



TYSON FURY
AGAINST
THE
WORLD

How did a bigot who called himself a disgrace to athletes become world heavyweight champion? Ahead of his first title defence, we try to get inside the controversial boxer's head

Words Sam Rowe



Tyson Fury, lineal heavyweight champion of the world, is a 6ft 9in colossus of contradiction.

Earning a wage thumping other men's skulls into blood pudding, the 27-year-old behemoth is a born again Christian who preaches love to all of God's children. He also believes the solution to paedophilia is to "let them in a room with me and two hammers."

Though proudly from Traveller stock – the 'Gypsy King', no less – Fury has spent most of his life dwelling in bricks and mortar. He's a family man who declares he'd hang his own sister if he learned she'd slept around, and argues that a woman's place is on her back, or maybe cooking his dinner. The bearded, barrel-chested giant also thinks the legality of homosexuality and abortion will one day bring about the apocalypse. And that Jews own all the papers, TV stations and banks.

Think his views are prehistoric and bigoted? Tough. He flat out refuses to apologise. Until he inevitably does, that is. Or swears it was all a joke. Honest.

On a good day, Fury is a laugh-a-minute showman – attending press conferences dressed as Batman, telling cameras he'd love to bare-knuckle box Barack Obama, or belting out a power ballad post-victory. Other times, he'll coldly discuss manic depression, his desire to quit the boxing game and drive his car into a wall. As for his body – the meal ticket that's earned 25 professional wins without reply – it routinely flits between a lardy mass of alcohol and pies (as seen in his "It's a disgrace to call me an athlete" press conference), and a sculpted, muscle-bound killing machine.

Confused yet? Don't worry, it seems the enigmatic man isn't entirely sure himself. Fury's wife, Paris, points to his "20 personalities" and need for a straitjacket. His last (and next) opponent, the mighty Ukrainian cyborg Wladimir Klitschko, asserted Fury had

"mental issues for sure". Fury agreed. It seems even his hairdo can't quite make up its mind – a continuity troubling muddle of wispy, thinning and shaved clean looks, depending on what day it is, as if it were paying homage to the frenzied brain that lies beneath.

Despite all that, Fury presents the heavyweight scene with a new pretender to its hallowed throne. Following a decade-long Klitschko reign that would be inspiring if it wasn't so eye-bleedingly dull, this jabbing Gypsy King embodies a welcome stick of dynamite to the sleepy heavyweight division. His is a style that is awkward and ungainly – power and technique masked by feints, jerks and a metric tonne of swagger – with no opponent yet able to unpick it.

"You have to rank him as one of the best," says Michelle Joy Phelps, owner of fight site *Behind The Gloves*. "He's currently the heavyweight world champion, he beat Wladimir Klitschko – which is something many people have attempted to do and were unsuccessful at – he's entertaining to watch in and outside of the ring, and I think that makes him the full package. It's exactly what the heavyweight division needs at this very moment."

After years spent scrapping his way up the ranks, via harsh breaks, false dawns and no shortage of postponed bouts, Fury's recent belt haul now puts him in the company of esteemed boxing demigods. Ali. Frazier. Marciano. Foreman. Tyson. All this for a self-proclaimed "fat gippo" who, prior to slaying Klitschko in Dusseldorf last November, was most commonly known

in the boxing world for once landing an uppercut square on his own chops. How on Earth did this happen?

