The ever-so-appropriate words were written and sung by another famous British subject, Sir Paul McCartney, in the days when the Beatles were cranking out even more smash hits than those authored in the ring by the latter-day boxer who came to be known as “The Hitman” to similarly adoring throngs.

Get back, get back

Get back to where you once belonged

For former two-division world champion Ricky Hatton, whose shrieking fan base reminded some of the pandemonium that was Beatlemania, the place where he once belonged must now seem long ago and far away. He was the pride of Manchester, England, non-soccer division, and as much of a hero there and throughout the United Kingdom as was McCartney and his three band mates. Was it only five years ago that Hatton's popularity was such that he could seduce 25,000 of his countrymen to travel to Las Vegas for one of his fights, even if many of them couldn't procure tickets inside the arena? Or just three years since his fun-loving, scampish halo was knocked askew in the wake of a crushing one-punch wipeout and revelations of lackadaisical training, binge drinking and forays into recreational drugs?

And was it less than a year ago that Hatton, his hero status and personal life increasingly in tatters, plunged into depression so deep he considered slitting his wrists and ending it all?

But Hatton, now 34, inactive for 42 months and edging ever closer to the comeback bout that many fallen pugilistic icons have risked in the hope of restoring whatever it is that they feel they've lost, insists that he can no longer leave things as they are. True champions – and a prime Ricky Hatton was certainly that – don't quit on themselves, or on those they have disappointed and disillusioned. For those fighters seeking absolution inside the ropes, the immediate future might not turn out as glorious as was the receding past, but then opening one's veins or totally succumbing to self-pity isn't the answer, either.

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On Nov. 24, in MEN Arena in his hometown of Manchester, site of many of his more memorable successes, Hatton (45-2, 32 KOs) tries to turn back the clock to a much happier time when he takes on former WBA welterweight champion Vyacheslav Senchenko (32-1, 21 KOs), of Ukraine, in what no one can describe as a tuneup. Senchenko might not be on a level with Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao, ultra-elite opponents who greased the skids for

Hatton's precipitous fall from grace, but he is no stiff to be casually cuffed around for the purpose of making the "Hitman's" return engagement just another feel-good exercise.

No, Hatton's purpose in this case seems to be an attempt to quickly find out whether he has the goods to come all the way back, or to again scurry into the hole he had dug for himself these past few years. It is an ambitious quest, even noble if his intentions are as pure as he insists. But the consequences of failure must be daunting to someone whose belief that he can complete the journey has to be at least somewhat fragile at this point. The more Hatton stands to gain, the more he stands to lose.

Some wagers, though, have to be placed because there really isn't an acceptable alternative. In the game of redemption, you're all-in or you don't play.

"Win or lose, I've already won," Hatton says of where he is now in relation to where he was not so very long ago. "I want to finish my career the way it should have ended – not flat on my back on the canvas.

"I feel like I let everybody down. The nation. All my fans. It was a really horrible, dark place I was in. I just needed to prove that I could get fit again. I want people to look at me as a four-time world champion, in two weight categories, and as a down-to-earth man of the people, not as the joke that I had become."

Funny thing about punches, and punch lines. It's always better to be the person delivering them than to be the butt of snide remarks from those whose lips previously uttered nothing but praise. A fighter can go from certain victory to emphatic defeat in the time required for the other guy to deliver a devastating shot to the jaw, which is about as swiftly as it takes for someone who always has been the life of the party to become just another unwanted guest with questionable table manners.

All those Hatton devotees from the UK thought it endearingly hilarious when their man cracked wise after his fourth-round stoppage of the formidable Jose Luis Castillo in Las Vegas' Thomas & Mack Center on June 23, 2007. Asked by a reporter what he planned to do next, Hatton, who never made a secret of his fondness for lifting a pint or two, smiled and said, "I'll have a few battles tonight with Mr. Guinness."

Hatton, a nonstop punching machine whose swarming, take-two-to-land-one style is reminiscent of the late Arturo Gatti, made the breakthrough from British phenomenon to global superstar when, as a sizable underdog, he forced the feared Russian, Kostya Tszyu, to quit on his stool after 11 rounds in MEN Arena before the typical sellout crowd of 22,000 on June 4, 2005, capturing the IBF junior welterweight championship in the process. That victory alone would have been enough for Hatton to become the first Briton to be voted Fighter of the Year by the Boxing Writers Association of America, although he embellished his credentials for the BWAA award with a subsequent thrashing of Carlos Maussa 5½ months later in Yorkshire, England.

Thus began the extended U.S. phase of Hatton's dizzying career ascent, with big crowds – enlarged by hordes of British revelers – coming out to see him beat Luis Collazzo in Boston and Juan Urango and Castillo on the Vegas Strip.

