THE BRITISH CUS D'AMATO

Manchester boxing stalwart Brian Hughes is a fountain of knowledge I

AM sorry to say that Manchester trainer Brian Hughes MBE is currently struggling with his health.

Brian will be known to many in the

game for a variety of different reasons. I first came across the name when I took an interest in a series of books he wrote about long-forgotten champions of the 1930s. Others will know him, of course, for the success he had with a string of top fighters, including Pat Barrett, Robin Reid, Michael Gomez and Michael Jennings.

To the many kids from the rough streets of inner Manchester, who never quite made it, but who tried, he will be best known as a boxing coach, a father figure and a local hero. Brian has always been completely committed to the club he formed in the 1960s, Collyhurst and Moston Boys Club, and he gave a great deal of himself to everyone who walked through its doors.

As a trainer, he comes from the old school. In a 1999 interview with *Boxing News*, Brian recalled how he learnt the ropes in the gym from an old fighter called Fred Hampson. Fred had a handful of contests in the early 1930s, without much success, but he became a very good trainer. Fred worked alongside Jack Bates, another Collyhurst legend. Jack had 135 bouts in a career that lasted between 1924 and

1932. Immediately upon his retirement, he became a top-class coach and he trained the three Manchester greats, Johnny King, Jackie Brown and Jock McAvoy, all of whom became champions. Brian wrote biographies on all three.

Bates died in 1962, but Brian remembered studying his methods as a 13-year old. Another Manchester influence was Tommy Proffitt. Tommy is still with us today and he is a regular attendee at Manchester EBA meetings. He boxed in the 1948 Olympics and he became the No. 1 contender for the British bantamweight title. He helped Brian in the early days with the club.

It took Brian quite a few years to become established as a top professional coach. His early fighters included Kenny Webber, Eddie Smith and Lance Williams. His first major success came with "Black Flash" Barrett, who he guided to British and European title glory. By the mid-1990s, Manchester had regained its former prestige as a fight city of outstanding importance, and Brian played a major part in this.

Gomez, Jennings, Reid, Anthony Farnell, Gary Lockett and Thomas McDonough were all trained by Brian and all of them were top class. After this, his involvement continued with Scott Quigg, Lyndon Arthur and Rees Roberts. He also assisted with the early development of Tyson Fury, having also coached his father, Gypsy Johnny, back

in the 1980s. Tyson has referred to Brian as "the Cus D'Amato of British boxing." What a compliment that is.

Brian has always treated his involvement with boxing as a career, and he has consistently sought out the best in order to help him to become the best. In the early days, he asked ex-British welterweight champion Eddie Thomas, an established manager, promoter and trainer, to teach him how to properly tape hands and to deal with cuts. Eddie knew a thing or two about the game and it says a lot about Brian that he travelled regularly to Merthyr to pick his brains.

Brian spent time in the Kronk Gym with Emanuel Steward in Detroit in the early '90s and he had Angelo Dundee over to his own set-up in Collyhurst some years later. Both of these Americans, among the best trainers of all time, spoke highly of him. Dundee stated that he couldn't do what Brian did, taking raw kids off the street and turning them into champions, as "the ones I get are all Golden Gloves or Olympic champions." Steward went so far as to offer Brian a job.

His lasting legacy is his ability to transfer his training skills to the fighters he worked with. Look how many of them are now established trainers themselves – Barrett, Farnell, Lockett and McDonough. The old tricks that Bates taught in the 1930s are now being passed on to Manchester's current crop of fighters 80 years later.



Miles Templeton

Boxing historian

IT'S PARTY TIME!

London and Leicester EBAs stage their Christmas festivities



Simon Euan-Smith

EBA correspondent

LAST week, both London and Leicester EBAs held their Christmas get-togethers, and both went very well. Travel problems meant I missed the first part of the London do, but President Stephen Powell kindly filled me in. As it was Christmas they dispensed with some of the formalities, but a minute's silence was held to mark the passing of former champions Bunny Grant and Bunny Sterling, and Jean Francis – whose late husband, Roy, was a fine amateur boxer and pro referee.

"I remember Bunny Sterling from the early days at St Pancras ABC," Stephen said. "We used to spar together. He chipped my front tooth! I saw his pro debut, at Shoreditch Town Hall, against Joe Devitt – who later joined LEBA. Bunny lost that one on points, but he kept going and ultimately became the first immigrant to win a British title." (Sterling beat reigning

champion Mark Rowe - another LEBA member - on a fourth-round cuts stoppage in September 1970 to take the British and Commonwealth middleweight belts.)