Natural born brawler

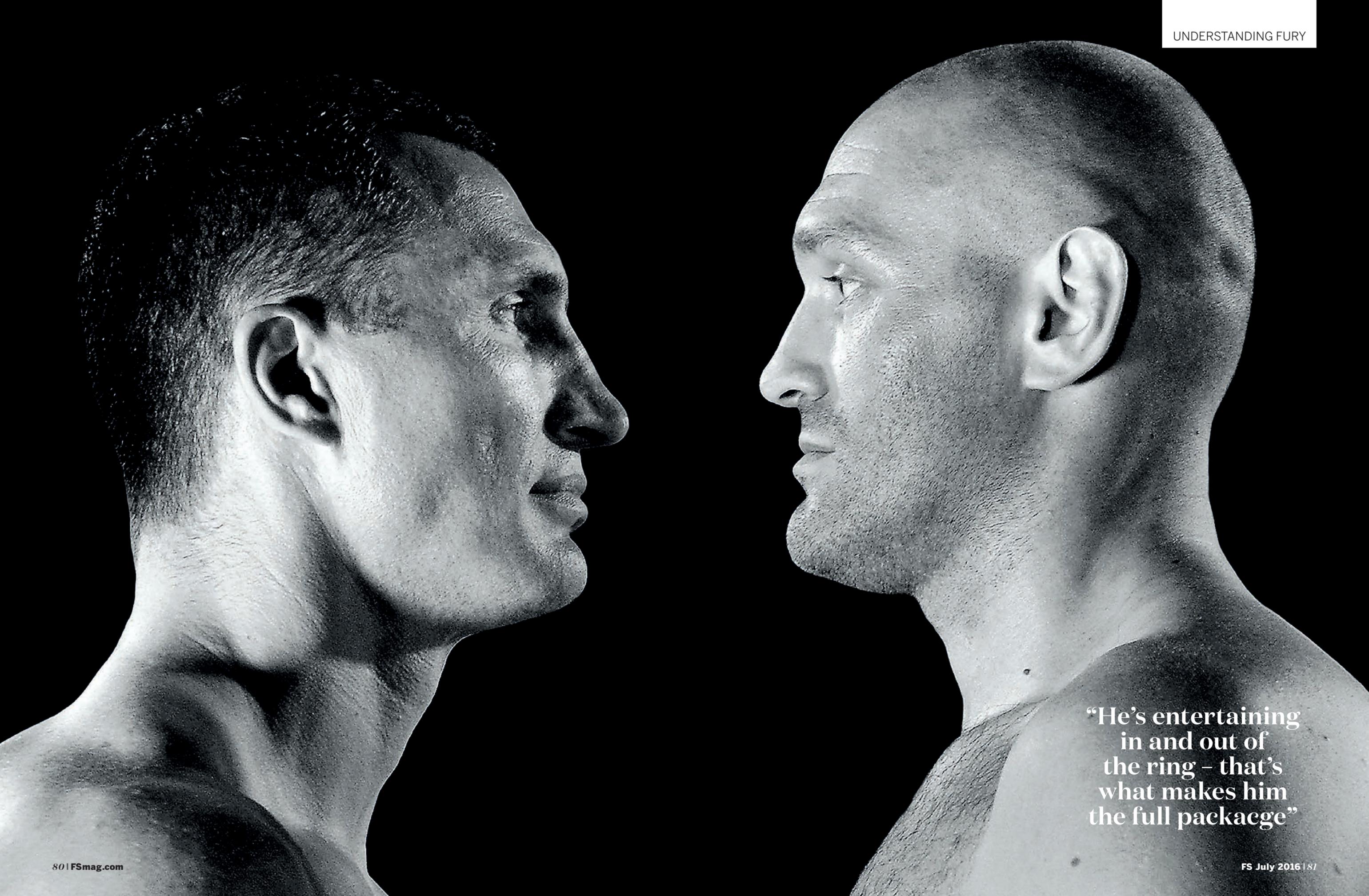
"He grew up steeped in the sport," explains Professor Damian Hughes, writer of *The Five Steps To A Winning Mindset*, and a man whose father, Brian, spent a year as Fury's trainer at the turn of the decade. "Thirty years earlier, my dad trained Tyson's dad, [bare-knuckle boxer and pro heavyweight] 'Gypsy' John Fury," Hughes explains, "so he's from a fighting background. And there's nominative determinism with his name – that alone tells you his whole life has been about fighting."

Indeed, Tyson Fury was born a brawler. Arriving three months premature, weighing in at one pound, he reportedly died three times before dad John could clutch him in his giant paw. Doctors feared the worst, saying that even if he did survive, he'd never grow to a normal size and would be very frail. Fury Snr was having none of it. He informed staff they were looking at the future heavyweight champ of the world, who'd grow to seven feet and 20-stone. And, yes, *that* name...

"It was 1988, Mike Tyson was in his pomp as world heavyweight champion," John Fury told *The Telegraph* in 2008. "I said, 'Let's call him Tyson.' The doctors just looked at me and smiled."

Growing up in Styal, near Wilmslow in Cheshire, young Tyson was among the first generation of Furys to grow up away from a caravan site. But make no mistake: Gypsy blood pumped through him, as did the lust for a tear up. A distant relation ▶





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of bare-knuckle icon Bartley Gorman (the undefeated 'King of the Gypsies'), Fury spent his childhood sparring with his brother Shane, their hands wrapped in tea towels. While other kids his age dreamed of starring in the Premier League, others Hollywood or Glastonbury, Fury had one simple (if not particularly easy) goal: making good on his dad's promise, and becoming a champion boxer.

