

FRANK BUGLIONI Words ADAM THORN Photography STEVE NEAVES

Swaggering into the plush Park Plaza hotel in South London, boxing's great showman, David Haye, is attracting quite the crowd. Fresh from his victory over Dereck Chisora, he's even more sickeningly magnetic than usual as people either flock towards him or exchange glances. But a few minutes later, the man we're here to see, Frank Buglioni, walks in, hands in pockets and after a polite hello to Haye, sits in the corner waiting patiently for the press conference to begin. And as his promoter goes into full razzmatazz mode, our man - considered Britain's answer to Jake LaMotta - looks a little lost.

Polite, smartly-dressed and eloquent he may be, but his endless fidgeting and scratching of his head don't exactly scream trash-talking box office. After all, this is not a sport where a mild-mannered bloke succeeds. But while out of the ring Buglioni may seem a tad out of place, inside the ring, it's a very different story. Just ask Sabie Monteith, Buglioni's first professional victim, who was ruthlessly knocked out just two minutes into the first round, after a wicked combination of left and right hooks to the cheekbones left his body limply falling on the ropes. Or Paul Morby, who was twice left looking up from the canvas in disbelief after being caught with a fierce punch while cowering from another barrage of attacks. ✈

FRANK BUGLIONI

RAGING BULLY

Day to day, he's a polite, mild-mannered gent. In the ring, he's a monster. Meet the real-life Jekyll and Hyde

“Frank Buglioni looks a man in a hurry,” gushed the TV commentator as Morby hauled himself up to be told of his first-round defeat by the referee. Even when Buglioni graced the elegant surroundings of the Royal Albert Hall, sorry Daniel Borisov faced the humiliation of being down three times before the bout was stopped – in the first round, *again*. He may be gentle in person, but Buglioni’s transformation into a merciless bastard is as much *Raging Bull* as it is *Incredible Hulk*: you really wouldn’t like him when he’s angry.

the monster in the man

“I often describe him as being like a steel fist in a velvet glove,” enthuses his manager William Storey as Buglioni showers after a session at Repton Boxing Club in East London before the press conference. “He’s got an iron chin and dynamite in his fists – phenomenal. It’s a real paradox because he is a really nice guy in real life but he becomes a different animal in the ring. He’s like a monster, which is quite unusual in boxing. I think he will definitely become a world champion. He’s got everything: pace, power, strength, and he can take a punch. I’ve never seen a boxer who has everything like he has, plus the intelligence to think creatively.”

And while the wider public may not recognise him yet, the sport’s money men, including his wily manager Storey, know that when Buglioni inevitably starts winning important titles, his Italian heritage, good looks and easy-going charm mean he could start raking in wonga at a rate of Beckham-like proportions. Put simply: he’s a marketing man’s fantasy.

boo-lee-own-ee

So a little introduction: Frank Buglioni (pronounce it “boo-lee-own-ee” in a De Niro accent and you’re basically there) started making a name for himself aged 14 by knocking two bells out of the other kids in his fights up and down the country. The 23-year-old had over 60 amateur fights in total, in which he won all but eight, stopping half of them. He qualified for the preliminary GB Olympic team, but pulled out before the final selection to turn professional late last year. He mixed all this by achieving a *loaded*-beating six A grades at GCSE and an International Baccalaureate. Show off.

So when we finally got to talk to the man himself after a post-press conference lunch, we wanted to know exactly how well he sees himself doing. It’s all very well being given the big talk-up by those close to him, but how would he feel if, at the end of his career, he *didn’t* win a world title? “I would be devastated if I didn’t get at least British or European honours. World is the aim but you have to be realistic. It’s hard to get there but I don’t see why I can’t. I’ve got the tools and if I remain dedicated, I’m sure I will.”

And to get there, he is accompanied by an entourage of people looking after him, from Frank Warren, his promoter, to his father Ralph who owns the business where he works, Storey (who has seemingly styled himself on Chewbacca), his trainer Mark Tibbs and er, a couple of TV documentary makers who have blagged themselves into the group to tag along too. With all these people relying on him to keep beating people up, isn’t that quite a bit of pressure for a young guy? “It’s something that goes through my mind but they’re such good friends and family that they know I’m putting in the effort and putting the right things into place. They know if I do get beat, which inevitably I will, and hopefully later in my career for world titles, then I did everything in my power to stop that happening so I won’t be letting them down and they will be by my side. My motivation is the love of boxing and striving to be successful. They are not there for the short-term, they have been there when I have been unsuccessful too.”

