



ENGLAND V IRELAND

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Kinahan told me he wanted to be a role model and I believed him

WHEN Bob Arum made his bow, Max Schmeling was heavyweight champion of the world.

A teenage Joe Louis was months away from his first amateur fight.

Professional boxing was only 40 years old when Arum was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in New York on December 8, 1931.

Growing up, Arum didn't pay much attention to Schmeling or Louis or those who came after them.

He was just short of his 34th birthday before he watched his first fight — and that was on TV. Ernie Terrell's win over George Chuvalo in November, 1965.

Yet Arum started out as a boxing promoter the following year. He'd go on to found Top Rank — and became one of the biggest promoters in the world.

Draw up a list of the greatest fights of all time. Everybody would have Muhammad Ali v Joe Frazier III in there. And Marvin Hagler v Thomas Hearns. Most would go for Jose Luis Castillo v Diego Corrales. They are just three of the super fights that happened on Arum's watch.

He delegates a lot of the day to day running of Top Rank now to others, especially his stepson, Todd duBoef.

Cities

But, in his 10th decade, Arum is still very much part of the sport, talking excitedly about a trip coming up to Perth in Australia, one of the few big cities in the world that he hasn't visited yet.

"I'm 92, and I love it as much as I ever did. I love discovering new talent and watching them develop. It beats retirement and sitting with a fishing rod at the side of a lake."

This could be a very different piece. Arum's extraordinary life has brought him into contact with what amounts to a roll call of modern American history.

John F Kennedy and his brother Robert, Martin Luther King, Muhammad Ali, Frank Sinatra, Ronald Reagan, George Bush...

He drops all of these names into our conversation. Some of those were his friends. He has yarns about them by the dozen.

Evel Knievel attempting to jump the Grand Canyon on a motorbike? Arum promoted that stunt. He didn't like Knievel. He is hilarious in his explanations of why.



LIFE AMONGST THE GREATS: Arum back in 1971 with heavyweight legend Muhammad Ali (right) and Jimmy Ellis ahead of their 12-round fight in Houston, Texas



CONTROVERSIAL RELATIONSHIP: Legendary boxing promoter Bob Arum with Daniel Kinahan and (above) celebrating a win with his former fighter, Belfast man Michael Conlan



VETERAN PROMOTER ARUM ON LIFE

IN AND OUT OF THE RING

Write that piece and it'd go down well. There'd be praise and pats on the back and... it would be bullshit. It would be dishonest. Sportswashing applies to journalism too.

This has been a week where snooker great Ronnie O'Sullivan — one of the most popular sportspeople around — has been in Saudi Arabia, and he's been eulogising about the place on social media.

Future

This is a week where Anthony Joshua v Francis Ngannou has taken place in Riyadh — and Saudi is where pro boxing sees its future.

It's a country with a terrible human rights record and it's one where children, up to re-

cently, used textbooks that described Jewish people as apes.

"That may or may not be true, but I was in Riyadh in October — and it was after October 7 — and I was guest of honour at this dinner. I met with His Excellency Turki Alalshikh and it was great. Whatever antisemitism may or may not have existed in Saudi in the past clearly doesn't now," said Arum.

"Being Jewish in Saudi Arabia and dealing with the Saudis, in my opinion, is a lot more comfortable than being in Dublin, Ireland.

"Look at the basketballers who wouldn't shake the hands of Israeli players. Let's be honest about it, there's no f**king medals on you people.

"I've been around a long time. I'm not a naive fool but, in Saudi Arabia, I didn't get a whiff of antisemitism. Indeed, they couldn't have been more welcoming."

A couple of years ago, there were whispers in the boxing world that part of Daniel Kinahan's strategy was targeting Top Rank.

Cultivating a relationship with Arum with the goal of eventually trying to buy the company off him. Arum says they had no such conversation.

"That never, ever happened. Maybe in his head, he was

thinking about it, but he never approached us — and that's the last thing we would have done," he said.

"We were doing business with Kinahan. He's a charming guy. He told me that he was getting into boxing because he'd done bad things in the past and wanted to reform himself.

Evidence

"He told me that he wanted to clean up his name because he wanted to be a role model for his kids and I believed him.

"We knew the history because, obviously, it was there if you Google it, but we didn't see anything that he was doing wrong. We saw no evidence that he was a drug dealer.

"Now, apparently, that wasn't

the case. If that wasn't the case, then Biden wouldn't have brought in the sanctions on Kinahan.

"I'm not a naive guy, I have a background in law, I was in the Justice Department. I bought into what Kinahan told me because I didn't see anything to the contrary.

"And, remember this, going back, we had a guy who served a prison term for killing a man by stomping on his head and he became the biggest promoter in boxing."

Here are words and phrases used by Arum about Kinahan before the announcement of US sanctions in 2022.

Honest. Honourable. The captain. A real rock. One of my favourite guys. Tremendous. Intelligent. Forthright. A nonsense guy.

He says himself that he'd Googled Kinahan — and any Google search would have made it clear that he was

one of the most wanted men by European police forces.

Once the sanctions were announced, Arum did one of the quickest u-turns on record. Was that a sign that he messed up, that he has regrets over dealing with Kinahan?