Leaving school aged ten, Fury threw himself headlong into the sport. During a sparring session, aged 14, he cracked three of Gypsy John's ribs. At 16 he measured 6ft 5in and weighed 15 stone. He represented both Great Britain and Ireland (owing to his Irish Traveller heritage), winning bronze at the Amateur Boxing Association Youth World Championships as a 17-year-old, before narrowly losing a Beijing Olympics place to David Price. Fury then tried, and failed, to represent Ireland, scoring the 2008 ABA Super Heavyweight title in Price's absence instead. Citing "boxing politics", he flipped amateur boxing the bird (and any chance of going to London 2012) in order to go pro, leaving with an amateur record of 31 wins from 35 fights.

Gypsy poster boy

Since turning pro, Fury's record in the ring is flawless – a 100% record needs no explaining, after all – yet at times, it's tough to figure out whether success has been earned because of his pugilism-steeped Gypsy roots, or in spite of it.

An oft-misunderstood race, stereotypes of the Traveller community have likely been set back decades by *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, whereas Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* only served to reinforce the stock image of caravan dwellers fighting all-comers for a pocketful of coins. It's understandable that Fury's achievements are enjoyed by all Travellers, rightly trumpeted as their de facto poster boy. Yet you can't help wonder if his Gypsy King crown hangs even heavier than his extensive championship belt collection.

Damian Hughes remembers his father returning from a 2010 training camp in Germany with Fury, "unequivocal that he'd be world champion, he had all the tools and attributes needed". Hughes says it was the freedom of distraction, to concentrate fully on his craft, that revealed Fury's raw talent. Then, come the fight at a Huddersfield leisure centre (versus Hans Joerg-Blasko, which Fury won by TKO after two minutes), the scene wasn't nearly as zen.

"There were about 80 people from the travelling community trying to get in and

see him before the fight," recalls Hughes, himself an onlooker in the heaving, sweat-soaked dressing room. "That gave me a bit of a clue as to the weight of expectation. That's a difficult burden to carry, I've got real sympathy with him in that regard."

The fact remains that under the stewardship of his father, and more recently uncle Peter, Fury has parlayed his modest roots into a peerless ring career. Their guidance has resulted in English, British, Irish, Commonwealth and European titles, alongside recent WBA, IBF, WBO, IBO, and *The Ring* heavyweight belts (with the IBF title later stripped due to a technicality), not to mention more wealth than he ever could have imagined. But then, at the heart of Fury's life beyond the ropes, there all too often lies chaos.

Surprisingly for a male, both boxer and traveller, Fury pulls no punches on the subject of his demons. "One minute I'm happy, and the next minute I'm sad, like commit suicide-sad," he told *The Guardian* in 2011, pointing to a fraught upbringing where his parents were "always shouting and screaming and hitting each other". His mum, Amber, fell

pregnant 14 times, with only four children surviving. At age nine, Fury remembers his joy at the birth of a baby sister, then, just three days later, mourning her death. Despite his newfound wealth and sporting acclaim, it seems darkness still stalks Fury.

Happily married (Paris is a fellow Traveller, with Fury observing tradition by sleeping in a caravan outside her parents' house throughout their engagement) with two children (Venezuela and Prince John), the couple suffered a miscarriage in 2014. Months later, the boxer's uncle – and sometime trainer – Hughie Fury, passed away from what should have been routine surgery.

Throughout his early career, Fury was trained under the watchful eye of Gypsy John – who fought 13 pro fights (and a bunch of unlicensed ones), including a battle with former WBC heavyweight champion Henry Akinwande in 1991. This all changed in 2011, when Fury Snr was sentenced to 11 years in prison. His crime? Gouging out another man's eye. Believe it or not, they were once friends, but fell out over a bottle of beer in Cyprus years earlier, with round two commencing at a car auction. ▶



Clockwise from top left: Father and son celebrate with a cuppa; showcasing the suit and white socks look; towering over Klitschko en route to the title



Though Gypsy John was released having served five years in 2015, his brother Peter has largely assumed the mantle as coach since the incarceration. Peter is often credited for masterminding Fury's valiant, against-the-odds win against Klitschko, but it won't surprise you to hear that he's no choirboy himself. Jailed for a ten-stretch in 1995, for possession with intent to supply Class As, Peter was long considered Greater Manchester's answer to Heisenberg, controlling a drug empire from his prison cell, with a handful of aliases and bank accounts that spread from the United States to the Isle of Man.

Peter Fury insists he has now gone straight, with Tyson and his own son Hughie's careers his sole focus, though his dark past caught up with him in 2013 when he was denied a US Visa ahead of Fury's seventh-round knockout against Steve Cunningham. Via social media, Uncle Peter branded Fury "out of control" on the night, grading his performance just a two out of ten. "This is what happens when I'm not there," he tweeted.

