

Edwards dabbled at a nasty cut above his right eye in the ninth and Braithwaite received a warning as heads bored in. Yet Edwards' smooth boxing and superior shot selection won through, with his jab dictating late on as Braithwaite was unable to narrow the gap. **MB**

21 December, Krasnoyarsk, Russia

Thabiso Mchunu
W12 Denis Lebedev

Boxing smoothly and punching sharply in every round, South Africa's **Thabiso Mchunu** comfortably outpointed former cruiser champ **Denis Lebedev** to win the WBC Silver title while ending the Russian veteran's career.

Two judges had it a shutout with scores of 120-107 while the third judge had it 119-108. There were no knockdowns in the all-southpaw bout but Lebedev had a point deducted in accordance with WBC rules when Mchunu was cut over the right eye from a clash of heads in the third round.

Lebedev was tough and gritty as always but at the age of 40 he lacked the reflexes and the timing to cope with Mchunu's crafty style and accurate punching.

Mchunu, 31, has blown hot and cold but he was in top form for this bout. He picked his punches and made them count, knocking back Lebedev's head with right jabs, scoring to the body from both sides and landing heavy left hands, even appearing to stagger Lebedev in the ninth round.

Lebedev just couldn't get anything going. He seemed to be struggling to work out Mchunu's lean-away stance and whenever it looked as if Lebedev might be getting into the fight, he'd get caught and jolted.

Although Lebedev got in some jabs and left hands, it was Mchunu who landed the big, eye-catching shots and the crowd's silence for long periods was mute testimony to Mchunu's mastery. **GH**

21 December, Ontario, California

Jermell Charlo
TKO11 Tony Harrison

Eleven months after losing a debatable decision in their first meeting, **Jermell Charlo** gained emphatic revenge by stopping **Tony Harrison** in the 11th round to regain the WBC super welter title.

GREAT FIGHT: Pascal's jabs helped him build up points in a battle of attrition



WORLD FIGHT OF THE MONTH

28 December, Atlanta

JEAN PASCAL W12 **BADOU JACK**

Producing a high-energy performance that belied his 37 years, Quebec's **Jean Pascal** gritted out a split, debatable decision over **Badou Jack** to retain his WBA light-heavyweight title in one of the best fights in a year of consistently excellent bouts.

One judge had Jack winning 114-112 but the other two judges scored in favour of Pascal, both with 114-112 scores. The crowd booed the decision but there were many closely contested rounds.

Pascal knocked Jack down in the fourth round but went down himself in the 12th when, on unsteady legs, he missed wildly with a left hook and virtually threw himself to the canvas. Referee Bill Clancy ruled it a knockdown on the basis that Jack's punches had started Pascal on his way down.

Yet while Jack closed the fight strongly, sweeping the last two rounds on all three judges' cards, he was in a hole on the scorecards early in the fight, with Pascal winning the first five rounds on all cards — which included the 10-8 round in the fourth.

Pascal, in tremendous muscular shape, started fast and kept up a blistering pace in the early part of the fight, shooting out quick jabs and winging big hooks and right hands to head and body. Jack was trying to be precise but Pascal was outworking him.

Jack, 36, was having his best round in the fourth, backing up Pascal and getting off with both hands, only to get caught with a right hand high up on the head that took his legs away and sent him to the canvas in delayed reaction. Jack beat the count and luckily for him the bell ended the round moments later.

By the sixth, though, Pascal was slowing down a little and Jack began his counter offensive, pressing forward with hands high, jabbing, banging to the body.

It had developed into a gruelling battle of attrition but Jack was pulling back the points deficit, workmanlike and insistent, while Pascal was increasingly fighting in bursts.