"We pride ourselves on being great sportsmen," said Dennis Holson, the British partner of Art Pelullo, the Philadelphia-based promoter of Hatton's bouts with Collazzo, Urango and Castillo. "But out-and-out winners? We don't have that many. Our country is an absolute winner here. We should savor these moments because we're not just making memories, we're making history."

But the good times took a downward turn in Hatton's next trip to Vegas, where he was paired with the man widely considered to be the finest pound-for-pound fighter on the planet, Floyd Mayweather Jr. An estimated 25,000 Hatton supporters from the UK flooded the city to support their favorite fighter, and so what if only 3,900 tickets were made available to them initially? Some of Hatton's people were willing to pay up to $10,000 for a ticket, and did, and those who never made it inside the MGM Grand Garden happily filled closed-circuit venues throughout town, screaming themselves hoarse singing "Rule, Brittania," "God Save the Queen" and, most frequently, "Walking in a Hatton Wonderland" to the tune of "Walking in a Winter Wonderland."

Unimpressed by all those Hatton crazies, a bemused Mayweather said, "The only reason Hatton is 43-0 is because he hasn't fought anyone. He hasn't fought 43 Floyd Mayweathers. If he had, he'd be 0-43."

Mayweather's take on what was to unfold proved spot-on; he dominated the action from the opening bell, wresting the WBA welterweight belt from Hatton on a 10th-round TKO, flooring the

outclassed champion twice in that round with ripping left hooks.

Still the impish prankster, Hatton sized up his first professional defeat thusly: “What can I say? I was doing all right until I bleepin’ slipped.”

Hatton’s slippage was to continue, in other ways. After victories over Juan Lazcano and Paulie Malignaggi, an underprepared Hatton, by then losing too many of his behind-the-scenes battles with Mr. Guinness, was felled by a single blow in the second round from Manny Pacquiao on May 2, 2009, at the MGM Grand. He has not fought since, and his absence from the ring took on the cloak of notoriety when he was photographed snorting cocaine in a hotel.

Now a trimmer, cleaned-up Hatton tries to make amends for the detours he so readily if unwisely took. In his 14th appearance in MEN Arena, can he still fill every one of those 22,000 seats? Will the fighter on display be the same force of nature that battered Kostya Tszyu into submission? Or the one who was exposed as an overhyped fraud by Mayweather and Pacquiao?

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Hatton says he wants to do show a more positive side of himself to his children, son Campbell and daughter Millie, who have too often seen the bloated, despondent drunk that their father had become. Maybe he never could have beaten Mayweather and Pacquiao, even at his best, but he did himself no favors by spending more time in the pub than in the gym. That was a surefire way to dissipate any hint of greatness that he once displayed, an aura he so desperately seeks to regain.

Comment on this article

Spinach Chin says:

Hats off to the Hitman. I say De la Hoya should come back and have a super fight with Hatton since neither can beat the top welters.

deepwater says:

hatton looks terrible in the face. bodies can be deceiving. hatton sure can look ripped and ready to go but look at his face. kinda like a crackhead with loose skin. not good. his opponant has no pop so he shouldnt worry about getting knocked out but if the guy can last 8/9 rounds hatton might gas out on empty. see delayhoya vs manny. dela looked in shape but couldnt do a thing.

solaris says:

I always felt that Hatton's win over Tszyu was over-rated!

Tzsyu had one fight in two years before fighting Hatton and was recovering from shoulder surgery. Also the fight was in Hatton's back-yard and Tszyu made a few pre-fight comments demonstrating that he didn't hold the Briton in high regard, and even speculated that the fight could end prematurely on cuts.

Good luck to Hatton though, he seems like a decent guy, but I doubt his comeback will end well...

Grimm says:

[QUOTE=deepwater;22241]hatton looks terrible in the face. bodies can be deceiving. hatton sure can look ripped and ready to go but look at his face. kinda like a crackhead with loose skin. not good.[/QUOTE]

Agree.

Gotta love the memories, though. Good bang to the body, great attitude - pure fighter at heart, and thanks to his fans his fights were festivitas. And of course he's eventually gonna get his --- kicked - maybe not in november, but down the line and pretty soon. It won't be pretty. Seldom is when this kind of fighter comes back.

Radam G says:

Ditto Deepwater. Holla!

riverside says:

Hatton is on the same path as Morales, we've seen it over and over

Radam G says:

ROGER DAT, Riverside. Holla!

brownsugar says:

Hatton didn't lose the weight the right way. He looks like Opra Winfrey did when after she shed tons of weight after undergoing a gastric bypass. Dropping 60 or 70 pounds should be done gradually.... if it's done correctly it won't come back. Hatton looked older than me and I have 7 grandkids.
I always enjoyed Hatton,.. he was a cut above most but not the best... he gave 100% and was entertaining outside of the ring.
If he's managed correctly he can get a few paydays... as long as he doesn't fight anyone else except Malignaggi..... if he gets past his comeback fight.