

REPORTAGE

A **BOXER** WHO CANNOT LEAVE HIS SOLE **DEFEAT** UNAVENGED; A **TRAINER** WHO **CONSPIRED** TO BEAT HIM, BUT IS NOW AT **HIS SIDE** TO PROVE A POINT. LIVE REPORTS ON TWO **OLD STAGERS** THROWN TOGETHER FOR ONE **LAST SHOWDOWN**

the rocky road to redemption

As the dawn light bathes the craggy features of 12,000ft Mount Charleston in a metallic pink glow, a lone, 5ft 7in figure begins to dance. His diminutive shadow plays on the road that snakes up the mountain. Ricky 'The Hitman' Hatton fires jabs into the crisp air like licks of a snake's tongue. He pivots on his left, gravel crackling under his feet, then rips uppercuts before rolling off his rear foot again, shadow-boxing as a warm-up for the brutal run up the mountain. 'You ready?' he shouts to me.

It's cold. We left Las Vegas at 5am and drove 35 miles to get here. The city was still pulsing with gamblers rolling in and out of the giant casinos; an army of Mexican immigrants were handing out 'Girls Direct To Your Room' flyers.

Hatton, 30, didn't say much on the way. He sat quietly in the front seat of the white GMC van, his beanie pulled over his thick brows, his face red and inflamed from the eczema that plagues him. When he was a child he had to wear soft gloves at night to stop him scratching his face; now it's why he cuts so easily in fights. His heavy, lumpen face with its distorted features, evidence of countless wars in the ring, was set into a frown. He spoke only intermittently over the whisper of tyres on black asphalt.

'I started to believe all those critics in my head,' he said. 'I lost confidence in myself. Was I finished? Did I have too many miles on the clock? I'd ask myself, "Rick, can you still do this?" I was beginning to think that my best days were behind me.' Another long silence, and then, 'I need to get my confidence back.'

The neon lights of strip joints, bars and sumptuous restaurants reflected off the windows of the van – the temptation of Sodom in the sand drifting by. 'If I lived in Vegas I'd probably ***** kill myself the way ►



WORDS BY JONATHAN GREEN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY GILLES TOUCAS



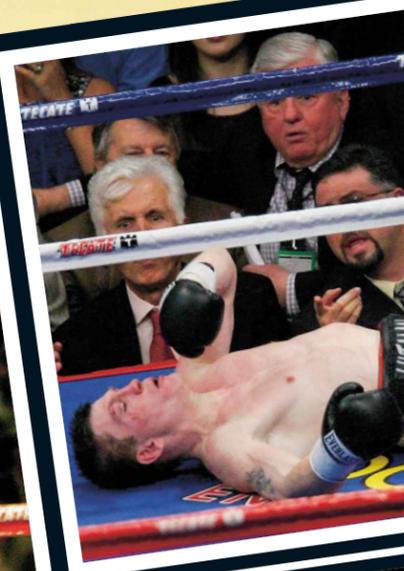
Hatton trains with Floyd Mayweather Snr in Las Vegas. Right: the bout last year in which he was beaten by Floyd Mayweather Jnr, his new trainer's son

► 'I carry on,' he admitted. Hatton is notorious for a hard-drinking lifestyle when out of the ring. Indeed, it seems ironic that he should be here in Vegas at all – looking for redemption in the last place people go for abstinence and purity.

'He's like a monk living in Sin City,' said Hatton's long-term friend and right-hand man Paul Speak, a burly former policeman from Salford who's at the wheel of the van. For much of the day he handles Hatton's relentless schedule, the *Rocky* theme tune, *Gonna Fly Now*, constantly starting up on his mobile phone.

Now, up and away from the green lights of the MGM Grand hotel where he lost his crown, Hatton begins to pound up the mountain. I fall in and attempt to run beside him. We're at around 8,000ft; the body has to work far harder at altitude. He puffs a couple of times as he finds his pace, then surges on, wincing and grunting in pain. He's wearing Hi-Tec hiking boots, just to make the five-mile run at a punishing gradient even tougher. 'These are my Beverly Hillbilly specials,' he says. 'When I get back to Manchester I'm going to burn these ***** boots.' The training regime is hitting him hard.