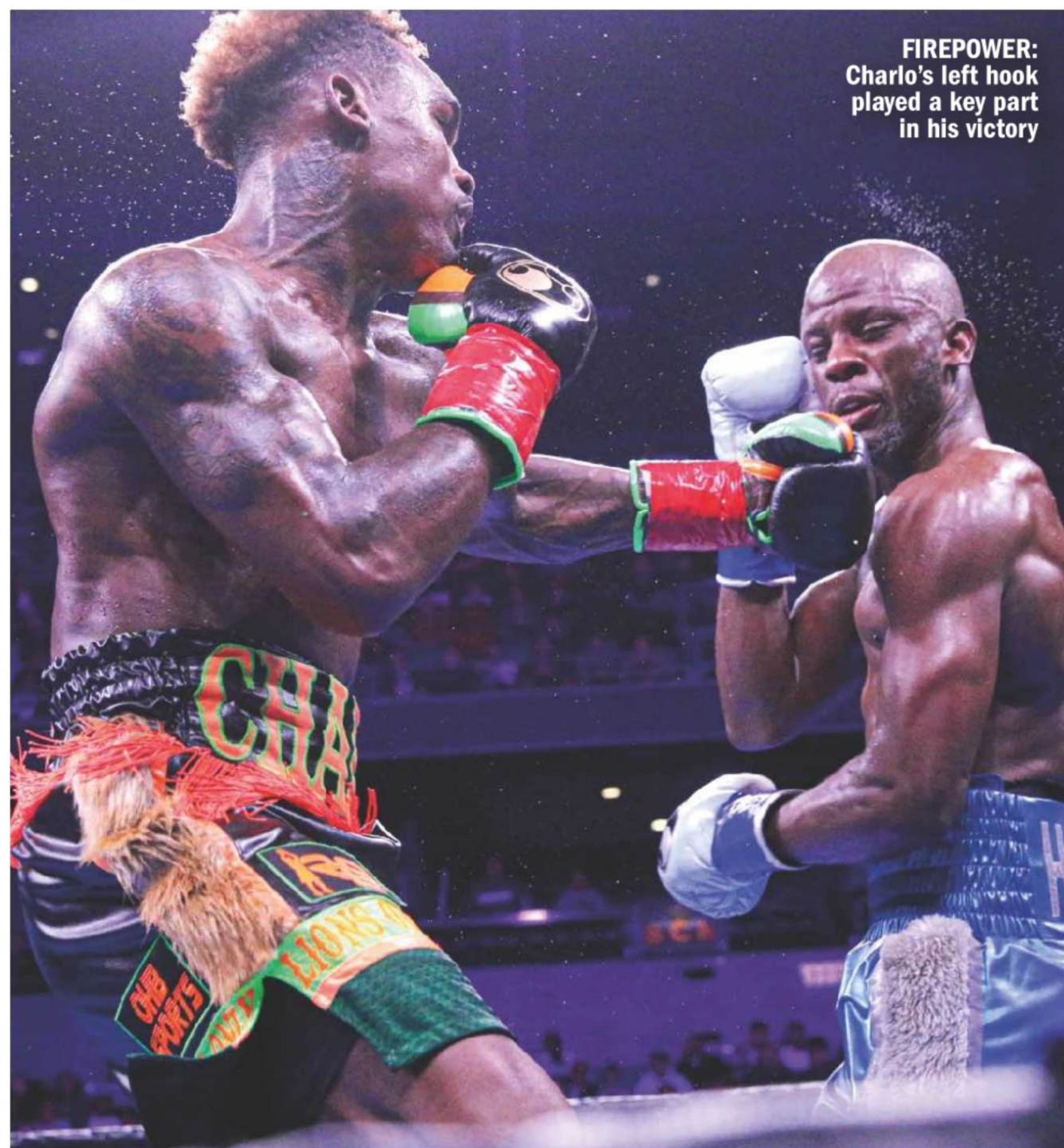
Jack was finally getting home with right hands by the later rounds and Pascal was fading. A right hand in the last round had Pascal looking wobbly for the first time in the fight but being given the eight count probably helped him because he had precious seconds in which to regroup.

Pascal even came back a bit towards the end of the final round, landing a left hook and battling it out in the closing moments. It did look as if Jack's second-half surge had pulled him ahead or at least earned him a draw, but not for the first time the Swedish-born, Las Vegas-based fighter failed to get the decision in a fight that could easily have been scored in his favour. **GH**



WORLD IN ACTION

Leo Wilson



FIREPOWER: Charlo's left hook played a key part in his victory

Detroit's tall and rangy Harrison had won the first fight by using slick boxing and movement. This time he took the fight to Charlo, jabbing, throwing the right hand and ripping in hooks to the body. Perhaps he felt the need to prove that he could outfight the ex-champion from Houston, Texas. The change in tactics made for a pleasing contest for the fans but ultimately led to Harrison's downfall. Charlo simply hit too hard for him, dropping Harrison in the second round and then twice in the 11th.

Despite the knockdowns, the fight was evenly balanced in most of the rounds, with Harrison leading by 95-94 on one judge's card after 10 rounds while the other two judges each had Charlo ahead 96-93.

Charlo was always dangerous with the left hook and he clearly had the superior firepower. Harrison blocked a lot of punches on his high guard and did a fake wobble in the sixth round, shimmied his shoulders in the seventh, wound up his right arm bolo-style in the eighth and spread his arms in the "Is that all?" way after a Charlo attack early in the 11th.

However, Harrison's

showboating didn't impress Charlo, who fought in a steady, solid manner, pumping out the jab and firing heavy right hands and left hooks, and Harrison couldn't block or dodge them all.