Thankfully, Fury's own rap sheet is minimal – his only stay at Her Majesty's pleasure came in Scotland last year, following a swerved court date for a speeding fine – but an ever-growing stack of distractions outside the boxing ring could yet be his undoing in it. And that's before you consider the mental and physical strain of carrying four extra stone in weight, less than three months before a heavyweight title defence.

Donald Trump + Westboro Baptist Church

In an age where boxing fans yearn for the halcyon days of yesteryear – bemoaning the Floyd Mayweather-type brawler that safeguards a perfect record by ducking fights, prepared only to grace the negotiating table when there's a suitably obscene amount of zeroes on the cheque; or the robotic, bore-you-into-submission Klitschko sort that overwrites a Tyson or Ali memory each time they enter the ring – there is a strong argument that we should all worship Tyson Fury.

The proverbial rough diamond, rising from a dusty trailer park to the rarefied heights of global stardom, is the stuff of a *Rocky*-style redemption story. He'll fight anyone. He speaks his mind. With each knock, every criticism, he comes back and keeps on winning. Though he's now worth millions of pounds, he'll still pair a tailored suit with flip flops, and insists on wearing white Slazenger socks ("50 pairs for a pound!").

So why don't we cheer him? Put simply: Tyson Fury is not a nice man.

“The problem comes when he strays into areas that are dangerous”

It's easy to look past the trash talk, like when he politely informed Dereck Chisora that he was ugly and his breath was rancid, or that Wladimir Klitschko had "as much charisma as my underpants. Zero." That's Boxing 101. Even other pre-fight antics, while borderline deranged, are forgivable. Headbutting a watermelon? Fine. Crashing a press call dressed as Batman? Fill your boots (or rather, spandex).

No. It's the other stuff that's the problem. You know, the sexism, homophobia, anti-semitism and 2,000-year-old Bible babble. Obliterating your chance of winning BBC Sports Personality of the Year in the name of free speech is one thing, but managing to insult just about every individual on Earth with perverse – some might say illegal – opinions is something very different. While he too is an outsider, who undoubtedly has faced racial abuse for his Traveller heritage, Tyson Fury has somehow offended more people than Donald Trump and the Westboro Baptist Church combined. It's almost impressive. Almost.

"Someone like Fury – who is not afraid of saying what he thinks and saying things that provoke discussion – as a journalist, part of you thinks that it's gold," admits *The Mail On Sunday's* Oliver Holt. "The problem comes when he strays into areas that are potentially dangerous." Holt knows this only too well, after conducting a now infamous interview with Fury last year, in which the boxer aligned gay marriage and ▶



SPORTING CONTROVERSIALISTS

He might be the current opinion divider in sports, but Fury certainly isn't the first...



Mike Tyson

The man who sprouted Fury's first name was a master in the ring (and when he had pigeons in his hand, weirdly!), but his 'dark' side trumped his triumphs. Biting an opponent's ear off is bad, sexual assault – and accusations of violence against his wife – is much, much worse. And he's supporting Donald Trump!



Luis Suárez

A quite outstanding footballer, but the Uruguayan has had his fair share of controversies during his career. Whether it be biting *three different* opponents, celebrating wildly after a handball in a World Cup quarter-final, or racially abusing a rival player, Suárez is a player that everybody loves to hate.



David Warner

Loathed by the majority of English cricketers after punching ickle Joe Root in a Walkabout for wearing a wig on his chin. The hot-headed Aussie also caused uproar after telling Indian batsman Rohit Sharma to "speak English" in a one-day international in 2015. An all-round charming individual.



Barry Bonds

The American baseball player broke record after record in his playing days, picking up seven MVP awards and 14 all-star appearances. He remains a hate figure for his positive drug tests, though, despite his denials. "I don't know if steroids are going to help you in baseball," he said. They definitely are...



Lance Armstrong

The ultimate cheat, whose legacy is forever tainted. The American was stripped of his seven Tour de France titles, and received a lifetime ban from cycling, after admitting to doping. Fell out with a host of teammates, who in turn gave a blow-by-blow account of his systematic doping. Whoops.

“To get airtime in a dying sport you need to be controversial”

abortion with paedophilia, claiming the End of Days was nigh. Fury cried misquote (the Mail later published the tapes, by way of proof), and told Holt through another interview that his brother Shane would “break his jaw completely with one straight hand”, while another pal would jump on his head. Fury later said such threats were a joke – your standard aggravated assault banter – though it was deemed serious enough that Holt was asked whether he wished to press charges. (He chose not to. “I didn’t want to make myself the story any more than I already was.”)