Hatton has a tough challenge ahead. For over a decade he beat anyone who was put in the opposing corner with swarming, decisive body shots. By December 2007, his record stood at 43 wins, no defeats and 31 knockouts. Then came a reckoning. Hatton fought the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world, Floyd Mayweather Jnr, who also had an unbroken string of victories, in one of the most hyped fights of the past ten years. Some 35,000 British fans, most



without tickets, flew to Las Vegas. As celebrity friends including David Beckham looked on, Hatton was felled with an artistic 'check hook' in round ten. Knocked out, humiliated and broken, he vowed he would never return to Sin City.

ASK THE EXPERT

THIS WEEK: DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF GOOD GROOMING



Richard Sawyer, Education Director at Lab Series Skincare For Men, explains the importance of good grooming and answers your questions

From everyday skincare to grooming for that special occasion, the demands placed on men to look their best have never been greater. Whether it's ensuring you're perfectly polished in your professional life, or that you're impeccably turned out for an important social engagement, Lab Series Skincare For Men offers a regime to suit. As the global authority on men's skincare, we are perfectly positioned to guide you through the grooming maze. From dealing with puffy eyes to dressing for a formal dinner and from combating razor burn to defining the perfect haircut for your lifestyle.

You'll find all this, and more, in *Top to Toe, The Modern Man's Guide to Grooming*, a special-edition book produced in collaboration with Tony Glenville, Creative Style Director. It's packed with expert advice on skincare and grooming, plus all the essentials of the modern man's lifestyle, including haircare and sartorial tips.

Q I suffer from blackheads and the occasional breakout, which I really thought I'd left behind in my teenage years. Any advice?

A You think you've left that all behind when you start gainful employment, but unfortunately the reality for most of us is different.

You can take preventative measures, though. Lab Series Purifying Clay Mask gives skin a thorough, deep clean; with results you can see in one use.

Q I find in the winter months my skin really suffers, becoming prone to dryness and redness. Any suggestions on how to combat this?

A The simple key to this is day-time protection and night-time recovery. By day use Lab Series Daily Moisture

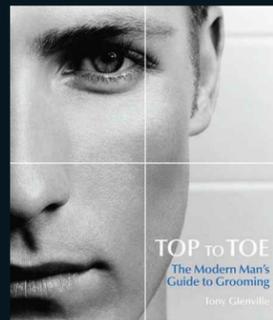
Defense Lotion SPF 15 which will moisturise and protect; and then at night use Lab Series Night Recovery Lotion to hydrate, revitalise and repair the look of skin damage.

Q I seem to be on top of my skincare and shaving regime, but now my hair is letting me down! Can you offer any advice?

A Well you're more than halfway there, I reckon! Lab Series Skincare For Men has a 3-step haircare system. The first step to thicker, fuller-looking hair is Lab Series Root Power

Treatment Shampoo; it invigorates the scalp to promote healthier-looking hair and preps for the next step - Lab Series Root Power Hair Tonic. This scalp-energising formula works to strengthen, thicken and repair hair, while improving its appearance. Step 3 - Lab Series Nutriplex Hair and Scalp Protector SPF 8 - this expert body-builder styles and controls, and promotes stronger and healthier-looking hair.

FREE LAB SERIES SPECIAL EDITION GROOMING BOOK



With any £29 purchase from Lab Series Skincare For Men receive the Lab Series special-edition grooming book. Available at Lab Series stockists.* One copy per customer. While stocks last.

* Stockist enquiries, tel: 0870 034 2566 email your skincare and grooming questions to Richard Sawyer at: expertis@labseriesformen.co.uk



But he's back. He doesn't need the money; he just wants to regain his pride. 'I don't need to box again, financially,' he says. 'But I'm back to the scene of the crime. It had gone all my own way up to that point, but when it didn't, if I'd hung up my gloves straight away, I think my legacy would be pushed under the carpet.'