As often happens in a back-and-forth fight such as this one, the big breakthrough came suddenly when Charlo threw a left hook to the body, then came upstairs with the left hook and Harrison wobbled back on rubbery legs in the 11th.

Harrison had rallied after

being dropped in the second round but this time there was no coming back. Another left hook buckled Harrison in a neutral corner and he touched down on his left glove to be given an eight count.

Charlo went for the finish, backed up Harrison on the ropes and nailed him with four consecutive left uppercuts before a left hook-right hand combination sent the Detroit boxer slumping to the canvas with his back to the ropes.

It looked all over, and indeed Charlo jumped up on the ropes on the far side of the ring in premature celebration. However, Harrison beat the count and referee Jack Reiss allowed him to continue. Harrison had nothing left, though, and he was pinned on the ropes and not fighting back when referee Reiss waved the finish after two minutes, 28 seconds of the round. **GH**

23 December, Yokohama Ryota Murata KO5 Steven Butler

Too strong, too heavy handed, Japan's **Ryota Murata** overpowered Quebec's game but outgunned **Steven Butler** in five rounds to retain his WBA middleweight title.

Butler, 24, boxed well enough to stay in the fight for the first four rounds and he landed enough right hands around the side of Murata's high guard to

have the Japanese fighter bruised around the left eye.

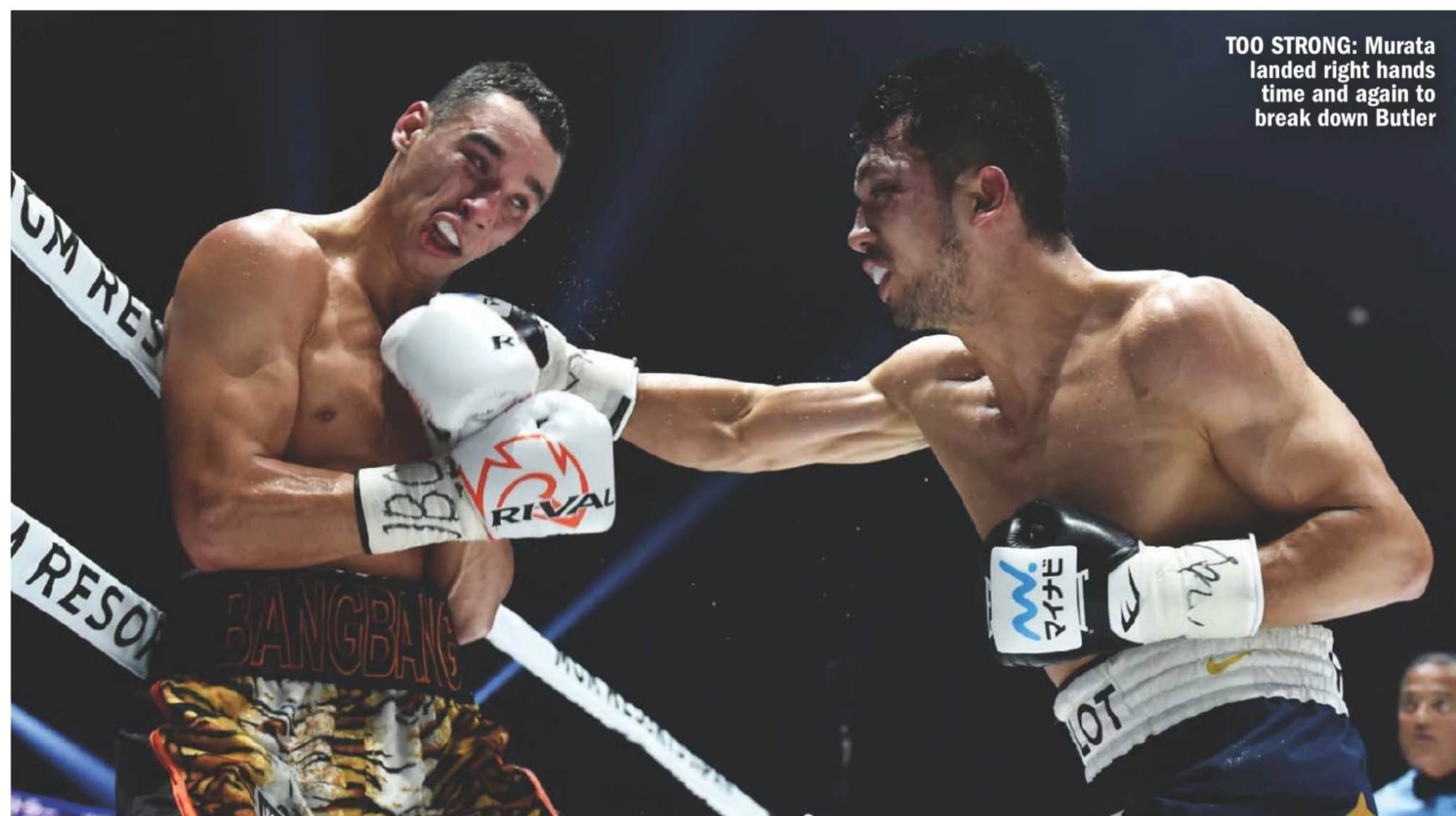
There were two big problems for Butler, however: Murata's blows were so much harder, and the challenger was far too easy to hit with right hands. Murata, 33, was simply able to walk through whatever Butler threw at him and it seemed that the Japanese fighter couldn't miss with the right hand.

