Welshman Joe Calzaghe was the WBO champion for nine years before gaining recognition as the best in his weight class. His compatriot Enzo Maccarinelli doesn't intend waiting that long.

Since being awarded the vacant cruiserweight WBO belt last September, Maccarinelli has scored two first round knockouts and plans to do the same against former world titlist Wayne 'Big Truck' Braithwaite in Cardiff this Saturday.

"I can't begrudge Joe the spotlight," said the 26-year-old. "He is the best champion Britain has ever had, but this is the time for me to have it on my own."

Maccarinelli has already earned a reputation as one of the hardest punchers in the 200-pound division, with his stoppage of the ultra-durable Marcel Dominguez last July the highlight of his impressive 26-1 (20 KOs) record.

In a gruelling contest, Maccarinelli stood toe-to-toe with the thick-necked former titlist before unleashing a devastating uppercut that felled Dominguez in the ninth. The Argentinean was unable to continue and Maccarinelli had secured a dream bout with then-WBO champ Johnny Nelson.

Or so he thought. A series of injuries forced Nelson to retire from the sport before the matchup could be realized, resulting in Maccarinelli becoming the new titleholder by default. It's not the manner in which most boxers dream of becoming a champion, but the Welshman is determined to prove he is the world's best.

"We need to find out who is number one," said Maccarinelli. "I don't see anyone there to cause me problems and I've seen them all - Braithwaite, [The Ring magazine champion, Jean-Marc] Mormeck, and [IBF titleholder, Steve] Cunningham. They're good fighters but if I'm on top of my game nobody will touch me."

But Maccarinelli hasn't had much luck in securing a 'breakout' fight. He was expected to face highly touted British puncher David Haye in what would have been a major domestic showdown this weekend, but contractual wrangling resulted in a bitter falling out between both camps.

"I've offered David Haye a career high purse to box Swansea's Enzo Maccarinelli on July 21 in Cardiff," wrote Maccarinelli's promoter Frank Warren in his News Of The World newspaper column. "The fight was there for Haye but he refused to sign. It's a shame because I have been talking to Mormeck's promoter Don King and we agreed we could have put on a cracking cruiserweight tournament. The winner of Haye-Maccarinelli could have faced whoever came through a fight between WBA/WBC champion Mormeck and IBF holder Steve Cunningham."

Countered Haye: "Warren's offer was definitely not the highest payday in my career. I'm not sure why Warren would perform such a massive u-turn. Warren probably needs a fight like Haye versus Maccarinelli more now than ever. It's a fight terrestrial television would love."

Haye's subsequent decision to sign a contract to fight Mormeck in September spurred talks between Warren and King for a July Maccarinelli-Cunningham unification bout. But that

proposed matchup also failed to materialize when Cunningham couldn't shake off injuries sustained in his title-winning victory over Krystof Wlodarczyk last May.

Still, a clash between the two titlists could happen this November, and Cunningham is fully aware of Maccarinelli's ability.

"It doesn't feel right to have other guys walking around calling themselves world champions," the American told BBC Sport. "I've seen plenty of film of Enzo and he looks pretty useful, that will be a good fight one day."

In the meantime, Maccarinelli will have to be satisfied with Braithwaite, 22-2 (18 KOs), who has fought only once in two years after suffering consecutive losses to Mormeck and Guillermo Jones.

Yet even though he may be worrying about which opponent he can unify titles with, it wasn't long ago that the Swansea native was engaging in fisticuffs of a far less glamorous variety.

"At 16 I used to go into town and tried to show how hard I was," he said of his tear-away teenage years. "I wouldn't pick a fight with random strangers, but with egotistical doormen who bullied people on a night out. I gave as good as I got, but I think 'what was I doing?' when I look back now."

Like Calzaghe, Maccarinelli was born of an Italian father, and papa made sure his son was subjected to plenty of tough love.

"My dad made me box as a kid," explained the 6'4" fighter. "At times I hated it. But he insisted I fight at his gym. My dad was much harder on me than the other kids. I'd always get the blame because he wanted to show there was no favouritism towards his lad. But he went too much the other way.

"But that probably helped me in the long run as I'd take my frustrations out on the bags and I'd always step up my training. Perhaps without that fire, I might not be the fighter I am now."

Still, Maccarinelli hasn't always fought with such passion. After turning professional with little amateur experience, the Welshman won his first three bouts, but a third round knockout defeat by journeyman Lee Swaby opened his eyes to the harsh realities of boxing.

"[The loss] gave me the kick up the backside that I needed," he admitted. "I wasn't beaten up or anything in that fight. It was a question of one punch knocking me out. I was just 19 and perhaps wasn't enjoying the sport as much as I should have been. It made me sort a few things out.

"Two nights before that fight I was in town and hammered. It was a part of my life where I was doing things that a professional boxer should not do. I had a talent that I wasn't doing justice to and, if I wasn't careful, I could have become another promising talent unfulfilled. I didn't want that to happen."

Any doubts surrounding Maccarinelli's desire for the sport were emphatically quashed during his thrilling brawl with Bruce Scott in June 2003. Maccarinelli was expected to record a relatively

undemanding victory, but seconds after the opening bell the young prospect was caught cold by the veteran and knocked heavily to the canvas. Nonetheless, Maccarinelli struggled to his feet, survived the round and went on to control the fight with his long thudding jab before demolishing Scott in the fourth.

Now under the tutelage of Joe's father Enzo Calzaghe, Maccarinelli feels he is better prepared for his big test against Braithwaite.

"Joe has been helping me out with sparring," he told Wales On Sunday. "Braithwaite is a southpaw fighter and I won't get a better southpaw sparring partner in the world than Joe. And I've felt the physical benefits of training with Joe as the sparring is fast, intense and hard work."

And if any doubters still question the power of Macarinelli's punch, Swansea University recently carried out a test using motion capture technology that verified its crushing impact.

Said the university's Dr Iwan Griffiths: "Enzo's punch measured 3.5 tonnes [of force], which is roughly the weight of a large van."

But will it be enough to move a 'Big Truck'?

"I've been punching harder than ever in training, and I feel so confident ahead of my fight," said Maccarinelli. "The man left standing will be the one who hits first and hits hardest and that will be me. [Braithwaite] is a dangerous puncher, but he's one big truck I'm running off the road."