I caught up with Light-Welterweight contender Lovemore N'Dou in his Los Angeles hotel room as he prepared to face British switch-hitting Junior Witter in a WBC eliminator this weekend.

Always fit, always quotable, the self-styled "Black Panther" was in a confident mood ahead of his latest short-notice assignment.

Hi Lovemore, thanks for agreeing to talk to me again. How are you finding LA? When did you arrive?

Everything is great, we arrived on Thursday because I wanted to get acclimatised and I've been here two days now and I'm already feeling better.

How are the facilities?

Excellent, the facilities are great; we're in a good hotel. We got everything arranged before we left Australia and everything was organised here, training facilities, everything.

I don't really need to ask Lovemore, but I guess you were already in training when the fight came up?

I'm in the shape of my life for this fight; I'm in great, great shape. I was in training all through Christmas hoping the Floyd Mayweather fight would come up. This fight has come at just the right moment. Everything is right.

Has your full team travelled with you? Are Billy Hussein and Jeff with you?

Billy Hussein and Angelo Hyder are here, with some of the guys from the gym, Danny Green and some of the boys.

So have you taken any American sparring to mimic Junior's style?

No, no sparring, we completed all the sparring before we left Australia…

Just lighter work – "tapering" down?

Yes, just tapering down and taking care of one or two minor things.

Junior's known for having quite a distinctive, individual style. Have you actually seen him fight? Are you one for watching videos of your rivals?

Of course I've watched all the other Light-Welterweights; it's my job to watch them. He's awkward and switches every one or two seconds! But I can adapt to any style. Sure, he may be

awkward for a round, maybe two, but I'll work it out. Lovemore N'Dou is adaptable. I'll catch up with him eventually.

Lovemore, you mentioned that you were in training right through Christmas. How long have you known about the possibility of tackling Witter? You were a late replacement for Gianluca Branco after all.

Only about two weeks and even then it wasn't confirmed. At one stage I heard he didn't want the fight, they wanted to fight someone else, but if they want this fight to be the WBC eliminator they have to go through me. I'm the next available fighter. I'm not interested in the Commonwealth title. If it wasn't for the WBC eliminator I wouldn't be fighting Witter.

The Commonwealth belt doesn't do much for you on the world scene does it?

No, not really. I want world titles. I'm highly ranked by the IBF. After Hatton, Kostya Tszyu has to fight me next. So I don't have to fight Witter. Remember, if HBO can't make Gatti vs. Mayweather because Floyd is in jail, then who are they going to turn to? Lovemore N'Dou. You know, everybody knows, Junior Witter is not a TV fighter. HBO will want to make me versus Gatti.

When we spoke back in September, we mostly talked about Hatton and Tszyu. I mentioned Witter and you said you'd fight him anywhere, tomorrow. Despite that, are you surprised you're now fighting him? It is out of the blue?

I knew I'd have to fight him in my future at some point; he's a contender and a good fighter. People say to me just sit on your ranking. But why? Why not just make the fights?

Are you surprised Junior is prepared to take the fight?

Well, yes and no. He has his high ranking, but if he wants that mandatory position he needs the eliminator and to have that he has to come through me. He's a contender and a good fighter so I'm not surprised, but I don't think deep in his heart he wants the fight. His promoters know I'm gonna whup their boy. They're already asking for rematch clauses.

Have you agreed to a rematch clause then? Is it in the contract?

I don't see why I should have to; I don't want to agree to it.

Looking back through your record is there anyone who you feel has a similar style to Junior?

Back in Australia there is a fighter who's exactly the same as Witter. He switches stances every other second. We call him Young Billy. He had the opportunity to travel to England to train with the Brendan Ingle. He's a perfect style match. I've sparred with him lots of times and the guys from the gym have been mimicking his style for me too, switching stance, moving, you know, so I'm very prepared.

That mix of mover and knockout puncher is hard to match -

(Interrupts) Knockout punching!? Look, Junior's a good fighter and I have all the respect in the world for him. I respect any fighter, but he's had handpicked opponents. I could have fought a 100 fighters like the ones he's been facing and been knocking them all out!

They said Miguel Cotto could punch, but I took him the distance and in the end I had him running, (repeats) had HIM running! And I was on short-notice and had a hurt rib. I just don't see Junior knocking me out, it just won't happen, out of the question!