Inevitably, the heavy hits caught up with Butler. Bruised under the right eye, he finally wilted in the fifth round, collapsing to the canvas as referee Rafael Ramos moved in to stop the fight after two minutes, 45 seconds of the round.

Murata, the London Olympics gold medallist, was making the second defence of the title he regained by stopping Minnesota's Rob Brant in the second round last July. It now seems astonishing that Brant was able to outclass Murata in their first meeting Las Vegas in October 2018. The lacklustre Murata who lost almost every round that night wasn't the same animal (as the saying goes) who showed up for the Brant rematch or the Butler fight. **GH**

28 December, Marseille Arsen Goulamirian TKO end of 9 Constantin Bejenaru

While **Arsen Goulamirian** isn't the fastest or most stylish of



TOO STRONG: Murata landed right hands time and again to break down Butler

Getty Images

Sumio Yamada



RUMBLING FORWARD:
The powerfully built Goulamirian bullied and battered Bejenaru into submission

boxers, his sheer physical strength makes him formidable. The Armenian-born French cruiserweight tends to start slowly but once he gets going he is like a tank rumbling forward and it's very difficult for an opponent to stop him in his tracks, as **Constantin Bejenaru** discovered when Goulamirian overpowered him in nine rounds in their WBA "super" world title bout.

Bejenaru, 35, went into the bout with a 14-0 record but in fact was a seasoned campaigner who had boxed for Romania three times in the amateur world championships. He gave it a great try, throwing a high volume of punches from out of his southpaw stance, and his busy, bustling style saw Bejenaru ahead 48-47 on all three judges' cards after the first five rounds.

Yet winning some of the early rounds against Goulamirian is one thing and doing it for the duration of a contest is quite another. While Bejenaru was scoring points, Goulamirian was slowly but surely wearing his man down.

Goulamirian, 32, was bullying and belabouring Bejenaru by the



UNRELENTING: Smith imposed his superior strength and punching power in a ceaseless offensive

Mike Williams/Top Rank

sixth and he mauled the challenger to the canvas in the seventh and eighth rounds. These weren't knockdowns but indicated that Goulamirian's sheer, brute strength was telling.

In the ninth, it all got too much for a weary Bejenaru and a left hook had him taking a knee for the mandatory eight count. Although Bejenaru got through to the bell, his corner sensibly retired him at the end of the round. Goulamirian took his

unbeaten record to 28-0 (18 KOs). **GH**

11 January, Atlantic City **Joe Smith Jr** W10 Jesse Hart

Rugged, uncompromising, all-out aggression carried Long Island, New York light-heavyweight **Joe Smith Jr** to a split but well-deserved 10-round decision over **Jesse Hart** in an exciting fight at the Hard Rock

hotel casino. Smith scored a flash knockdown in the seventh round and won widely on two scorecards, 97-92 and 98-91, while the third judge surprisingly had Hart winning, 95-94.

Hart talked of striking a blow for Philadelphia civic pride by avenging Smith's 2016 KO victory over an ageing Bernard Hopkins — apparently an inspirational figure from Hart's earliest days in boxing. He even wore a Hopkins-type "Executioner" mask into the ring.

Once the bell rang, however, the would-be avenger was driven back around the ring as Smith steamed right into him with an unrelenting onslaught.

Smith got hit on the way in, he was made to miss wildly at times, but he never got discouraged. It was full-throttle aggression in every round.

Hart landed some jabs and right hands and scored with left hooks, raising a swelling under Smith's right eye. The problem for Hart was that he didn't hit hard enough to keep Smith off of him. And, in only his second bout at light-heavy after previously boxing in the 168lbs division, Hart didn't have the physical strength to hold his own on the inside, where Smith to all intents beat him up. Hart was being pursued at long range and there was no respite in the clinches as Smith got his right hand free to club away, down and up, occasionally delivering a head-jerking uppercut.

It seemed that every punch Smith threw was designed to do damage. A right hand sent Hart down briefly on to one knee in the seventh round and he listed into the ropes after getting to his feet. It was fortunate for Hart that the bell rang before Smith could follow up.