Ambitious he may be, but for Buglioni, winning titles and rearranging noses was an interest for him even as a young teenager. *loaded* sat down with his charismatic father Ralph, the parent who gave Buglioni his Italian heritage, and he was more than happy to gush

about his son’s pedigree. “Frank went to fight in the NABC [National Amateur Boxing Championships] quarter-finals in Southampton and Bobby Beck [his amateur coach at the time] recognised the boy Buglioni was fighting. He walked over to the trainer and said, ‘You’ve drawn Frank, don’t put your boy against him because he is going to get hurt’. The trainer turned around and said, ‘No, you would be surprised, my boy can look after himself’. Just 30 seconds later, Frank hit him on the chin so hard that, as he fell back, he broke his leg and ankle. Bobby Beck told them, ‘In future, when I tell you something, listen to my advice. You should be ashamed of yourself. That kid will probably never fight again’. That upset me because I knew what was going to happen. Bobby was devastated.”

terrified

But doesn’t Ralph get nervous at all? After all, at some point his kid will be on the receiving end of one hell of a beating, so how does he feel watching his own flesh and blood step into the ring? “Terrified. The minute he gets into the ring, the fear leaves you for a bit, but the build up, the day before, and the night before is the worst. Then you get up the next morning and it gets worse still. The only way you can explain it is that the nerves take over so



“BUGLIONI IS LIKE A STEEL FIST IN A VELVET GLOVE”

He’s right, those gloves do look silky smooth

features

The calm
before the
storm



much, you become hot, sweaty, cold, weak and lethargic. It feels like the clock stops. You just want to get to the fight at that point. But I'm better in professionals than the amateurs. It's more organised. I feel quite a bit more comfortable with it."

Perhaps the biggest thing in Buglioni's favour, apart from his viscous right hook, is his Italian heritage. When *loaded* suggested a *Raging Bull*-themed photoshoot, he and his team were more than happy to play along. In fact, his new nickname is 'The Wise Guy'. And the one thing that his father, trainer and manager all stressed was how Buglioni, a softly-spoken and exceptionally polite man, almost flips in the ring. Watching tapes of his previous fights, it's not just a cliché to say he shows no mercy. A transformation that, handily for us, really does make him seem like Britain's answer to Jake LaMotta. "When he played football, he lacked toughness and aggression and we all felt he need something to give him some more strength of character," explains his dad. "We took him to the boxing gym and after eight months, they said he had something about him and that he could become a very good boxer. So we took him to Waltham Forest [boxing club] and after that, every other sport was non-existent. He loved boxing. It was a shock to see someone mild-mannered and

placid take to a sport that everyone says is rough. But it isn't. In the early days it isn't what you think. You are looked after by these coaches. They are just as concerned for the other boys and not seeing them get hurt."

And the Italian comparisons are clearly something that excite his manager too. "There is a lot of *Raging Bull* about him," adds his manager William. "It's an obvious simile but he is like a matinée idol from the 1930s who happens to be incredibly good at boxing, yet also a gentleman out of the ring. It harks back to the Corinthians - gentleman who, when they get in the ring, transform into monsters. He's very well brought up, though. Down to earth. Very focussed. It's hard for Frank not to knock people out in the first round though. He is very strategic and he could almost be a third person outside of the ring."

strictly business

"I am what I am outside of the ring and inside the ring it's strictly business," Buglioni tells *loaded* about the transformation he goes through when his personality changes before a fight. "You've got to switch it on but you can't live at 100mph all your life. You train yourself. It's not in my nature to be that sort of person all the time. When the bell goes, it's very tactical. I have fought opponents, especially in the

amateurs, that have wound me up and done things that I didn't like. That only helps to spur me on. I don't let emotions come into play. I get in the ring and get the job done." Forget *Raging Bull* - when he speaks about his 'business' in the ring, it feels more like sitting down to watch *The Godfather*.

So being relatively new to the professional game, we wonder what kind of training he has to put in to prepare for matches? "I get up at 6am and go for a nice run, something which is obviously a lot easier in the summer. I usually wake up, drive to the office [he works for his father's construction business] and run. After I've finished I can start work at 8am before leaving work at 3pm, then I go to the gym and do a couple of hours there. I work as hard as I can, and sometimes my trainer Mark Tibbs has to calm me down, telling me to take a day off. I hate taking days off. He knows what he wants to get out of me so there's not a lot of screaming going on. We do a lot of cardio, five to six miles a day. Then two-hour gym sessions doing pad work, bag work and strength and conditioning. I go home every day completely exhausted. But providing I get the right rest and eat the right foods, I feel myself getting stronger and fitter." Something which sounds far too much like hard work for us. Doesn't he ever go for a big night out 

**“YOU CAN'T GO 100MPH
ALL YOUR LIFE.
IT'S NOT IN MY NATURE”**

features





with the boys? "Very few and far between," he says. "Occasionally I go out with my friends and have a good night but they don't pressurise me. At the weekends we have a laugh and play pool. The nights that I box are better than any night out for all of us."

good beating

"If he was preparing for a fight in six weeks, then we would try to break him in slowly," explains Mark Tibbs, on Buglioni's tough regime. "We have lots of six-round fights. Lots of four-mile flat runs. In the gym he might need some strength. Then the sparring comes in. We build the intensity before the fight and then the week before, we bring him down again. What people don't realise is that mental strength makes so much difference. You could have a fit athlete but without the mental strength he will fall apart. Frank can think for himself. We work to a plan [before a match] but if that doesn't work, then a fighter needs instinct - and that's what Frank's got." Mark also recalls the moment he first met Buglioni, and the attributes that shone through. "I went to watch a guy fight in Bethnal Green and Frank stood out by a mile. I went up to his amateur trainer and asked if he wanted to spar with Billy Joe Saunders [the current Commonwealth champion] and he did. I knew he was going to be good. It's certain things you say to people. Some people pick it up, some don't, but me and him are telepathic. When someone understands an instruction and just delivers it, it's a trainer's dream. He's a great athlete and he will only improve by mixing in better company."