What do you put your ability to take a shot down to? Is it simply good preparation?

Yes, its preparation and heart, a big, big heart.

This fight is obviously a high stakes contest for both of you, but for Junior it's the first chance he gets to show his skills to the sceptical American audience since the Judah fight. Do you think the big occasion could see him return to his defensive shell? Ricky Hatton always maintained he would when faced with the big fights?

No, I don't think so. Junior is going to come out to fighting, and as for going into his shell, I don't think so – he'll come to throw his shots.

The last time we spoke, I titled the interview "I'm the next Bernard Hopkins" because it stood out in our conversation. It must be a thrill to be fighting on the Hopkins-Eastman undercard?

Honestly, I still can't believe it. He inspires me. He motivates me. I look at what he's achieved and what a great, great champion he is. To do what he's done makes me want to do more. Makes me believe me it can happen for me too.

I live right, I don't drink, I'm always in training, always in the gym. I enjoy training.

You're still loving the morning runs then Lovemore?

(Laughs) Yes I do. I remember what Marvin Hagler used to say: you can't do your runs when you're sleeping on silk sheets - so when the fight's coming up I get rid of the soft tissues and sleep on the floor! (Laughing again)

It's a famous quote, often used when talking about our own Naseem Hamed.

No, I enjoy training, everything.

Do you have a sense of how the fight may unfold? Do you like to make predictions?

No, no, I don't make predictions. I'll take it as it comes, I'll do whatever it takes, whether it goes to points or knockout I will win. He can run, but I'll catch up with him eventually.

Having gone close twice before in big fights and lost on points, will you be looking to be more decisive in this encounter?

The Sharmba Mitchell fight is the one that disappoints me the most. Everyone knows I won that fight. I beat Sharmba and that was on short notice too. But as I've said to you before David, I always try and turn the negative into a positive. From that came a shot at Cotto and I had to take that on short notice too. And even then I had problems. As well as the rib injury, I had problems before the fight. My wife was held in customs, they wouldn't let her in, and so I entered the ring with my wife locked up!

No problems this time?

No problems. I'm going into the fight with a clear mind and it's good to fight on neutral ground. I don't have to worry about going to England to fight Witter and he doesn't have to worry about coming to Australia. If it goes twelve rounds, we're on neutral ground.

To conclude, do you have a view on the Hopkins fight? From what you said I suspect you think Hopkins will win easily?

No, not easily. No fight is easy and Eastman is a good fighter and I have respect for what he's done, but 'Nard isn't ready to go just yet so I expect him to win.

Same goes for the Kostya Tszyu fight with Hatton.

Well I take some heed of your perspective Lovemore, given you picked Kostya to knockout Sharmba Mitchell the last time we spoke.

The only chance Ricky has is if he's on top of Kostya the whole fight, if he allows Kostya to even take half a step he's going to land the big right hand or left hook and it will be all over.

Pleased to see he's finally taken a world-class test, though it may turn out to be too big.

Respect to him. The British public has been crying out for him to take the step-up and finally he is, so we'll find out what he's got. He's a good fighter.

It looks like the red-hot Light-Welterweight division is going to lose a couple of names with Kostya and Miguel Cotto likely to move up to Welterweight soon.

Yeah, it's likely they'll move up. There are still some great contenders. You still have Gatti and Mayweather and Vivian Harris. Vivian is a great fighter. He's really underestimated. I still think 140lbs is the toughest division out there.

This will be your first fight in a while, which is uncharacteristic given how busy you usually are. Is that due to the promotional problems you mentioned when we spoke back in September? You were hoping to be fighting Isaac Hlatshwayo.

That situation continues. I didn't fight for D-Rush Promotions against Isaac because they still owed me money from the preceding fight. This is my profession. Why should I fight for free? If I wanted to give money to charity I would, but I'm not giving it to a company. I don't fight for free. So the fight never happened and I'm still owed the money!

Okay Lovemore, thanks for the conversation and best wishes to you for the fight. Whatever the result I think the fans are going to have a treat. We'll see what Junior really has.

It is going to be a great fight, drop me an email when the interview is up. I have my laptop with me in my room.

(Lovemore N'Dou, typically affable in conversation, will prove a stiff, stiff test for the aspiring Witter to pass at the Staples Center on Saturday night. The real winners are the fans, as another great fight is made in the Light-Welterweight division.)