Hart had blood showing inside the mouth and he suffered a cut over the left eye in the ninth round, getting welcome respite when referee Harvey Dock took him over to the ropes for a doctor's examination. Hart gamely let his hands go in the 10th, landing enough punches to sweep the round on the scorecards, but it was far too little, far too late. **GH**

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 11 January.

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), 17-5-2

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

Chris Billam-Smith

(Bournemouth), 10-1

Commonwealth champion
- 5

Deion Jumah

(Chelsea), 12-0,

English champion
- 6

Jack Massey

(Chapel-en-le-Frith), 16-1
- 7

Luke Watkins

(Swindon), 14-2
- 8

Nick Parpa

(Palmers Green), 9-1

Southern Area champion
- 9

Mikael Lawal

(Shepherd's Bush), 12-0
- 10

Sam Hyde

(Sale), 15-1-1

LIGHT-HEAVYWEIGHT
175lbs/12st 7lbs

- 1

Anthony Yarde

(Ilford), 18-1
- 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

Kody Davies

(Pontllanfraith), 10-0
- 10

Anthony Fox

(Westbury), 8-12-4

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), 22-3
- 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), 38-2
- 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

Conor 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

Philip Bowes

(Leytonstone), 20-3

Commonwealth champion
- 9

Akeem Ennis-Brown

(Gloucester), 13-0
- 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

Tommy Coyle

(Hull), 25-5
- 8

Craig Evans

(Blackwood), 20-3-2
- 9

Gavin Gwynne

(Merthyr Tydfil), 12-1

Welsh champion
- 10

Myron Mills

(Derby), 14-1

English champion

SUPER FEATHERWEIGHT
130lbs/9st 4lbs

- 1

Carl Frampton

(Belfast), 27-2
- 2

Joe Cordina

(Cardiff), 11-0

British and Commonwealth lightweight champion
- 3

Martin Joseph Ward

(Brentwood), 23-1-2
- 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

Marco McCullough

(Belfast), 22-4
- 9

Lyon Woodstock Jr

(Leicester), 12-2
- 10

Alex Dilmaghani

(Crayford), 19-1-1 (1NC)

FEATHERWEIGHT
126lbs/9st

- 1

Josh Warrington

(Leeds), 30-0, IBF champion
- 2

Kid Galahad

(Sheffield), 26-1
- 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

Lee Haskins

(Bristol), 36-4
- 8

Joe Ham

(Glasgow), 16-2, Scottish champion
- 9

Gamal Yafai

(Birmingham), 17-1
- 10

Ashley Lane

(Bristol), 14-9-2

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), 22-1-1
- 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 and European 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 11 January.

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 Yaniel Dorticos (Cuba), 24-1
- 3 Arsen Goulamirian (France), 26-0
- 4 Krzysztof Glowacki (Poland), 31-2
- 5 Ilunga Makabu (Democratic Rep. of Congo), 26-2
- 6 Lawrence Okolie (GB), 14-0
- 7 Kevin Lerena (South Africa), 24-1
- 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) 24-1
- 6 Jean Pascal (Canada), 35-6-1 (1NC)
- 7 Badou Jack (Sweden and US), 22-3-3
- 8 Joe Smith Jr (US) 24-3
- 9 Gilberto Ramirez (Mexico), 40-0
- 10 Anthony Yarde (GB), 18-1

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), 28-0
- 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 Julian Williams (US), 27-1-1 (1NC)
- 2 Jarrett Hurd (US), 23-1
- 3 Erislandy Lara (Cuba), 26-3-3
- 4 Jermell Charlo (US), 31-1
- 5 Brian Castano (Argentina), 16-0-1
- 6 Erickson Lubin (US), 22-1
- 7 Patrick Texeira (Brazil), 31-1
- 8 Michel Soro (France), 35-2-1
- 9 Sergio Garcia (Spain), 31-0
- 10 Tony Harrison (US), 28-2

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), 35-2
- 7 Yordenis Ugas (Cuba), 24-4
- 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 Robert Easter Jr (US), 22-1-1

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 Tevin Farmer (US), 30-4-1 (1NC)
- 4 Joseph Diaz (US), 30-1
- 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 Andrew Cancio (US), 21-5-2

FEATHERWEIGHT

126lbs/9st

- 1 Josh Warrington (GB), 30-0
- 2 Gary Russell Jr (US), 30-1
- 3 Shakur Stevenson (US), 13-0
- 4 Xu Can (China), 18-2
- 5 Tugstsogt Nyambayar (Mongolia), 11-0
- 6 Claudio Marrero (Dominican Republic), 24-3
- 7 Mark Magsayo (Philippines), 20-0
- 8 Kid Galahad (GB), 26-1
- 9 Jesse Magdaleno (US), 27-1
- 10 Oscar Escandon (Colombia), 26-5

