WAR AND PEACE
MY STORY

RICKY HATTON
with Tris Dixon

PAN BOOKS

PROLOGUE

It was not supposed to end this way.

I was in the Manchester Arena and the fans were singing my name. That part was right, at least.

They chortled 'Walking in a Hatton Wonderland' with the same vigour and passion that they always had, and as I left the prize ring for the final time they cheered and applauded.

My face was black and blue and swelling rapidly, and I had lost for just the third time in my career.

They always say that comebacks are ill-advised but I never did listen to them much. It was my life, my career, my decision.

Although I knew it was going to be an emotional night, I could never have guessed exactly how incredible and unique it would turn out to be. You have to be a professional boxer to actually appreciate what it means to come out to a crowd of 20,000 raucous fans like that. I know you have your trainer and your team behind you, but you don't share the love with your teammates like you do in other sports; it comes all on you, only you and all at once.

There was an eruption when I stood on the stage waiting to walk to the ring, and I prepared to hold my head high as my music, 'Blue Moon', kicked in.

In that instant, I'm stood there alone and I prepare to step through the wall of noise that awaits. Walking to the ring, it's hard work. It's lonely, it's isolated, and the euphoria brought on by the roar of the crowd sinks under the pressure and feelings of dread. The place comes alive. A wave of flash bulbs blast at me and the arena spotlights shine directly into my eyes. I'm blinded but steady myself, gather my thoughts and think of my girlfriend Jennifer and my children, Campbell and Millie.

I need to hold it together. I've come so far. I can't crack now. I look into the baying masses. I bite down so hard my jaw clenches and shakes. I bang my gloves together: 'Come on, Ricky lad.' I emerge from my personal darkness and the noise begins to fill my soul while simultaneously popping in my ears.

It is deafening. There is no other way to describe it. It means more to me than it ever has done. Not too long ago I had been suicidal. I'd had knives at my wrists and I couldn't get any lower. Compare that to walking out in the Manchester Arena with all of these fans screaming for me, willing me to do well. I have come a long way – it means everything to me.

People have always asked me what my best achievement was in boxing and it was never anything to do with what I did in the ring – it was the fanbase that followed me. For somebody to have fought depression for a number of years, to hear that roar that night after more than three years away from boxing . . . I had to hold the tears back as I walked down the ramp. It

sounds a little bit soppy but I just felt like dropping to my knees and saying thank you. To hear that roar one last time was more than I could have ever hoped for. I was getting teary-eyed, saying to myself, 'Come on, Ricky, keep it together. Come on, son, you can do it.'

The noise was somehow intensifying with every step I took. I began to think about all of the people I had let down. This whole fight was about redemption and making people proud of me again.

Then there was my baby girl, Millie. I didn't want her to read in the papers the rubbish my son, Campbell, had to about me and my private life. I didn't want that. I wanted her to read about how well her dad was doing. I was also thinking about my parents, who I'd barely spoken to in two years, and how I felt I'd been let down by those people who were closest to me.

When it came down to the actual fight, against a very good former world champion in Vyacheslav Senchenko, it was hard for me to try and channel my emotions and say, 'This is great, this is what it's all about.' Beforehand I just thought the world was against me and I was just going to show everyone. I had so much fury inside me, more than I did when I fought Kostya Tszyu. The fact no one thought I could beat Tszyu, that was my fury. 'I'm not just a ticket-seller,' I was thinking, 'I'll beat him.'

But this was different. National hero, getting flattened by Manny Pacquiao, then retiring, the personal problems that I had and all the rest of it . . . How I felt for Senchenko was, 'What did I do to this world to have it fucking happen to me,

this whole weight that seems to have fallen on my shoulders?' Stick it all in a ball and I thought that's what Senchenko had coming at him. 'It's going to be fucking painful for him,' I thought.

As I stood at the bottom of the ring steps, having lost four-and-a-half stone, after all the issues that I'd faced and everything I'd been through, the love the fans still had for me was incredible. It was the most emotional fight of my career, and that includes Kostya Tszyu, Floyd Mayweather and Pacquiao. That is something that will never leave me.

I could have picked an opponent I would have flattened but I didn't. I went straight in at the deep end and I wouldn't do anything differently. I've always been a hundred-per-cent man, all or nothing, and that had not changed in my time away from the ring.

There was something extra that night, too. An air of uncertainty that everyone bought into. Some would have been saying, 'Why's he coming back? He doesn't need to.' Cynics would think, 'Well, we know why he's coming back.' But even avid fans of mine would have been sat there not having a clue what was going to happen, wondering if I was going to be the same as I was at my best. Was I going to come back better or stronger? Should I really be doing this? That added to the atmosphere. No one knew what was going to happen. When I won my first world title against Kostya Tszyu it was an electric night, but it didn't compare to this.