There's someone else in his corner who's seeking redemption, too. Hatton has hired the father of the man who beat him to train him back to glory. After guiding Mayweather Jr to his first title in 1998, Floyd Mayweather Sr became so estranged from his son that early last year he offered to train Oscar de la Hoya, with whom he'd worked since 2001, to defeat his former protégé. De la Hoya declined. Hatton then engaged his services, which is why the old trainer is gearing him up for his Vegas bout next weekend with Paul Malignaggi, a tough, New York-based Sicilian fighter. If they fail, The Hitman may never fight again.

'No! Don't just go running in again like you used to,' shouts Mayweather from ringside. 'Move your head. Don't do it the old way; do it the new way.' At a secluded private gym off East Flamingo Road, Hatton tries to run his man down, but the rangy sparring partner, his arms inked black with tattoos, darts and weaves, escaping Hatton's power. Finally Hatton cuts him off and muscles him into the ropes, unloading a cracking volley of bone-crushing uppercuts and hooks. There's the muffled whump of 16oz sparring gloves hitting flesh; the quick exhalations of air being forced out of body cavities. 'That's right, that's right!' shouts Mayweather.

Hatton's handlers were nervous about letting us see the sparring, fearing that if we filmed the session the footage might be seen by his opponents, giving them advance warning of his style. But they eventually allowed us into the gym - without video cameras. It's a huge, cavernous hangar with bags on electric rails to mimic an attacking opponent, a brand new ring and walls covered by pictures of legends who've trained there - Shane Mosley and Laila Ali, among others. Hatton looks sluggish and he knows it.

He wants to blast away like he did in the old days, but instead he solemnly flicks away jabs and bobs his head. 'The run killed me this morning,' he says as he unlaces his gloves. 'But it's all going to pay off on fight night.'

Hatton is learning how to fight defensively, something he has rarely had to do in the past. 'I can't just run in and take punches any more,' he says. 'No more big shots for me. Everyone knows Ricky Hatton is strong, but now they're going to find out that he can box, too.'

The decision to hire the architect of his downfall was a surprising one. Mayweather Sr is a controversial figure. He spent four years in the Michigan federal penitentiary for smuggling cocaine. He'd been a major boxing talent, likely to be a world champion, until his career was cut short when he was shot in the leg by his brother-in-law. Legend has it he held up Mayweather Jr and said, 'If you're going to kill me, you're going to kill him too.' His own hopes in tatters, he trained his son to be, arguably, the best boxer in the world - and the man who would unseat Hatton. Mayweather Jr has since trained with Roger Mayweather, his uncle. Mayweather Sr is convinced of the benefits of ▶



► head during that. It did me no favours with the referee. Every time I hear the American anthem now a shiver goes up my spine.'

At the start of the fight, Hatton was like a '100mph bull at a gate', putting his opponent under pressure and forcing him to fight. But in round ten, in a split second, he was neatly sidestepped and sent tumbling to the canvas unconscious. 'Your memory goes and you don't know where you are,' he says. 'I mean, you still know you're in a fight, but it took me 20 to 30 seconds to even realise what happened.' Hatton gamely climbed to his feet before Mayweather strode over and hit him, 'mercilessly', with a flurry of punches. Billy Graham threw in the towel.

'When he was in the showers he cried,' says one of Hatton's entourage. He felt he'd let his fans down. It was the end of a dazzling record.

Hatton was gracious in defeat. 'I know it sounds daft, but I've had tougher fights. I just charged in and he caught me. Of course, it didn't help that I left my chin out to dry.'