SUPER BANTAMWEIGHT

122lbs/8st 10lbs (junior featherweight by IBF, WBO)

- 1 Emanuel Navarrete (Mexico), 30-1
- 2 Rey Vargas (Mexico), 34-0
- 3 Guillermo Rigondeaux (Cuba), 19-1 (1NC)
- 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 Jason Moloney (Australia), 20-1
- 7 Takuma Inoue (Japan), 13-1
- 8 Reymart Gaballo (Philippines), 23-0
- 9 Joshua Greer Jr (US), 22-1-1
- 10 Zolani Tete (South Africa), 28-4

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), 19-0
- 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 Giemel 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 Daniel Valladares (Mexico), 22-1
- 8 Tetsuya Hisada (Japan), 34-10-2
- 9 Carlos Buitrago (Nicaragua), 32-5-1 (1NC)
- 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 Pedro Taturan (Philippines), 14-2
- 4 Wilfredo Mendez (Puerto Rico), 15-1
- 5 Ginjiro Shigeoka (Japan), 5-0
- 6 Byron Rojas (Nicaragua), 27-4-3 (2NC)
- 7 Victorio Saludar (Philippines), 20-4
- 8 Jose Argumedo (Mexico), 23-4-1
- 9 Joey Canoy (Philippines), 15-3-1 (1NC)
- 10 Simpiwe Konkco (South Africa), 19-6 (1NC)

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Pandering to the prurient

Edwin Valero's tragic and disturbing story is in keeping with the 'true crime' genre that pushes the boundaries of taste, but thankfully the Johnny Tapia bio adopts a different tone

BERSERK: THE SHOCKING LIFE AND DEATH OF EDWIN VALERO

By Don Stradley

85 pages/19 b&w photos
£7.99/\$9.99

THE GHOST OF JOHNNY TAPIA

By Paul Zanon, with Teresa Tapia

68 pages/24 b&w photos
£7.99/\$9.99

The late Jimmy Cannon's oft-quoted description of boxing as "the red-light district" of sports could be applied with equal truth to the relationship between "true crime" books and other works of non-fiction.

For every sober and diligent account of a particular crime or crimes, from Jack the Ripper right up to the latest serial-killing sensation or gangland bloodbath, there are always dozens of exploitative cut-and-paste jobs available to pander to the prurient. It is no accident that "true crime" is always sectioned off from other non-fiction in bookshops — though perhaps "quarantined" would be a better word.

Boxing itself comes under enough pressure to justify its existence, particularly in the aftermath of ring fatalities, that it is hardly surprising if one's first reaction to "true crime" boxing books is one of distaste. Does boxing need this shit on top of all the other shit that is thrown its way, deservedly or otherwise? No, not really, but what can one do except hold one's nose and forge ahead, hoping for the best while fearing the worst?

Which brings us to *Berserk: The Shocking Life and Death of Edwin Valero* and *The Ghost of Johnny Tapia*, both published by

a new outfit, based in Boston, Massachusetts, called Hamilcar Publications.

