

LEE SELBY'S FIGHT TO MAKE WEIGHT

I tricked my body to believe I was eating



BY THE end, Lee Selby was hoping to hoodwink everyone — his opponents, his team, even his own body.

The former IBF world champion, whose natural weight is 11 and a half stone, starved himself to make the 9st feather-weight limit for nearly a decade — shedding excess fat, but also sapping himself of strength.

Battles with the scales are a by-product of any fighter's life. But Selby's recent tales of sacrifice and suffering — in boxing and life — are darker than most.

'It got to that bad a point where I'd have two meals — one of salad leaves and one normal meal,' recalls Selby.

'I'd chew the normal food, spit it out, and just eat the leaves as a substitute for the food I was missing out on. Just so I had something in my stomach.'

'I was trying to trick my body into thinking I was eating proper food when really I was just eating leaves. It was dangerous, but I was willing to do that to keep hold of the title.'

For so long, making weight was a fight in itself, but it was a price worth paying if the wins kept coming. They did, and last year the Welshman, who fights on the undercard of James DeGale v Chris Eubank Jr at London's O₂ Arena on Saturday, sat atop the division, on the cusp of lucrative showdowns across the world. Not that it always felt that way.

'In fight week, I'd hear other fighters on the bill saying how great they felt,' Selby says. 'I was

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

by Daniel Matthews



sitting at home dying, starving hungry, thinking, "How on earth can they be feeling like that, when I'm feeling like this?"

'The mental side is just so, so draining, thinking about weight all the time. I'd be pinching my skin, feeling how much weight I'd put on after every meal. It was bad, it became obsessive.'

In recent years he became too weak to spar in the final weeks of camp. In the days before fights, he was too drained to do anything. 'The only bit of movement I'd do was to go to the gym to get the last bit of weight off,' he laughs.

Selby hid his struggles from his team so they, like everyone, watched as his performances dipped, even as the wins kept coming. Then, last May, he faced Josh Warrington at Elland Road.

He was a strong favourite to keep his belt and set up a money-spinning fight with Carl Frampton but, almost immediately, Selby realised he had gone one too many times to the well.

The 'Welsh Mayweather' was reduced to a bloody shadow of his former self — his depleted body unable to do what his

mind willed. 'As soon as I threw my first jab, the spark was just gone,' Selby admits. 'My manager Jamie Sanigar said after the fight as soon I was warming up on the pads it just wasn't there.'

For 12 rounds, Selby battled on, barely able to see his opponent as two nasty cuts poured blood.

'Even weight-drained, on a bad day, I'm still good enough to beat most fighters,' Selby says. 'I was scraping through with my fitness, determination and boxing, I got away with it for a long time.'

No one could ignore it following defeat by Warrington. It spelt the end of his time at featherweight and, on Saturday, Selby begins a new chapter against American Omar Douglas, two divisions up at lightweight.

Selby hopes the extra 9lb will bring back his punching power, and with it his best form.

But making lightweight means his love of cheesecake and Nando's must be tempered, even if bigger portions are on the menu at last.

Little else has changed. He still trains between his home town of Barry and Newport, where he made his debut in 2008. The 32-year-old lives nearby, having swapped a council estate for village life with his young family.

'I had my pro debut a stone's throw from where I was training, at Newport Leisure Centre,' he says. 'I can appreciate what I've achieved more by starting life at the grassroots. No TV, no backing, hardly any money. I did it the hard way.'

In July 2017, just four days before facing Jonathan Victor Barros at Wembley Arena, Selby's

Starved: Selby weighing in at 8st 13lb in May 2018 (above) before being well beaten by Warrington (right) PA



mother, Frankie, died suddenly. Remarkably, the Welshman defended his title in style before returning home to grieve. A week later his grandfather, Peter, passed away, too.

'I don't think it's changed me. Everybody goes through their trials and tribulations,' Selby insists. 'There are people in war zones losing their kids in front of them. It's just part of life, you just get on with it.'

This stoicism is a far cry from a decade ago when, after the death of his brother Michael, Selby sought solace in drink and drugs. A few months later he fell to his first defeat as his career threatened to derail.

Those days are passed, but Selby must rise again.

He admits that in years gone by he would have rather died than lose. Now, with people depending on him, his mindset has changed.

But his determination remains as he looks to become a two-weight world champion.

That means more time away from his stable of furry friends. 'I've cut back a bit. I've got six chickens, seven dogs, a cat and four ferrets,' he says.

When Selby is away, the man who first took him to the gym, Craig Smyth, takes the reins: 'He's the only man brave enough to look after them!'

A keen hunter and shooter, Selby has no intention of turning his mini zoo into a business. For now, he has a big enough job on his hands as he begins his lightweight division assault.

So, what can fans expect from the new Lee Selby on Saturday? 'Hopefully, you'll see a bit of the old Lee Selby.'

● Saturday's fight is exclusively live on ITV Box Office. Go to www.itvboxoffice.com.

Now it's Edmund's turn to split from coach

KYLE EDMUND has joined the curious merry-go-round of coaching changes by parting with the man who helped guide him to last year's breakthrough at the Australian Open. The British No 1 has split from Swede Freddie Rosengren, 59, despite their partnership yielding a semi-final in Melbourne and a first ATP Tour title in Antwerp in October. It

TENNIS

By MIKE DICKSON

comes days after Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka's split from her coach. Edmund's progress has stalled recently because of a knee injury. He has managed only four matches since Antwerp but will return to action by

taking a wildcard into a Challenger event at Indian Wells next week, prior to playing the Masters events there and in Miami.

Edmund had been coached jointly by Rosengren and Britain's Mark Hilton, who will assume full responsibility for the time being.

The official reason given for the split is that the Swede wishes to

step down from coaching and spend more time with his family. The challenge for Hilton, and whoever takes charge in the long term, will be to instil a greater mental and physical robustness in the 24-year-old Yorkshireman. If it can be done, Edmund is good enough to prosper in the shake-up that will ensue as Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Andy Murray and

Novak Djokovic fade away. Federer announced yesterday that he will play the Madrid Open this spring — the first clay-court tournament he has committed to in two years. Britain's Dan Evans followed up his victory over defending champion Frances Tiafoe by beating Lloyd Harris 6-0, 6-2 to make the last eight of the Delray Beach Open in Florida.