"Once Biden brought in the sanctions, I said 'whoa, I missed what was going on'. So, sure, in that respect, I have regrets."

Take the long view on Saudi and boxing, and it's part of a clear historical pattern.

Dictator

Think of two of the most celebrated fights in boxing history.

Muhammad Ali v George Foreman in 1974. The Rumble in the Jungle. It took place in Zaire thanks to President Mobutu Sese Seko, a brutal dictator. According to the UN, Mobutu's Zaire had "the worst human rights in Africa".

Fast forward a year to Ali v Joe Frazier III. The Thrilla in Manila.

A fight promoted by Arum. It's regarded as one of the greatest fights of all time.

But it took place in the Philippines, then ruled by Ferdinand Marcos.

In 1995, 10,000 Filipinos won a US class-action lawsuit filed against the Marcos estate. The claims were from victims or their surviving relatives, centred on allegations of torture, execution, and disappearances.

Arum fights have taken place in 22 different countries outside the US, in over 100 different cities.

But it was his decision to do business with apartheid South Africa that is particularly revealing. That's because Arum still believes he did the right thing, and that it actually benefited the cause of black South Africans...

The fight took place in 1979 — only a year after the Soweto uprising where nearly 200 school-children were shot dead by South African police.

The fight in Pretoria was be-

tween a white South African, Gerrie Coetzee, and John Tate, a black American. Civil rights leaders in the US intervened, trying to persuade Tate to pull out. Arum bulled on regardless.

Over four decades on, he still plays the Frank card. "I thought the same way Sinatra did when he went there. This idea that you would boycott South Africa and that would make them change was not the way to go," he said.

Horses

"We insisted on the stadium being integrated. Wouldn't have gone ahead with the fight if it wasn't."

"I'll tell you a funny story about when I was there. I was invited to a big race meeting at Bloemfontein.

"This guy came up to me and said they had a problem because there were a lot of Indian owners and their horses couldn't run because there was no integration.

He asked me to highlight it at a press conference.

"So I banged the table and made a big speech."

A week later, the race tracks were integrated. We helped pave the way for change in South Africa.

"I don't give a shit about what anyone says to me about going there."

"Arthur Ashe and these guys wanted a boycott but I felt going the other way was the right thing to do. And I still think that.

"It was one of the greatest experiences of my life."

Time for a final question.

KC: Have you watched Succession?

BA: Yes, not all of the episodes, it got a bit boring and repetitive.

KC: See any of yourself in Logan Roy?

BA: No, I don't.

Is he lying? Is he telling the truth? It's Bob Arum. Who the hell knows?

GARCIA PLIGHT A FAMILIAR STORY

■ Chris McKENNA

RYAN GARCIA and Oscar De La Hoya are so sadly similar it is a great shame they can't find peace to pull each other together. The continued public breakdown of Garcia is hard to watch.

He is a young, talented fighter willing to take on all-comers, who has cracked self-promotion on social media.

He should be everything that is good about modern boxing. But the spotlight seems to be too bright for the 25-year-old former lightweight world champion.

Garcia's world title date with Devin Haney looks in real jeopardy as he continues to battle his mental health.

Support

There seems to be a lack of a support network around the Californian but it would be too quick to judge. It was clear in the press tour to promote the Haney fight that all was not right.

Garcia has had time away from the ring to deal with his mental health but he returned to rebuild himself into a massive fight with Gervonta Davis last year, where he came up short.

Now we are watching through our fingers as bizarre social media posts keep coming that create serious concern for the wellbeing of Garcia.

That is what makes his broken relationship with his promoter De La Hoya all the more worse.

The pair are still tied by contracts but their personal bond has been broken. Yet in De La Hoya, Garcia could have someone who has suffered like him.

De La Hoya also went off the rails during his career. The American's outstanding success in the ring is all the more remarkable given his battles with alcohol and drugs during his career.

They are problems which continue to cause him issues as a promoter.

While we don't know if Garcia is suffering because of intoxication or narcotics, we do know that he needs help.

There wasn't always someone there for De La Hoya, so when problems arose, he turned to substances for support.

He knows what Garcia is going through.

If they could find peace, they could help each other to ensure De La Hoya's career as a leading promoter continues and Garcia can fulfil his potential in the ring.

But at the moment, it looks like Garcia could be writing another chapter in the opus that is boxing's troubled stars.



BLOW: Ryan Garcia after taking a body shot from Gervonta Davis in Las Vegas

SOUND OF FURY CALLS OUT CON

■ Mark WAKEFIELD

TOMMY Fury called out UFC star Conor McGregor to arrange a boxing match following the announcement that Jake Paul will face Mike Tyson in the ring.

Fury has now issued a message to McGregor, calling out the MMA icon.

McGregor competed in professional boxing when he faced Floyd Mayweather in 2017.

"Yeah definitely," Fury told DAZN when asked if

he still plans to return to the ring this year.

Injury

"I'm looking to get this injury out the way and I have just seen Jake Paul will face Mike Tyson next."

"So how about me and McGregor next, how's that? I need a comeback fight, so McGregor, get in touch."