



James DeGale

Love for Arsenal, Prince Naseem and fighting the fat, with Britain's world super-middleweight champion

Who was your sporting idol as a kid?

"At the age of 10 or 11, I used to love Prince Naseem Hamed. He was my hero. I used to love his entrances to the ring and the way he used to fight as well. He was a showman."

Any particular Naz fights that you enjoyed?

"When he knocked out Kevin Kelley. He made his US debut in Madison Square Garden and I remember thinking: 'Yes! I would love to do that when I'm a professional fighter.'"

What's been the best feeling that you've had in a boxing ring?

"That's so hard! It's obviously gotta be the Olympic gold in 2008 or winning the world title. But, you know, I made history by becoming the first boxer to win an Olympic gold medal for Great Britain to then go on and win a world title. So I sort of need both to have that record, if you know what I mean."

We do. Outside of boxing, what are your three favourite sports?

"Football is the obvious one. I'm a big Gooner, a season-ticket holder. I go and see Arsenal any opportunity that I can. But I like all sports - athletics, a bit of tennis."

Is there a sport which makes you change the TV channel?

"I'm not a lover of cricket or golf, but I appreciate what they do. Any top sport is hard, mentally and physically."

Have you ever been starstruck at all?

"I met one of the legends, Sugar Ray Leonard, when I boxed for my world title. He was doing the commentary and he came into the changing room and wished me luck - I was a bit starstruck then. I didn't know what to say to him. It was very humbling."

Do you have a nickname?

"When I first started boxing, I walked into the gym in Harlesden, the first club I was at - and my coach Phil Pearson just called me 'Chunky'. If I'm being honest, it was because I was a fat kid - but I suppose he was being a bit polite in calling me chunky. It's stayed ever since."

What was the last film that you saw and did you enjoy it?

"Hmm. You've put me on the spot... I go to the cinema a lot. If I had my missus here, she'd tell you... It wasn't the last one I watched, but I rated that one with the wrestler..."

Mickey Rourke? The Rock? John Cena? Ric Flair? Ricky 'The Dragon' Steamboat?

"Nah. It's about a wrestler who goes to the Olympics, his brother and the nutty coach..."

Foxcatcher!

"That's it - with Channing Tatum. That was a really good film."

What kind of music do you listen to?

"As soon as I get in the gym, I put my iPod or a CD straight on. I like R&B, hip-hop, dance, commercial, chart music. I'm a big music fan."

What treat do you allow yourself when you come out of training camp, post-fight?

"Eight weeks prior to my fight, I'm on a strict diet - I cut out chocolate, crisps, cakes and stuff like that. So for the first two weeks after a fight, I indulge in food. I eat what I want."

Where are you 10 years from now?

"It's about building sort of a legacy. So when I retire, people go: 'You know what? That James DeGale was a good fighter, man. He won stuff and unified titles.' That's what it's about now." ●

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