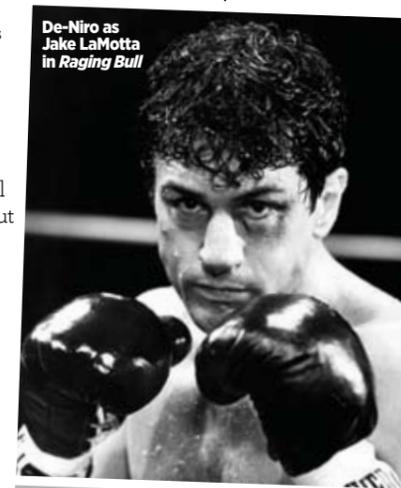
He may be well prepared, but despite all the talk, we can't help but feel, at some point, he must have received a bloody good beating in the ring. Over lunch, he mentions that he has had his nose broken twice. "It's never happened in fights," he insists. "I have never been hurt in the ring -

touch wood. Where I can get badly hurt is when I'm in the ring against good sparring partners as they can be heavier. I have been beat in the amateurs - I know what losing tastes like and it doesn't taste nice. My sparring partners are a stone heavier. I haven't had serious injuries or taking any beatings for a while, but I have been in there when it hurts and I have come through it."

write off

Our interview came just days after Amir Khan was knocked out in just the fourth round by Danny Garcia in Las Vegas, with IBF Super-Middleweight Champion Carl Froch helpfully telling the Bolton boxer that, if it was his career, he would hang up his gloves. "I look up to Carl Froch because he's not ducked anyone and performs at the highest level time and again. I was fortunate enough to train alongside him a year ago. His way of life, his dedication and general ethos make him stand out." We wonder whether he thinks Khan can make a comeback? "I don't see why not. He got stopped more dramatically by Prescott. People are writing him off but he's at world level and it happens. This is the point in his career where his close family and friends come into their own. That's what will drive me. I'm not looking at losing any fights, but you have to be prepared for it. I think you can always come back."

But his career is a long way from being over. "You don't understand. I could have had class. I could have been a contender," moaned a bitter



De-Niro as Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull*

Jake LaMotta staring into his reflection at the end of *Raging Bull*, the film that inspired our shoot. "I could have been somebody instead of a bum which is what I am. Let's face it. It was you Charlie. It was you." The lesson here is, if Buglioni can contain his wild side to the ring, his future could end very, very differently. ■ **loaded**

Frank Buglioni is next fighting on September 14 at Wembley Arena. Visit frankbuglioni.co.uk for more.

"FRANK HIT HIM SO HARD, HE FELL AND BROKE HIS LEG AND ANKLE"

THE GREATEST ITALIAN STALLIONS

loaded presents four more fighters from Europe's best, and more importantly coolest, nation

JAKE LAMOTTA

Also nicknamed 'The Bronx Bull', Italian-American Giacobbe 'Jake' LaMotta became World Middleweight Champion by beating Laurent Daouthuille in 1950 after 15 rounds, a match which became known as Fight Of The Year. As a child, he was forced by his father into fighting other children to entertain adults. With one of the best chins in boxing, he was one of the first boxers to adopt the 'bully' style of fighting.



ROCKY MARCIANO

Known as 'The Brockton Blockbuster', Rocco Francis Marchegiano was born and raised in Massachusetts to Italian immigrant parents. The only man to hold the World Heavyweight Champion title and go undefeated throughout his career, Rocky defended his title six times between 1952 and 1956.



ROCKY BALBOA

Two-time Heavyweight Champion Robert 'Rocky' Balboa, Sr. modelled himself on Rocky Marciano. By 1975, the southpaw had fought in 64 fights, winning 44 and losing 20. The Italian Stallion could absorb a multitude of the hardest hits without falling and was proud that he had never broken his nose in a professional fight. Not bad for a fictional character.



JOE CALZAGHE

The Pride Of Wales or The Italian Dragon (yep, it's confusing, his dad's Italian, his mum's Welsh) is the longest-reigning world champion in many years, having held the WBO Super Middleweight title for over ten years and made 21 defenses. His Super Middleweight and Light Heavyweight reigns overlapped and he retired with the longest continual time as world champion of any active fighter. He also participated in the seventh series of *Strictly Come Dancing* with Russian professional dancer Kristina Rihanoff, so there you go.



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