I step under the ropes and into the ring and the crowd bursts. I have never heard a noise like it. It's gladiatorial. They

want me to do well. I step onto the canvas and I can feel it shaking and vibrating under my feet with the sound. It is unbelievable. It is priceless. I look back out at the fans, fully embracing the bond we have always shared. I glance at Senchenko. 'You're having it tonight,' I think to myself. The fans clearly agree. He doesn't look back at me. I see individual faces in the audience. They scream and sing. Some of the fans are punching the air, pulling for me. I can feel their hopes pinned on me. They have paid a lot of money to come and watch me fight. They have come to see me win. It is what they expect.

I meet my opponent in the centre of the ring. I look at Senchenko, expressionless, hiding my nerves, disguising my anger, the fury that burns beneath and my eagerness.

The last time I had fought I had been destroyed in two rounds by Manny Pacquiao. It's all very well concentrating on the story away from the ring – redemption had been my mantra – but the last time I'd stepped between those ropes I'd been knocked out. Badly. Ultimately, it was not just the Pacquiao fight that sent me over the edge, it was an accumulation of things, but I was embarrassed about it and I had to face up to it now.

I've never said I will be the greatest fighter ever but one thing I have always been is a very proud man and I always took on the best. So as a man, it was very hard to come to terms with that knockout. I had been heartbroken last time I had been in the ring. And now there was self-doubt, too, with a lot of people asking me if my chin was going to be able to hold up

to the same punches that it could before and I read somewhere that: 'This could be another blast out. He's obviously past it.'

I didn't want to make a dickhead out of myself. If I lost again like I did against Pacquiao then the fear of being a laughing stock comes into play, doesn't it?

To compound that, when I went for my boxing medical they said, 'Ricky, your blood pressure is sky high, you're half an inch away from having a heart attack.' And that was even once I got my weight down, because of all the stress from everything away from boxing. I was still having problems with my mum and dad, and the last three torrid years had been a horribly dark period for so many reasons.

My depression can be traced all the way back to the Floyd Mayweather fight in 2007, but even though I had been in training for the comeback, not drinking, doing what I needed to do, sometimes feelings don't go away. My blood pressure was through the roof and it was worrying.

Still, after eight rounds against Senchenko I think I was winning. Not everyone does, but I've watched it back and believe I was winning a close, hard scrap.

I'm a boxing historian and I have listened to old fighters who have turned round and said, 'We'll give it one more go.' And in the gym, in sparring, the padwork and the training, I was in no doubt that I was going to be better than I ever had been in my life. That's what those old fighters said, too.

I was sharp, feeling fast and me and my trainer Bob Shannon were both thinking: 'Jeez, there's not even any ring rust.' Training, though, is so different to the fight. The minute that

bell went it was different. And after three or four rounds, I sat on my stool and thought, 'Oh Ricky. You haven't got it.' Reality set in.

Again I think of little Millie, Campbell and Jen, my new family, and so launch myself back into the fray each session, trying to make my point.

The fight gets tougher round by round. It becomes a battle and as we take turns landing heavy shots our faces begin to tell the tale of a hard fight. It's another violent story, another war. It's my forty-eighth professional contest and I've spent the best part of fifteen years dragging my body down to the right weight. I can feel all of the miles on the clock. The fighting engine doesn't fire like it used to. It splutters; stops and starts. That's how I'm fighting. It is not fluid and it's becoming painful as he starts to land long, raking blows that crunch into my face and pump my head back, jolting it so I can hear audible gasps from my crowd. That is never a good sound.

I walk back to my corner after each round and glance down to the middle seats of the front row at ringside. For every fight previously, Mum and Dad have been there, willing me to do well. They aren't there. Their seats are taken and it reminds me of the heartache away from the ring.

Jen is there, Campbell is at home and Jen's mum and dad have baby Millie. Former world champions need babysitters, too. But it just doesn't feel the same, emotionally or physically. Everything is different.

In the ring I wasn't quite getting out of the way quickly enough. I wasn't quite moving my feet away correctly; when I

was throwing punches some of them were just missing by fractions and it was the little things like that. It wasn't like it used to be. The timing, the movement. They weren't there. So you knuckle down and try to go through with it. And you force it because it's not coming naturally. And then that works against you. I thought, 'If I haven't got it, let's just get to the final bell. Let's just get the win and do what we've got to do.'

