

“I’ve been doing this for 25 years and I love this work,” says Enzo Calzaghe as he walks through the crowded bar.

Calzaghe has worked many jobs throughout his 59-year life. His roles have comprised barman, bus conductor, butcher and waiter. But these days when he enters the disused bar in Newbridge his role is trainer to some of Britain’s best boxers at the converted gym that was once a sports clubhouse.

The compact building lacks modern dressing rooms and fitness equipment, but Calzaghe’s training techniques have produced three world titlists, among them one of the world’s finest fighters.

As Enzo works the pads with his son Joe in preparation for his multi-million dollar showdown with Bernard Hopkins, there is little evidence that the fighter and trainer share any familial links. The dark haired undisputed super middleweight champion stands nearly 6’ tall with a calm manner and handsome clean-cut features that belie his profession.

Conversely, his father, who has never had a professional fight, carries a more rugged appearance. While Enzo’s frame is slight, his powerful personality ensures his presence is felt throughout the room. Sporting a thick moustache and a disorderly head of reddish hair, Enzo doesn’t appear Italian, but his fiery temperament and direct approach clearly reflect his Mediterranean roots.

“I know my job and I know what I’m doing,” he says. “I’m not a cheerleader.”

Born on the island of Sardinia, off the coast of Italy, Enzo moved with his family to England when he was two years old and stayed there for about a decade before returning back home. But he would learn some valuable lessons during those childhood years that would ultimately aid his current vocation.

“When we were at home [in England], my dad would get the gloves out and what he did with me brought me up on the art of boxing,” Enzo told the Western Mail. “At school I was always getting picked on because of where I came from, so what I learned from my dad came in useful. I never, ever used to fight, I would always box, and I dreamt of being a boxer.”

And befriending a future heavyweight contender would give Enzo another valuable insight into the sweet science.

“I got to know Joe Bugner,” he recalls. “When his family arrived in England, they choose to stay in Bedford where I lived with my parents. We went to the same school and became friends. He was a great kid.”

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Written by Ronan Keenan
Monday, 14 April 2008 19:00

At the age of 21 Enzo and a friend got the urge to explore the world and left Sardinia with a bag of clothes and a guitar. Through working various jobs and playing music on the street Enzo always managed to make enough money to survive; traveling around Europe without a steady income was never a major concern.

“It was my choice to travel the world,” he says. “I chose my own path. I wanted it. I didn’t fear nothing. I was healthy. I felt sane. I have nothing to eat? No problem. I will find something tomorrow.”

But in Amsterdam the precarious lifestyle was taking its toll on Enzo’s companion, who one day returned to Sardinia without warning.

Still, Enzo remained undaunted.

“Even after my mate left, I wasn’t about to go home as I promised I wouldn’t return until I was a millionaire.”

The European tour continued, but while staying in England the financial constraints became too much and Enzo contemplated a return home.

“I got to Southampton station to begin my journey,” he remembers. “But when the tannoy guy announced a Cardiff train was due I thought ‘Sod going home, let’s try Cardiff’.”

Soon after, Enzo would meet the future Mrs. Calzaghe in a diner and a few years later settled in the town of Pentwynmawr. It wasn’t the most fashionable of areas, but that didn’t bother Enzo.

“I didn’t care, I had a gym on the doorstep,” he told Wales on Sunday last year. “I got involved in the gym and met Paul Williams, who was trainer of Newbridge Boxing Club. He invited me to bring Joe along. He was nine and had only previously been punching our sofa cushions.”

Nine years later Enzo would give up his job as a bus conductor and take over control of the gym, beginning the process of turning it into one of the most respected stables in British boxing. But immediate success wasn’t forthcoming. Even though Enzo immediately realized that his son had an obvious talent for the sport, the fighter wasn’t as confident in his abilities.

“My dad pushed me to be a boxer, but many a time during the years I thought I might have made the wrong choice,” Joe admits.

Joe lost his first amateur contest, but since then has built up a 44-0 (32) pro record while holding a super middleweight world title for the last eleven years. Yet while the gregarious Enzo has always been unwavering in his decision making, Joe’s reserved personality led some observers to question the suitability of father-son boxing team.

Following an uninspiring points victory over the limited Rick Thornberry, Calzaghe’s promoter Frank Warren claimed that Joe would not reach superstar status if Enzo remained his trainer.

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“I feel Enzo has taken Joe as far as he can and someone else should take over,” Warren told The Sun in 1999. “I think he has become complacent and, where his father is concerned, he is the one calling the shots. Enzo agreed that Joe has been cutting corners in training and that couldn’t go on.”

Moreover, Enzo’s inexperience as a boxing trainer provided further ammunition for his doubters.

“I’m only trained to be a bus conductor,” acknowledges Enzo, who feels some traditional exercises such as jumping rope are “a waste of time”.

But Joe kept faith with his father and blamed his lackluster performances on injuries.

“Fighters are great at finding excuses and going through six or seven different trainers when the only thing that needs training is their own attitude,” said Joe. “No one can motivate me the way my dad can.”