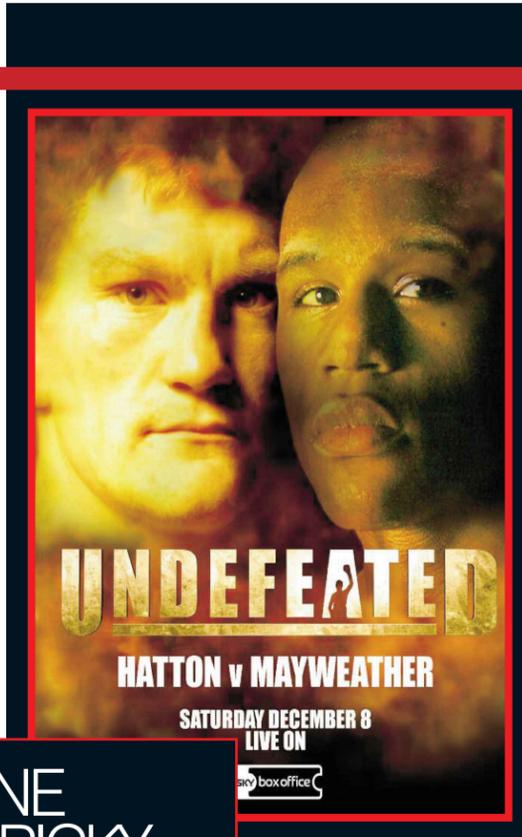
Some fighters may have retired, but not Hatton. 'What makes a great champion is when he comes back from defeat,' he says.

In May, Hatton had a lacklustre comeback fight in Manchester. 'Fifty-eight thousand came out to watch, but sometimes that can add to the pressure,' he says. Ultimately, he won the fight against Juan Lazcano, but it went the full 12 rounds. 'I had a chest infection,' he says. 'The first fight back from defeat is always tricky. I know I didn't set the world on fire. I was happy, but I still had my doubts.'

Hatton doesn't throw punches outside the ring. Although earlier this morning I thought he might when a brash young American man cut in front of our white van pulling out of a petrol station. 'Did you not see the ***** white Transit! You d***head!' shouted Hatton. In a less intense moment, he explained, 'If an average person in the street took one of my punches, they'd likely sustain permanent damage. But to be honest, you just want to knock the other guy out for ten seconds. After that you want him to jump up and then you'll be mates for the rest of your life.'

The boxing world has been ablaze with gossip since Hatton parted company with Graham, his trainer of over ten years. Together they conquered the world. Graham's unorthodox method of training, with a huge leather body belt hung from his shoulders, used to thrill onlookers when they watched Hatton and Graham work out at the Phoenix gym. But after last year's defeat and the disappointment of his comeback fight, Hatton decided a change was in order.

'Billy was adamant that he could finish my career, but Ray Charles could have seen that he wasn't capable of it,' says Hatton. 'I'd go into the gym and wonder whether he was able to even finish a training session,' says Hatton. 'His enthusiasm was waning.'



EVERYONE KNOWS RICKY HATTON IS STRONG, BUT NOW THEY'RE GOING TO FIND OUT THAT HE CAN BOX, TOO

The poster for Hatton's 2007 fight against Mayweather Jr

The regime Mayweather has devised for Hatton is brutal. At the end of a savage day, Hatton lies on a bench supine while Mayweather relentlessly crashes a medicine ball into his stomach and ribs. Hatton shouts out in pain a couple of times. It looks like Mayweather is creating a new man, hammering him into life on a workshop bench.

Hatton is digging in for only the second week of this five-week training programme. 'You have to be fit,' he says. 'And then you have to be Vegas fit.' The day before I saw him using a medieval-looking contraption that fits around the head, with 15lb weights attached to it. It's used to strengthen neck muscles by doing head dips. 'I'm not sure I need to lose any more weight from my head,' Hatton jokes.

Mayweather insists that Hatton needs a completely new regime – even after the fight. 'No more of this Ricky Fatton thing,' he says. 'Stop it – no more. He needs to keep his body in shape in between fights; no more than 10–15lb each time. He could make a lot of money, but you can't play at this. He needs to stop drinking. Period.'

An hour later, Hatton and I arrive at a medical clinic, Hatton dressed in a Guinness T-shirt. As he waits in line to be tested for HIV, hepatitis and other conditions a boxer has to be checked for under Nevada Athletic Commission rules, he ruminates on his new trainer's words about drinking.

