

BRITISH VINTAGE BOXING

HENRY MARCO COOPER INTERVIEW

BVB: Can you remember when you first realised your dad was a famous boxer?

HENRY: Basically it's something I'd always grown up with so never really noticed the difference. There were always things going on around the house, dad being interviewed or people shouting out to my dad.

BVB: The press used to come round to your house and eat with the family, what was that like for you and John?

HENRY: In the build up to the fights he would go away to train, we might not see him for a month to 6 weeks, after the fight it would be a treat for me and John [my younger brother] as he would come back, all the press would come back round to the house, most likely because mum would put on such a good spread, then I would have to go to bed but I would sneak back down and hide under the dinning room table concealed by a big table cloth and listen to them all.

BVB: How did you feel as a child before your dad had a fight? Can you remember the atmosphere?

HENRY: There was always a buzz before a big fight, especially when he fought Ali. We lived in Wembley at the time, Ledway Drive, that was the only time we actually had police as there was a huge crowd outside the house, that was quite exciting! Funnily enough, they say youth is wasted on the young, it always seemed just a matter of fact, I wouldn't bat an eyelid. On Sports Night they used to play it the next day and I would just be playing on the floor and would look up at key moments to see how dad was doing, luckily from my perspective he won most of the time.

Dad was always away before a fight but I imagine he would have been pretty wound up, he said to us that the reason he spent time away from home was to keep him mean. The thing was to keep him away from having the creature comforts of being looked after, he had to do a job of work and he had to be fighter on the night, so being away from home was one part of the process that helped him achieve what he wanted to do.

BVB: After a fight, how did Henry cope with the highs and the lows?

HENRY: Funnily enough I would say that he coped with lows exactly the way he would have if he had won because there were no edges to the old man. He was exactly the same win or lose, he was always the same with John and I, he was never cross, never grumpy, even when he had lost a fight, he might have been disappointed but it never manifested itself in the house, we never had to keep put of his way, he was always a happy chappy, bless him. He was just happy to see us and coped with it the way he did, he was just normal. John and I could never get our heads round how he was this boxer that had to do a job of work as a fighter, where he had to be quite brutal, but dad was just dad and was a loving father and he never did anything to upset us. We still laugh about it today - that big ole softy fella that we would see at home, playing with his dog or us, could have that side to him, that he could detach one side of the business to the other.

BVB: Did you ever get a chance to meet Muhammad Ali? If so what was that like?

HENRY: Yes I met him a couple of times, last time when he came over to the UK to Windsor Castle. I met him yonks before then at the Grosvenor and he was very warm to John and I, he just said, "you should be very proud of your father, he was a great boxer, he really didn't get the breaks that he needed". The thing that was most impressive both those times, more so maybe the first time, you know bless him, Ali was very ill the second time round, but it was the warmth that they had for each other, they had huge genuine respect, when they spoke they were always very good with each other and the second time when I met Ali at Windsor he was a shell of the man that I remember. I remember dad was very visibly shaken when we were being driven home, he just said, "Oh my god, just to think what a fantastic sportsman that man was and to see him like that really upsets me". It did, I could see that dad was visibly choked by it. So meeting Ali, you always know when you are in the presence of somebody different, and Ali was certainly that, even when he was poorly.

BVB: What advice from your dad resonates mostly with you?

HENRY: He always said, just jokingly "If in doubt, stick your left out" but he'd advise never to get involved in street fights, he said it's not worth it just walk away. Believe it or not, dad was very passive with us. "Always try your best; at least you know you have given it your best, that's all you can do." On my wedding day, he said – "Remember son, its always good to talk! Don't hide anything, just be talkative!"

BVB: You have been very supportive of BVB taking on the role as official merchandiser for your dad, why have you chosen to do this?

HENRY: Mainly because of you, its not just about a product it is about the people and I feel very comfortable with the people involved and your sheer enthusiasm for boxing, it resonates with how my dad felt about the sport that he loved.

BVB: What do you think your dad would make of it?

HENRY: He would be very happy about it, dad always liked people to succeed in what they do, he would like the way you are promoting it and he would be chuffed

that you are using his name, when people used his name he would always take it as a compliment. I think he would have been 100% behind it.

BVB: What do you like about the range?

HENRY: We like the nostalgia, vintage style and of course the use of dad's name.