Then, in round nine, he got me with a body shot. A left hand crunched into my side.

It is a sickening, painful shot that captures my breath. I'm drowned of oxygen and drop to my knees. The pain in my side is severe and it bends me at the waist. I try to breathe in, at first through my nose, then through my mouth. But I can't draw breath. I can't breathe. When you get hit on the chin you can get up, shake it off, but they always say you can never shake a body shot off and when I fall I can hear referee Victor Loughlin counting: '. . . two, three . . .'.

I'm still trying to take breaths, thinking I'm going to rise at eight. I can actually feel the crowd willing me to get up.

Victor's count gets to '. . . four, five . . .' and I can hear the crowd really shouting for me. 'Come on.' My nose is not able to bring any air inside. Then it is '. . . six, seven . . .' and it's even louder. Now they're pleading with me. 'Come on, Ricky. Get up. Get up.'

CHAPTER 1

In the Beginning

They called him Spider Hatton. His first name was Richard, too, but he was my great uncle. We have pictures of him dating back to the 1920s and he had a cherubic appearance about him, like he was too polite to wear boxing gloves. Yet by all accounts he could pack a punch and was a prominent figure on the Manchester fight scene. He was a throwback and apparently pretty good.

My family only found that out when we looked into it after I started boxing, because we didn't know where my talent came from. No one in my immediate family had ever boxed before. My dad, Ray, had played football for Manchester City, my grandad had played for City's B team before the war; so when I took to boxing like a duck to water it had us all baffled. We went back through the family tree and found where I got it from – Spider Hatton, the bare-knuckle fighter. I suppose bare-knuckle would have been right up my street, wouldn't it? He was actually my grandfather's brother, but my grandmother's father, Daniel, was also handy with his fists on the bare-knuckle circuit

in Ireland. As with most things in this sport, reputations give birth to legends, and they said that Eileen Slattery's husband Daniel – my great-grandfather – was one of the best.

I wasn't drawn to boxing when I was really young. My dad always had public houses and my mum, Carol, worked in a clothes shop in Hyde before she took on a carpet stall at Glossop market when one of my uncles died. But then I saw, and was amazed by, Bruce Lee on TV and wanted to be like him. You can guarantee that when *Rocky* comes on the TV every amateur gym is packed to the rafters the following night. Well, that's what it was like with Bruce Lee. I absolutely loved his films and so started kick-boxing. I did all right with it; I was only seven or eight and was as game as they come, but with me being short and stocky you could see my talent was with my fists and not my feet. I couldn't get near my opponents and the taller ones were kicking my teeth in. The coach said that because I was giving away so much height and reach I should give boxing a try, so I walked over the road to the Louvolite Boxing Club. Ted Peate was my first amateur coach, and I was there for the first two years of my amateur career. Within about two or three months I had my first fight.

Boxing is one of those sports where you get whacked on the nose and you either like it or you think, 'It's not for me, this game.' My first fight was an absolute war. I boxed a lad called Danny Reynolds, from Leeds, and it was toe-to-toe for three one-and-a-half-minute rounds. The crowd went mad, and if I hadn't had a strong stomach I would have thought, 'Sod that

for a game of soldiers.' But I loved it. I was hooked. The harder the fight, the more I loved it.

At the Louvolite there was me, Stephen Bell and Tony Feno, two of my great friends at the time. Stephen went on to captain England as an amateur, and both would come to the big fights later in my career, but back then boxing was fun for us, we were best pals and called ourselves the Three Amigos. There are still old black and white pictures of us in the gym now. In the minibus we'd sing songs all the way down to the show, tell jokes and take the piss out of Ted. By the time we got to the show and we had to fight it was almost as if it was secondary to having a laugh with the guys; you'd expect that at a young age I suppose, we were only eleven or twelve. I loved going boxing and going to the gym, even from the start, but it was a social thing as much as a sporting thing for a while. That didn't last too long. As the fights ticked by, and people started to tell me they thought I was pretty good, I began to take it a bit more seriously.

Like my dad, though, and my grandad before him, I was playing football as well and I also supported Manchester City like them. I played right midfield and wasn't bad, featuring for my local team on the council estate in Hattersley. I went for trials with Tameside Boys, my county team, and was selected for them. By playing for Tameside I was picked up by Man City and was at the FA School of Excellence for two years. In my class at City were Jim and Jeff Whitley, who both went on to play for the club and were capped by Northern Ireland, and it always makes you wonder, could I have done it? I was okay and

was always very fit because of boxing. I got up and down the pitch really well, was a good tackler and a decent passer of the ball. I was a Roy Keane-type player, always very aggressive, as you can imagine – and, as boxing keeps you thinking three or four moves ahead, I could always read the game well, pick a pass out. There were some players in my class who stood out a mile though, and I wasn't one of them. It was also clear to anyone watching that my real talent was with my boxing and I was forever working on that.