“I don’t think I was ever truly worried,” Holt now says of the affair. “I’m not saying I was blasé about it – he said it was a joke afterwards, that they were messing about, and I hoped it was a joke I guess.

“But when he is regurgitating really quite unpleasant stuff about anti-Semitism, these beliefs about Jews controlling the banks, the newspapers and all that kind of stuff, that’s straight out of 1930s Germany. To be honest, I think that’s when he crosses the line.”

Master plan

But could it all be an act? Is Tyson Fury, the belligerent sexist, raging anti-Semite and God-fearing homophobe, merely a pantomime villain, playing us all in an intricate, self-destructive – yet financially viable – long con? Psychologist Damian Hughes thinks so, with the blueprint to this master plan mapped out by a fellow heavyweight in a 2010 press conference.

“Don’t underestimate how clever he is,” notes Hughes. “He realises that, to get airtime in a dying sport, you need to be controversial. I remember once speaking to David Haye, and he said that the phrase ‘gang rape’ – about beating Audley Harrison – was worth about half a million pounds to him in terms of box office purchases alone.

“I know Tyson was well aware of being controversial in order to generate public interest in him, so when he starts coming out with certain anarchic and prehistoric views, suddenly he’s in the limelight. Now you’re doing research and writing

articles on him. It’s all about generating some interest.”

On one hand, the notion that a boxer would willingly splice Adolf Hitler’s views on Jews and homosexuals with Old Testament fire and brimstone just to play salesman is the sort of half-baked conspiracy you’d expect Fury to spew. On the other, there might actually be something in it. He’s not denying it.

“Sometimes I just play up to the character they want me to be,” Fury explained to *The Telegraph* ahead of the Klitschko fight last year. “I say daft stuff to get a reaction. I believe it’s me against the world.”

“It takes a curious kind of self-publicist to use anti-Semitism as a tool to promote a fight,” says Holt. “But one thing that sport in general teaches you, and I suppose boxing in particular, is that people will go to extreme lengths to promote something.”

Housewives’ favourite

So is Tyson Fury a blight on modern boxing, a vicious, bloated bigot in a Batman costume, or a singing, under-appreciated prankster that could still turn it around and let us in on the joke? For now at least, it remains a split-decision. But then, in a sport where two

individuals exchange blows until – if we’re lucky – one is prostrate on the canvas, have we ever found true heroes? Mike Tyson, lest we forget, is a convicted rapist. Floyd Mayweather has a distressing history of violence against women. Muhammad Ali had some pretty leftfield thoughts on racial segregation. Yet in the pantheon of boxing superstars, all of the above have a seat at the table. Could Tyson Fury join them?

“I definitely think he’s the real deal,” says Michelle Joy Phelps. “He’s young enough to really establish a rich legacy,” adds Hughes. “I don’t think Anthony Joshua will get close to him, I think he’d stop Haye. I can see him dominating the sport for the next four or five years, if he keeps motivated and interested in it.”

Whether you love, loathe or are driven to a maddening rage by the man, one thing is for sure – heavyweight boxing is never boring with Tyson Fury in it. And, as far as endorsements go, “Iron” Mike Tyson – the boxing icon who gifted Fury his name – has recently come out in support of the maligned Gypsy King. And the plaudits don’t stop there.

“My mum speaks very highly of him,” says Damian Hughes, with a snort. “She said he was a very polite and respectful human being.”

WHO’S NEXT?

Assuming Fury beats Klitschko in their rematch, where does he go next? If he’s not *really* retiring, that is...

ANTHONY JOSHUA

If Fury is to be believed, world titles don’t really mean that much to him, but could he be tempted into a fight with IBF champion Joshua to try to regain his old belt? It would be the most lucrative fight in British boxing, by far the most clamoured for, and the truest test of one another’s credentials as the best boxer in the heavyweight division. It’s also the most dangerous for each fighter – would Fury risk his perfect “0”?

“It would be the most lucrative fight in British boxing”

DEONTAY WILDER

Aside from Joshua, WBC champion Deontay Wilder is probably the only other viable option. While Luis Ortiz and Joseph Parker will stake claims for any of the four titles, Wilder is the only pick that would motivate Fury financially to get up and fight. Still somewhat technically limited, Wilder’s awesome one-bang punch power could give Fury enough to think about before signing a contract.

DAVID HAYE

What could have been. Twice. Haye may have steamrolled two patsies in as many months, and a showdown with mouthy American Shannon Briggs beckons, but the desire to step back up to world level remains, and Fury could be his ticket back to the big time. It’s an outside bet, though, as Fury has shown open disdain for Haye after the Londoner pulled out of two fights with him, in 2013.