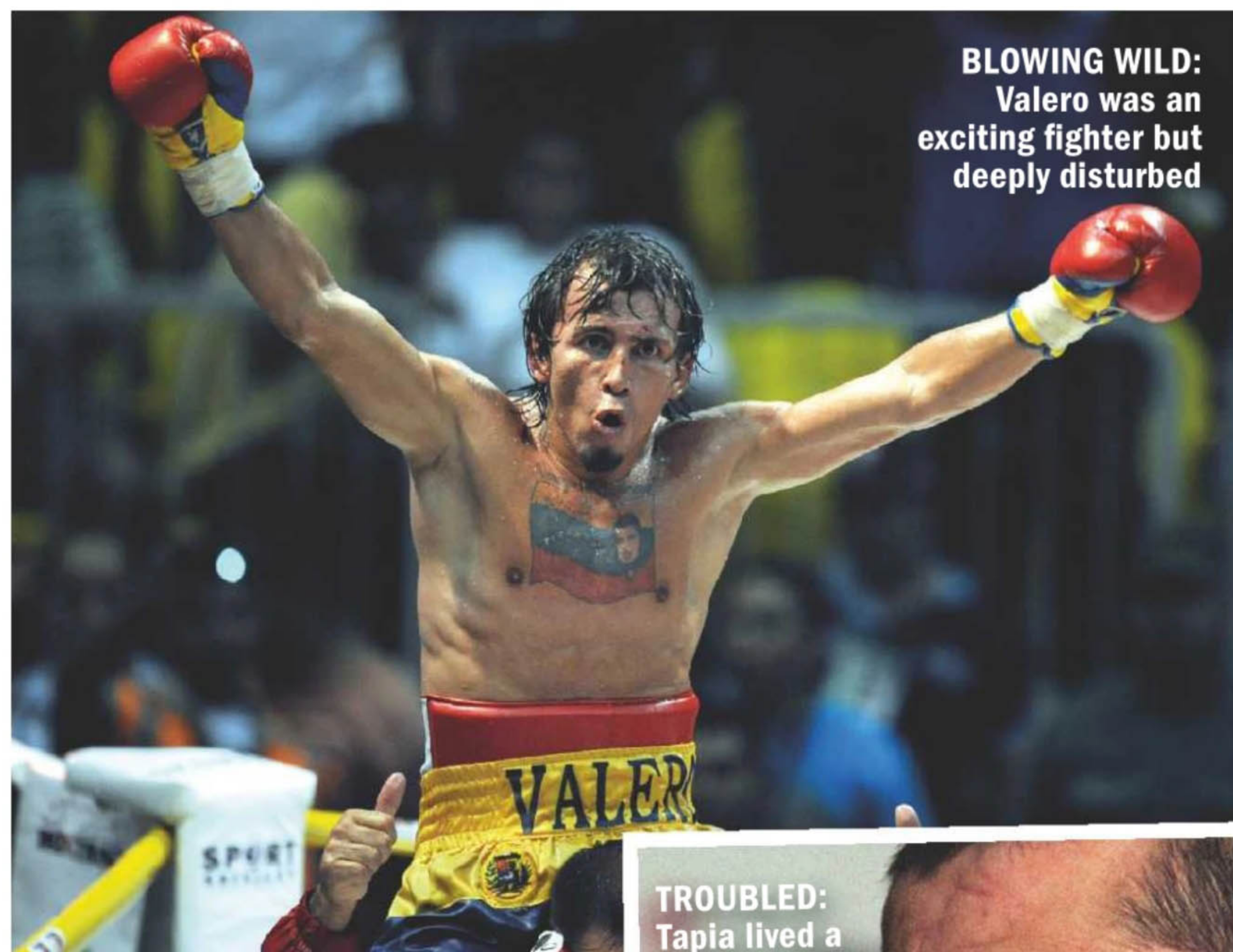
Starting two years ago with US editions of books first published in Britain (*Off the Ropes: The Ron Lyle Story*; *Dark Trade: Lost in Boxing*; and *Jacobs Beach: The Mob, the Garden & The Golden Age of Boxing*), the publisher seems to have adopted a two-pronged sales strategy, with its full-length and marginally more palatable new offerings set to appear under the Hamilcar Publications banner, while its series of "Hard-Hitting True Crime" booklets are marketed as Hamilcar Noir.

The full title of *Berserk*, in all its tabloid tawdriness, tells you exactly what sort of readership it is aimed at, and perhaps the best that can be said about the book itself is that author Don Stradley makes a reasonable attempt to convey the facts of Valero's life and death in something approaching an even-handed manner. That noted, however, he probably had little choice, given that the limited sources, principally Venezuelan or American, tended to be either exculpatory or moralising, respectively.

Either way, however, it is clear that Valero was a deeply disturbed individual, whose erratic behaviour only worsened after he won, firstly, the WBA super featherweight title in 2006, and then the WBC lightweight title three years later.

Valero's increasing drug use supposedly fuelled his paranoia about possible kidnap attempts in the lawless mayhem into which Chavez's Venezuela had descended in the 2000s, but given that in 2009 alone there were almost 17,000 kidnapping cases in that country, he probably had good reason to be fearful.