My dad had a pub, the New Inn in Hyde, where he built a gym in the cellar; I would spend hours down there practising punches, combinations, feints and footwork. The cellar had several small areas: if you went straight ahead and turned right there was a big room where all of the barrels were stored, beer, lager, ciders and so on; next was a little room where my boxing gym was; and through that a smaller room where all the spirits and bottled lagers would be. Then, if you came out of the gym and doubled back on yourself, by the staircase there was a long corridor that lead to three smaller rooms, where the pub football teams used to get changed before a game on a Sunday morning. There was also an extra room, full of clocks and things because there was a pigeon club at the pub. It was amazing in there, and it's fair to say there was a broad cross-section of people who came into the New Inn.

When I was training on a Friday night I would get people coming down to watch me now and then. The pub was supposed to be haunted, so I'd only go down there with my trainer because you believe in bad things at that age, don't you? But I

had many happy times down there. It might have been the hardest game in the world but I was a bit of an anorak, even as a kid; while other lads from school and the estate were out on their skateboards, BMXs or mountain bikes, I was down there training. I suppose that's what you've got to do to reach the top, you've got to live it. One of the Louvolite coaches, Mick Lowan, brought his pads and came down to the cellar and spent hours and hours coaching me.

The gym I had in the cellar was just about the size of a small ring. On the walls we had fight posters of Marvin Hagler and Sugar Ray Leonard, and former heavyweight champions Leon Spinks and Mike Tyson. I had a corner where I would keep my skipping rope, gloves and hand weights, and there was a mat which, when I'd done all of my floorwork, I would lean up against the wall. The punchbag and floor-to-ceiling ball would come down and be put away when me and Mick did the pads. I just ate, slept and breathed boxing – I was pretty much training like a pro from the outset. Even when I was due to fight on a Monday I was asking about possibly fighting on a Tuesday. More often than not I didn't get a fight but it didn't really matter to me, I just loved being around boxing, full stop.

When I trained down in the cellar some nights there was a steady flow of people coming to watch me train with a beer in their hand; some would go and get another pint from the bar and keep coming down for hours.

Even though I was so young I enjoyed it in the pubs, it was character building. You would look across the bar and think, 'Jeez, I don't want to end up like him.'

I think that's one of the reasons Dad never drank. I don't really know how that came about, but he had played football for City and it was just something he was never entertained by. I asked him one day and he just said, 'It's always been the case. I never really fancied it, wasn't into the nightclub thing. I was into sport. And when I was in the pubs and saw the sights across the bar I thought I'd made the right decision.'

Each to their own.

And Dad was always a grafter. He always worked hard. He had six or seven pubs, two carpet shops, and even before that he worked on the markets. He wasn't scared of rolling up his sleeves so that we could have the good things in life.

But in a local there's always the little old guy who sits in the corner by the dartboard, and as a kid I would challenge the regulars to games of darts. There's a fella who thinks he can pull women every five minutes and another fella who's the next Maradona, or so he thinks. They're characters you get in every bar up and down the country.

It was great, and I had a very good upbringing in the pub; later, when my dad started up a carpet shop, I was going out to people's houses and fitting them, dealing with the public.

The area where I spent my childhood often got headlines for the wrong reasons. The exact house where the Moors murderers, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, lived several years earlier was just two hundred yards away from where we lived. It was destroyed in 1987. My younger brother Matthew and I used to go to primary school with the son of the infamous serial killer Dr Harold Shipman, who murdered more than 200 patients

after moving into the area in the 1970s. Greater Manchester was in the headlines again in 2012 when two female police officers responded to a call in Hattersley only to be attacked by Dale Cregan, a fugitive who was on the run and who phoned in a false call-out to ambush the women – using guns and grenades. Some of the nicest people in the world come from the area but sadly it's not known for that.

Boxing has always helped people in the poorer sections of society, and some boys in and around Hyde ended up being taken to the gym to iron out kinks in their behaviour, but there really wasn't any of that with me. I think I only ever had one fight at school. That was in the first year, and no one wanted to fight me again because I flattened him. My teachers always said I was never any trouble; good as gold, they said, and they were right. The thing was I was bone idle. If my son, Campbell, had the same attitude as I used to have, I'd wring his bleeding neck. I was more interested in boxing, football, City, anything. I just wasn't into schoolwork, studying or exams. I thought I didn't need to do it because I was going to be a boxer; I was going to be a world champion. It was a stupid attitude to have because at twelve or thirteen I didn't know if I was going to make it as a boxer, and I certainly didn't know if I was going to become a world champion. I just farted around and if I hadn't made it in boxing I'd have had no exams or qualifications to fall back on; I could have been in a whole heap of trouble.

