

Jim wants to Rock Duddy's World

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Jim Rock will look to make it a hat trick of Irish titles at the National Stadium on Saturday night when he contests the vacant middleweight title with Leeds based Irish man Lee Murtagh.

The Dubliner says he's confident of getting past Murtagh and he already has a first defence in mind. Rock wants John Duddy, the New York based Derry sensation in what would surely be the biggest all Irish fight in decades. Promoter Brian Peters is also confident that the fight can happen later this year.

"I've had talks with Duddy's people and they've been very positive," revealed Peters. "In fact Duddy's manager Eddie McLoughlin, matchmaker Jim Borzell and trainer Harry Keitt will all be ringside in Dublin on Saturday night and hopefully we can thrash out a deal while they are here. Jim thrives on big challenges and they don't come much bigger than a fight with Duddy."

Rock says this is his last year in the sport but he's determined to go out on a high and sees a fight with Duddy as part of that plan. "I've got to get past Murtagh first but then I'll be the Irish middleweight champion. I don't see how John Duddy can go around calling himself the best middleweight in Ireland until he takes that title off me."

Former Irish amateur champion Duddy has compiled a perfect 16 and 0 record since turning professional in 2003. Fourteen of those wins have come via stoppage with an incredible nine of those coming in the first round.

"Don't get me wrong," said Rock. "He's doing a great job over there in New York and good luck to him but I don't know what kind of calibre of opponent he's been facing. They don't seem to be up to much if they're all getting stopped in the first round. I can guarantee you he wouldn't be stopping me in a round."

The 34-year-old "Pink Panther" feels his experience would prove the key to handing Duddy his first defeat. "I spar a lot of young guys at John Breen's gym in Belfast and they are all the same. They start off fast over the first few rounds but they soon fade as the rounds go on. My biggest strengths are my fitness and my work rate so I come on strong the longer a fight goes."

"I've sparred a lot with Jason McKay and he beat Duddy as an amateur although obviously he seems to have improved a lot since then. It's a challenge I'd look forward to though and it's those kind of fights that get me motivated."

Rock is keen to point out though that he is not looking past Saturday night's opponent, Lee Murtagh. "This will be a big chance for him and he'll be really up for this. He's a decent enough record and a southpaw so he could make it awkward for me but I'll be looking to do a professional job on him. Winning a third Irish title would mean so much to me. I'd rather fight for nothing and win a title then fight for €50,000 with no title on the line. I'm not in this business for money, I'm in it for titles."

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Ironically it's Rock's business commitments outside of the ring that are forcing him to call time on his career. "I'm simply too busy with my car sales business to keep boxing. I have a wife and young family as well and it's hard on them having to spend so much time away in Belfast training for fights. I've been threatening to retire for a while now but this is definitely my last year in boxing. I just want to make sure I go out on a high."

Murtagh though is intent on spoiling the party. "I've had 8 weeks notice for this, which is a long time so my preparations have been very good," revealed the Leeds southpaw. "I've been working particularly hard on stamina work because this is going to be a long fight. It certainly won't be short and sweet but I'll be ready for ten hard rounds."

Murtagh who's parents both hail from Belfast says fighting for the Irish title is a dream come true. "It's always been a dream of mine to box back in Ireland so to get the chance to fight for the Irish title is very special. It's the fight I've always wanted and I've turned down English title shots because I wanted to hold out for an Irish title fight. Even the secretary of the British Boxing Board Robert Smith asked why I was turning down those title shots and I explained that it was an Irish title fight that I really wanted."

"I'd go so far as to say that this is the only fight I've ever wanted. This is my world title. I've fought for all kinds of titles like the Central Area belt, the British Masters championship and the WBF Inter-Continental title but it's the Irish one I want around my waist."

Murtagh has also heard the talk about a potential Rock – Duddy fight and he thinks that might be a sign of over confidence from Rock. "I wouldn't go so far as to say he's looking past me but I do think he might be a little under motivated for this fight. He'll probably look at me and my record and this no problem but that could be his downfall. I can't wait for Saturday night. I've worked hard for this and I going to make the most of this chance."

The Rock - Murtagh Irish title fight is chief support to the Bernard Dunne – David Martinez clash at the National Stadium Dublin on Saturday night. The card also features a second Irish title fight with Oisín Fagan and Jeff Thomas contesting the vacant light welterweight title.

The bill also features three of the most talented fighters to ever grace the National Stadium as amateurs with appearances from former European champion, Paul Griffin, World bronze medallist James Moore and four time Irish champion Andrew Murray. An appearance by former top English amateur Andrew Wallace completes the line-up.

For tickets visit TicketMaster.ie or call 0818 719300.

The show will be broadcast live on RTE 2 on Saturday night.