A series of injuries would plague Joe in the following years, leading to the postponement of an eagerly-awaited bout with Glen Johnson and putting in jeopardy his showdown with the unbeaten Jeff Lacy.

After damaging his left wrist in training just two weeks before the March 2006 fight with Lacy, the southpaw sought medical opinion and was told he wouldn’t be able to punch with the hand for at least a week.

The American boxing writers had grown weary of Calzaghe’s injuries, and some scribes began to label him “sick note”. Enzo was fully aware of the harm that another high profile postponement would do to his son’s career, and when Joe told his father the extent of the injury, the trainer was in an unsympathetic mood.

“Joe, if you don’t want to fight, it’s up to you,” said Enzo. “Pull out of the fight if that’s what you want, but you have to realize that you’re going to be a laughing stock if you do. You will beat the crap out of Jeff Lacy. Believe me because you don’t believe in yourself.

“If you’re not going to fight this fight, you might as well retire. You’ll lose all credibility. Lacy won’t come back. You’ll be damaged goods.”

Joe’s subsequent one-sided destruction of Lacy finally convinced the critics that Enzo’s blunt persona was the perfect antidote to his son’s reticence.

The victory over Lacy also acted as a catalyst for the success at Newbridge Boxing Club with Enzo Maccarinelli subsequently winning a cruiserweight world title, Gavin Rees claiming a 140-pound world belt and Gary Lockett securing a June middleweight championship opportunity against Kelly Pavlik.

At the end of 2007 the fighters at the Newbridge gym had a combined winning streak of over

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110 fights without a single defeat and Enzo was honored as the Boxing Writers' Association of America Trainer of the Year and the BBC Sports Personality Coach of the Year.

But a lot has changed since then. In March, Maccarinelli was knocked out in the second round by David Haye. Just two weeks later Rees was outclassed by Andreas Kotelnik and middleweight prospect Kerry Hope was stopped by the unheralded Matthew Hall.

"Every good bubble's got to burst," concedes Enzo. "I'm not God. No boxer or trainer is immortal. As long as we did our job right, when it comes down to business its down to the fighters.

"I still got the champions, I just lost the belts."

Now, Enzo's primary focus is preparing Joe for his sternest test against Bernard Hopkins in Las Vegas this Saturday. Enzo will be attempting to negotiate a number of hurdles that he has never encountered in his twenty year career. He is faced with the task of ensuring that Joe adapts to the light heavyweight limit of 175 pounds. He must help his fighter acclimatize to the heat and unfamiliar surroundings of Vegas, while forgoing the traditional home comforts that accompany fighting in Britain. Moreover, he must facilitate the increased media coverage, while limiting the added distractions that could preoccupy Joe.

Some insiders feel that Ricky Hatton was swallowed up by the magnitude of his fight with Floyd Mayweather last December. In addition, the endless thrash talking of Mayweather and lofty expectations from the throngs of traveling British fans drew Hatton into an uncharacteristic war of words with the American that may have disrupted the Englishman's mental preparation.

"The fight of Ricky Hatton's life was lost somewhere between the mistimed frenzy of his preparations at that grimy gym in Manchester and the emotional hysteria of his love affair with the thousands of fans who followed him to glitzy Las Vegas," wrote Jeff Powell.

Like Mayweather, Hopkins attempts to intimidate opponents with verbal volleys ahead of a big fight. But Joe will be hoping to avoid the pressure to engage in such sparring as his father steps in to grab the spotlight.

"Hopkins will do every trick under the son to get one over Joe," Enzo told FrankWarren.tv. "I feel sorry for the American press that they have to put their faith in a 44-year-old man."

Commenting on the possibility that Hopkins may use roughhouse tactics during the fight Enzo said: "We know what's going on. If the referee allows [Hopkins] get away with illegal shots then America will have to review its boxing."

"Forget about this crap guy," he continued. "I don't value him one bit of s---. This guy has no intention of boxing a true fight. He's going to fake his way [through the fight] and if that's accepted by Americans then it's a sad, sad case."

The comments could be an indication of Enzo's irritation at the increased media scrutiny of this

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fight, but it is more likely he is acting as a foil to distract attention from his son. Enzo's headline-making statements could prove to be another example of how the Calzaghes' contrasting personalities ultimately benefit Joe.

But preparations for the fight suffered a setback last week when Joe's sparring partner Bradley Pryce was temporarily denied entry into the US. Pryce, who was due to fight Norberto Bravo on Saturday's card, was only granted a visa this week and Enzo consequently cancelled the bout.

"Our stablemate Nathan Cleverly and I normally spar with Joe in the build-up to his fights," revealed Pryce last Tuesday. "My visa delay is a blow for Joe's training."

On the surface, Enzo seems to be taking the disruption in his stride.

"As long as [Joe] performs like he has for the last 22 fights I've got no concerns whatsoever," he says.

Yet there is one thing in Las Vegas that seems to be distracting the trainer.

"He likes to think he's a bit of a professional when it comes to cards," divulged Joe in The Sun this week. "He's taken loads of money off the rest of the boys at our evening poker sessions at our villa."

Business as usual for Enzo Calzaghe.