'Well, that ain't gonna happen,' he says, dismissively. 'I'm 30 years old and I'll still go down the pub with the lads, and that will never, ever change. That's me – that's what makes me who I am to a degree. If you took the fiery side away from Roy Keane or Wayne Rooney they wouldn't be half the players they are. I think there are pluses and minuses. I work to live, not live to work. And I like to let my hair down. I know I do it a bit more and a bit heavier than most, but I know that and I have to deal with that. To be honest, if I only had to lose 3lb

before a fight then I'd probably go out drinking the week before anyway.'

Hatton's dilemma is that the drinking and partying are part of the reason why people like him. And there's no doubt that he's still trying to cling to his one-of-the-lads persona. When the photographer for the shoot casually mentioned that he'd just shot Cameron Diaz and Daniel Day-Lewis, Hatton said, 'And now he's photographing me? What am I? The ***** Z list. Or the Fat list, more like.' He glared at the photographer, maintaining the same expression for every single frame. 'He's no David Beckham; he hates having his picture taken,' said one of his entourage.

Meanwhile, in a secret location elsewhere in Vegas, Paul Malignaggi is preparing for the fight. Famously, he had to have his dreadlocks cut off in the middle of a bout against Lovemore N'dou because they were impairing his vision. Hatton proved he'd lost none of his prankish sense of humour when he handed Malignaggi the locks – picked up by one of his team – at the pre-fight press conference. His opponent doesn't lack for heart, either. By the time Malignaggi ended his 12th round with Miguel Cotto, he had a cut to the eye, a bleeding nose and a broken cheekbone. 'Hatton will have to bring his A game,' says author Thomas Hauser.

It's only early evening, but Hatton is heading back home for sleep and another rousing 6am run the next day. 'I feel like I've been in Las Vegas forever,' he says. 'I miss home, I miss my family. I'm a bit of a homebody, really. It depresses the hell out of me.'

The light of his life is his son Campbell, seven. After his run this morning he played a loop on his Nokia phone of Campbell playing the Oasis song *Rock 'n' Roll Star*. 'I bought him a guitar,' says Hatton, proudly. He doesn't want his son to follow in his footsteps. 'I'd prefer him not to box. I think any parent would be a liar if they said they wanted their son to box.'

In the evenings he says he watches reruns of *Forrest Gump* on his own and rarely sleeps before midnight. 'I thought you were asleep by 9:30?' says a shocked Paul Speak. 'I'm a night owl,' says Hatton, apologetically.

Earlier in the day he put in five miles, but still didn't reach the summit of the mountain. When he got back in the van there was a text message waiting for him. 'Just got in the pub – how was your run?' read Hatton. It was from a friend of his called Duck.

He explains: 'It sounds a bit tight calling him Duck. He's a local lad with spina bifida and he has a hump. Even his mum calls him that, so we all do, too. He turned up in Vegas for the Mayweather fight in slippers.'

Duck, and other fans like him – rather than fame or even boxing success – are clearly what motivates Hatton. Although the boxing critics may have written him off, his fans – the celebrity ones included – have not. 'Liam and Noel [Gallagher] are going to carry my belts in,' he says. 'And Becks will be there.'

He pauses, then adds, 'If it doesn't go my way, then I'll really have to think about where my future is.'

But Hatton's a fighter, in the truest sense, and coming back from the brink is what he does best. Before the fight he's going to reach the summit of that mountain.

'I'm gonna get to the top if it kills me,' he says. From there he will be able to see the winking lights of the MGM Grand in the distance, the scene of his defeat and now, he hopes, the stage for his redemptive victory. ■ Jonathan Green won *Exclusive Of The Year at the 2008 Magazine Design and Journalism Awards* for his July reportage feature in *Live*, 'The Dirty Secret of Your NHS'. 'Hatton v Malignaggi' is live on Sky Box Office on Saturday

TO SEE MORE PICTURES OF RICKY TRAINING IN LAS VEGAS GO TO MAILONLINE.CO.UK/HATTON