Committee member Bob Cheeseman paid tribute to Jean Francis, describing her as "a very caring and loving lady – well known in the boxing community."

The meeting duly sang Happy Birthday to committee member Chas Taylor, who turned 80 a few days later (December 5). Chas is also Treasurer of the Home Counties EBA, and their Membership Secretary, Terry Clarke, was on hand, selling tickets for their Christmas Party this Sunday (December 16). Tickets are a very reasonable £5 per head, to cover the buffet.

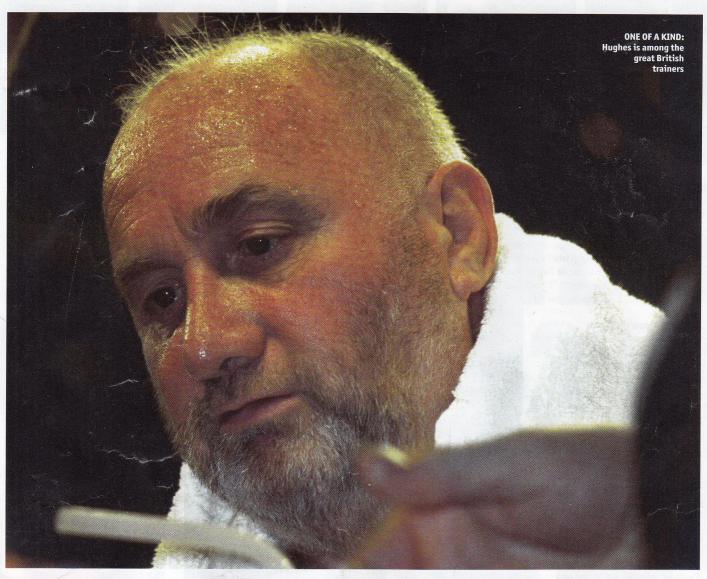
"This year we have Mick Mancini to entertain our members and guests, along with our usual DJ, The Pink Panther," Terry said. "There will be an auction, plus a raffle. We look forward to greeting many of our friends from other EBAs."

LEBA Secretary/Treasurer Ray Caulfield brought along his Special Icon Award from the Nordoff Robbins evening. Ray explained he had accepted the award on behalf of everyone at LEBA who had worked so hard to make the event a success – especially all the champions who had attended.

Mike Taub gave his monthly Young Guns round-up, complimenting Lucy Wildheart on her recent win over Elaine Greenan in Brentwood.

I was delighted to see Colin Lake, now out of hospital. A pro in the '60s, Colin went on to become a trainer – looking after, among others, the very popular Ivor "The Engine" Jones (another LEBA regular).

The buffet was excellent, and Dean



Ferris kept everyone entertained with a variety of songs. Members were invited to do a turn, and among those who obliged were Pat Thompson, Mark Taha and LEBA Vice President Peter Kent, in fine voice at 93. Singing unaccompanied, Peter treated us to a medley of wartime favourites and then came round (as he always does at Christmas), collecting for St John's Hospice.

Two days later (December 4), Leicester held their Christmas gathering. "It was a very happy occasion," President/Chairman Mick Greaves said. "About 35 turned up, including [former European, British and Commonwealth middleweight champion] Tony Sibson.

It's true we don't get the numbers we used to. We've lost a lot of older members, and aren't getting new ones. But we're a happy bunch, and there's a group of stalwarts who always turn up to meetings

Photo: ACTION IMAGES



HUGE SUPPORTER: Sibson continues to do his bit for the EBAs

and get-togethers."

North Staffs EBA have their Christmas meal at The Leopard, Burslem, next Wednesday (December 19). From next February (there's no January meeting) North Staffs will be going back to holding their monthly meetings there (first Wednesday of the month, starting 7.30pm).

There have been some changes at Central (Midlands) EBA, with Chairman Martin Florey and Treasurer Stephen Florey standing down. In the current newsletter, Secretary Paul Nutting thanks both for all they've done for the Association, and notes that both will carry on as members. That's good news. Gary Bate has taken over as chairman, and Paul Nutting will be taking on the treasurer's role as well.

EMAIL simonoldtimers@googlemail.com with your ex-boxer association news.