



In shape: James DeGale says he feels physically 'fantastic' despite having to train smarter and less often than before

'If I lose against Eubank then I will be a history man in boxing'

INTERVIEW

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BOXING
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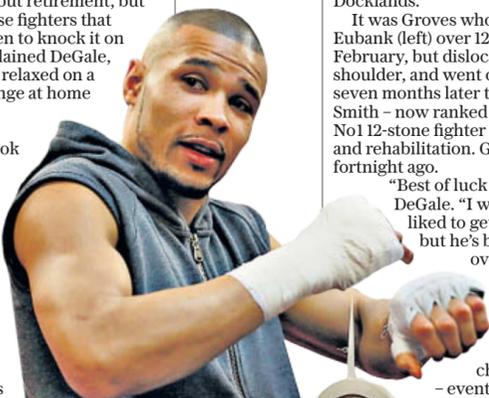


James DeGale is in the latter stages of his career but still aims to put on a masterclass on Saturday

James DeGale watched his greatest rival George Groves retire two weeks ago and now says he will follow suit if he loses to Chris Eubank Jr in a super-middleweight grudge match on Saturday.

"A lot of people are asking why I'm talking about retirement, but I'm one of those fighters that will know when to knock it on the head," explained DeGale, long, lean and relaxed on a sofa in his lounge at home after another gruelling gym session that took him from the gritty streets of Harlesden to home in suburban St Albans.

"I'm not going to be one of these fighters that will stay in boxing far too long and starts



'I would have liked to get my revenge on Groves. But my career does not revolve around him'

to tarnish his legacy. If I lose, where else would I go? I've just lost to Chris Eubank Jr. When he loses, he's going to find it difficult to come back. I've done everything in this sport. I've left my mark in boxing. I'm a history man: British, Olympic, two-time world champion. To box on wouldn't make any sense."

DeGale, now 33, and Groves boxed together in a tiny, converted chapel of rest in Notting Hill, West London, in the days of wearing shorts to school. But they never liked each other; they say they never will. Groves won a razor-tight, controversial decision over DeGale in 2011, and in parallel careers, they have had several opponents in common. On Saturday night, that timeline criss-crosses once more, when DeGale meets Eubank, the son of one of Britain's most loved and loathed fighters, at the O2 Arena, Docklands.

It was Groves who defeated Eubank (left) over 12 rounds last February, but dislocated a shoulder, and went on to lose seven months later to Callum Smith - now ranked the world's No1 12-stone fighter - after surgery and rehabilitation. Groves retired a fortnight ago.

"Best of luck to him," said DeGale. "I would have liked to get my revenge, but he's been pro for over 10 years now. He achieved his dream of becoming a world champion - eventually - at the

fourth attempt. He's made a bit of money. I don't need George Groves, my career does not revolve around George Groves."

DeGale insisted that his fight with Eubank "ain't for a pay day". He added: "I'm still hungry. Obviously I'm getting older. I can't do what I was doing at 22. No 10-mile runs or 40 rounds of sparring a week. I'm training smarter now and honestly I feel great. I can honestly say that. Boxers say that when they're preparing for a fight, but I can honestly say I'm feeling fantastic. And I intend to put on a boxing masterclass."

DeGale acknowledges that Eubank is very tough, yet says he lacks the skills of the sweet science. Little doubt that Eubank is far behind the southpaw skills that have taken DeGale from the Beijing Games to world-title glory. But physically, Eubank's tenacity will test anyone. "If I'm shot, I'll get found out. If I am not the best or on a decline, I'll get found out," admitted DeGale.

Still hungry: James DeGale, 33, insists that his fight on Saturday is not just a pay day, even though he is 'getting older'

But DeGale does see the dangers of going on too long. "The thing about boxing is that it's the hardest profession. It's the mental side. It don't just affect you, it affects your team and your family. It's the hardest sport in the world and sometimes it is unforgiving. That's why you've got to know the right time to call it a day."

DeGale cannot help feeling that Brighton fighter Eubank - who has taken a trainer for the first time in his career after 29 fights - is "deluded".

"Eubank's shown in his ITV documentary that him and his coach are very deluded people. As I say, he is a tough figure. He's a bit like his dad, he don't mind being hit and when it gets hard. ITV are promoting this fight very well. I've done a lot of promotion with Eubank." As he spoke he placed his cup of tea dead centre on a coaster in the middle of a glistening glass table.

"Security was there for the sit-down. He's just a very weird, over-the-top person. I don't know

if it's an act or if he's really like that. This guy said he was technically better than me, a better boxer than me, he's tougher, stronger - but then to kill it off he said he was better looking than me. The guy is deluded."

DeGale laughs long and loud, admitting that when it comes to detail he is "OCD". In fairness, there is not a carpet hair out of place in his four-bedroom home. "This is about bragging rights I'd say, because I don't think Eubank will be able to be world champion or even compete at that kind of level, if I'm being honest. But there are bragging rights, here. He's called me out for a long, long time. There's history there. It's a big fight, it is."

DeGale, who has had five world-title fights in North America, also sees heavyweight Anthony Joshua's move to fight there coming at the right time, but could not help offering his admiration for Tyson Fury.

"Joshua needs to go to America now. It's brilliant exposure and

Jarrell Miller at Madison Square Garden is the perfect fight for him. They'll like him. He's tasty."