The following year, of course, Valero made his own contribution to Venezuela's



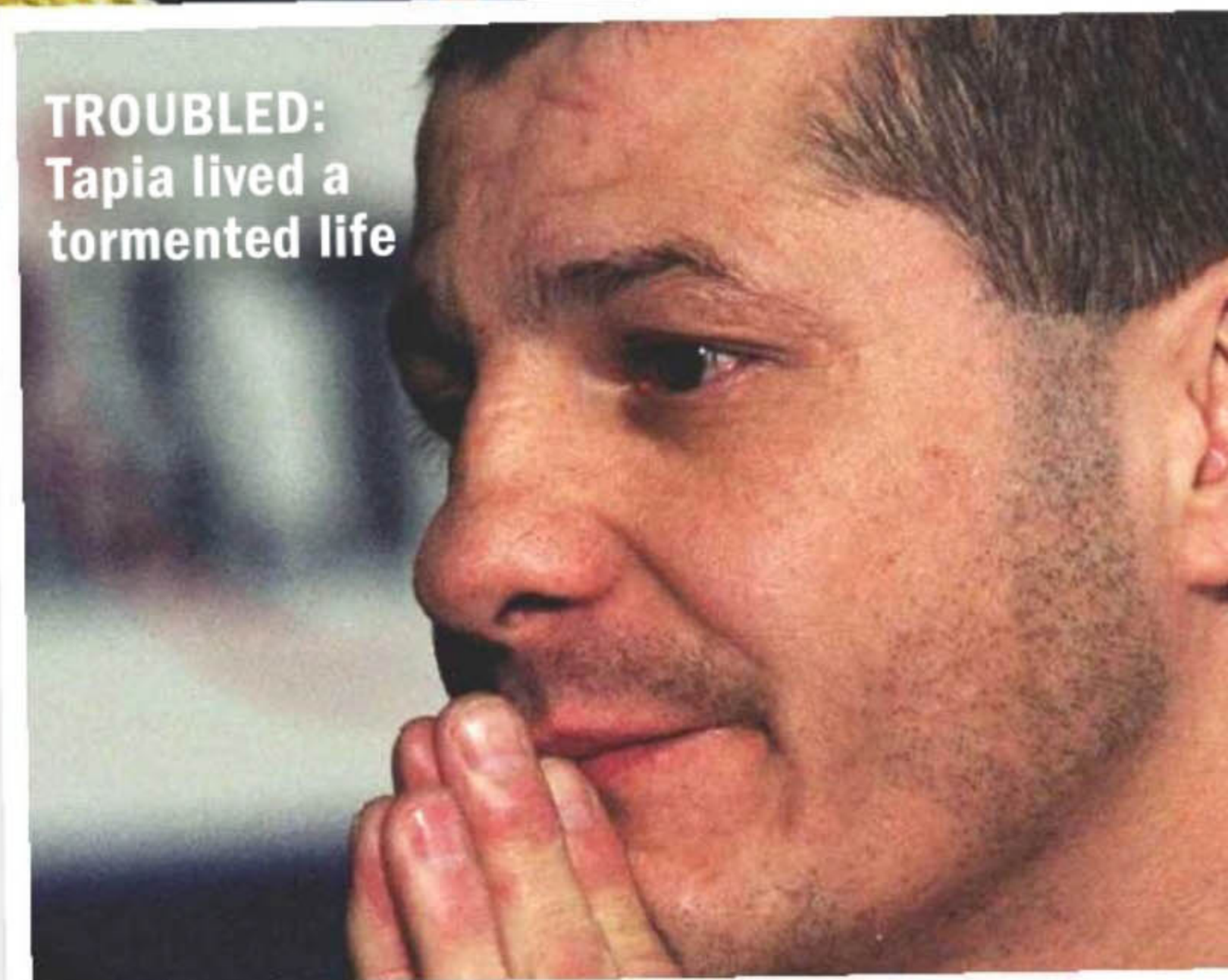
BLOWING WILD: Valero was an exciting fighter but deeply disturbed

world-beating murder rate when he killed his wife, Jennifer, in an hotel in Valencia — of which Mr Stradley writes: "When she was found dead, the blood from her slit throat had clotted on the hotel carpet. It looked like a small pig had been slaughtered." The first sentence of that quote may be said to be factual reporting, the second, however, is "true crime" writing at somewhere near its ugliest.

The welcome difference in tone between *Berserk* and *The Ghost of Johnny Tapia*, written by Paul Zanon (occasionally of this parish), can largely be explained by the difference in temperament between their subjects, together with the not-insignificant fact that the latter was co-written with the assistance of Tapia's heroically long-suffering widow, Teresa.

Whereas Valero was dark and his crime was real, the generally amiable three-division world champion's offences were mainly against himself, and he remained a popular figure until his untimely, though hardly unpredictable, death in 2012.

The principal surprise here is that Mr Zanon's main text is so short (a mere 57 pages, compared to *Berserk*'s hardly



TROUBLED: Tapia lived a tormented life

lengthy 75), not least as the New Mexican, unlike Valero, enjoyed a full career, which also included an autobiography published in 2006.

Indeed, the fact that Tapia was a childhood victim of crime, his mother having being murdered in 1975, makes his inclusion in this unlovely series somewhat dubious, but then presumably the same could be said for Arturo Gatti and Oscar Bonavena, whose stories, along with another effort from Mr Stradley, comprise the next Hamilcar Noir offerings.

Their titles? *Killed in Brazil?: The Mysterious Death of Arturo "Thunder" Gatti* and (I'm not making this up) *Shot at a Brothel: The Spectacular Demise of Oscar "Ringo" Bonavena*. Sheer class, and all in the very best tradition of "true crime". Enough said.

• Both published by Hamilcar Noir



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