"But Fury's personality, his story, his style - I love. I think Fury is going to be so hard to beat. I think he's the man of the division. I promise you. His mindset now and the way he trains, he looked unbelievable. How easy was it against [Deontay] Wilder? He won every round against Wilder apart from the rounds he got dropped. Easy. I just think he's going to be

When to watch Television coverage of London fight

James DeGale versus Chris Eubank Jr for the IBO super middleweight title is on Saturday at the O2 Arena, London, on ITV Box Office, 8pm.

This fight will be shown exclusively on ITV Box Office. For further information and updates, please go to www.itvboxoffice.com

hard to beat at heavyweight. The way he moves, the speed, the length, the confidence - he knows he's difficult to hit. I just like him. I'm a Joshua fan as well, but I think Fury wins. I honestly do.

"The way Fury dealt with Wilder was crazy. He wasn't running, he just boxed. Then I think Joshua will knock Wilder out. I think the two main men are Fury and Joshua, but with boxing politics and different TV channels, will it happen? That's the biggest fight in the world now."

In a flash, DeGale is up, and shadow boxing, pushing out a jab and ping-pong a hook out into the ether. "Eubank said he is training hard and has brought it in a new coach, but we haven't got long to wait now. A lot of questions are hanging over this fight. What's JD got left? That's the main one. But the support I'm getting is unbelievable."

"There's always going to be a villain and a hero. And for once I am the hero. And I'm going to silence Eubank."



Kilty 'gutted' at not being allowed to defend sprint title

British Athletics stands by tough selection policy

Only Edoburun picked to compete in Glasgow

By Ben Bloom
ATHLETICS CORRESPONDENT

Richard Kilty, the reigning double European 60 metres champion, has hit out at not being given the chance to attempt a historic hat-trick in Glasgow next month after British Athletics was forced into selecting just one male sprinter despite having three spots to fill.

While organisers European Athletics allow anyone who has run 6.78seconds or less to compete at the European Indoor Championships, British Athletics decided to implement a selection requirement of 6.60sec. That is a time only Reece Prescod and Chijindu Ujah have managed - and both have opted not to compete in Glasgow.

That left the governing body only able to pick people based on their 100m times from last summer, with Ojie Edoburun - who finished last in the 60m at last week's British Championships - the sole option.

His selection means the host nation will be without a number of athletes capable of extending the country's record of winning a men's 60m medal at 16 successive European Indoor Championships. Most notable is former world champion Kilty, who, on the comeback trail from Achilles tendon surgery last summer, has improved to run 6.63sec and 6.64sec in Birmingham on Saturday and is ranked 11th in Europe.

"I'm gutted not to be selected," he said. "I've never been so upset in my career. It's heartbreaking not being able to stand on the line and defend a title which I have won twice. It was my dream when I woke up from surgery to defend it. I gave it my all, I was hoping the selectors had faith in me."

"Their selection is confusing and I think the standards are inconsistent. I have run faster [indoors this winter] than everyone in the UK who is eligible for selection. I will be appealing the decision."

Had British Athletics loosened their selection mark only slightly to 6.65sec, they

would have been able to choose from a pool of a dozen men to fill the three spots for Glasgow.

While the governing body's self-imposed men's standard of 6.60sec would have guaranteed a medal at the last edition of the European Indoor Championships, the British Athletics women's standard of 7.25sec would not even have made the final. Analysis of the qualification marks shows how out of kilter the men's 60m is with the rest of the events. Discounting the tactically run middle-distance disciplines, the men's 60m is the sole event with a standard so tough that it would have earned a medal at the 2017 European Indoor Championships.

Neil Black, British Athletics performance director, insisted there was nothing wrong with the qualification criteria. "We had a policy which says the qualification mark is 6.60sec," he said. "That's been the

European Indoor Championships

Glasgow March 1-3

TV details

Friday March 1
BBC Two 9.30am-2pm, 5.30pm-9.15pm

Saturday March 2
BBC Two 9.30am-1pm, 5.30pm-9.15pm

Sunday March 3
BBC Two 10am-1pm, 5.30pm-8pm. BBC Four 8pm-9.30pm

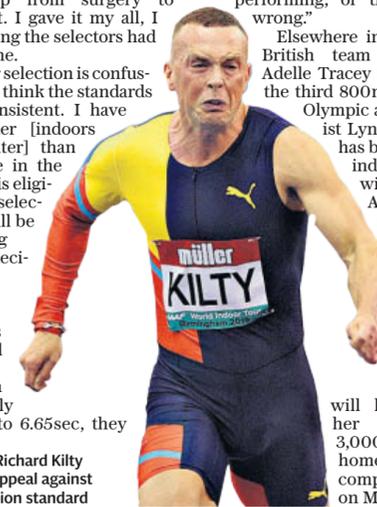
men's qualification mark since 2013 for the European Indoors.

"If you look back through history that is a standard that historically many people have achieved. It's never been questioned in the past and it's a standard that we've all been comfortable with."

"This year, for a combination of reasons, athletes haven't met that standard. I don't think that means there's a problem, or athletes aren't performing, or the standard is wrong."

Elsewhere in the 48-strong British team for Glasgow, Adelle Tracey has been given the third 800m spot ahead of Olympic world finalist Lynsey Sharp, who has been out of form indoors this winter, while Andrew Pozzi will unexpectedly defend his 60m hurdles title despite not running since last August through injury.

Laura Muir will look to retain her 1500m and 3,000m crowns on home soil when the competition begins on March 1.



Left out: Richard Kilty plans to appeal against the selection standard