I still flirted with football because as an amateur boxer not many of the other kids would fight me. At the start of my teens I had won the schoolboy championships two years on the

bounce and had knocked everybody out in every round. I ended up getting byes into the semi-finals and finals because I couldn't get fights. I was going up and down the country weighing-in at as many shows as possible to try and give myself the opportunity of getting matched. That meant my attendance dropped at football training. I was missing sessions, and Manchester City let me go as a consequence, saying, 'We're impressed with what we've seen, Ricky, but we haven't seen enough of you because of your boxing. We'll keep an eye on you.' That made my mind up. I packed it in for a couple of years, only to make a brief footballing comeback when one of my friends started a team, Hattersley Youth, on the estate. But I'd set my heart on boxing by then.

I had moved from the Louvolite and was now at Paul Dunne's Sale West Boxing Club. Paul used to work with my grandad, my mum's dad, for a security firm and my grandad said to give Paul's gym a go and it went from there. I still trained in the pub and in my own time, too, and I could turn my hand to almost anything in the ring. Sometimes I would box and move – using combinations, defence and footwork – the next minute you would see me ripping into my opponent. I would get that red mist, the eye of the tiger, from a very young age. The minute you get caught with a shot, ideally you go into survival mode, go defensive and tuck up. That wasn't me. If they cracked me with one, you could see steam come out of my ears and I sometimes forgot the main rule of boxing, which is to hit and not get hit. My attitude, which was totally wrong, was: 'If you hit me, I'll hit you back harder.'

By this time it seemed my whole family were into the carpet business. My Uncle Paul, Uncle Ged and my late Uncle John all had carpet shops. Then, when the pubs started to open beyond 3 p.m. on a Sunday they became very hard work, opening really long hours, so my dad gave up on the pubs and gave carpets a go like the rest of the family. It went well for him – and I started to help here and there at R Carpets in Gorton. At first I used to go in at weekends. I think it helped my boxing because I would be chucking underlay on the van, throwing grippers on, putting carpets on and lifting them on the rack; there was a lot of lifting and I think physically that stood me in good stead.

It was logical that I'd start carpet fitting, I suppose, and if the boxing didn't work out it was a trade to fall back on. At least I'd be earning. My dad used to say to Pete, who was the main carpet-fitter, 'Take Ricky out. Show him a few bits.' At first I was just putting the grippers down, then I would put the underlay in and then I started to learn to fit the carpets. I was probably Manchester's worst ever carpet-fitter to be honest with you. I was cutting them short, cutting through wires, I was terrible – I'd spend all day on my hands and knees and get home with dozens of plasters on my fingers and must have cost my dad a fortune. In the end he bought me a shop to look after in Hyde and put me in retail. As it turned out, if I was bad at carpet fitting, I was worse as a carpet salesman. It's just as well I had the boxing to fall back on because I wasn't much cop at carpets.

As a family we weren't very wealthy but we didn't ever

want for anything. Life was good, we were extremely close and if we needed football boots or trainers, we had them; it was the same for boxing gloves and kit, and we always had family holidays. We went to Tenerife, Benidorm, Magaluf, Torremolinos, Turkey and Egypt; we were very fortunate and saw a lot of the world at a young age. We went to Disney World in Florida twice, where it was all very expensive – and some kids will never go – so we were very lucky.

It wasn't all about pricey foreign holidays, either; we went to Blackpool a lot, too. We had some great times there. My dad's mum and dad – Nan and Grandad – had a caravan in Blackpool and we would go three or four times a year. It was me, my younger brother Matthew, Mum and Dad, and Nan and Grandad. We would go to Pleasure Beach, the Sandcastle – I've taken my own son and there's loads of fond childhood memories there. The good times always go through your mind, and when we're queuing up to go on the rides they come flooding back to the surface, like my lunch almost does whenever I've had to go on them.

Now, although I was always pretty quiet as a kid, my brother Matthew had a right mouth on him. He also has a dry sense of humour and will take the piss out of you without you knowing he's doing it. He used to mouth off and wind other kids up, and when it went tits up, he'd shout, 'Rick, sort this out.' I cleared up a lot of his trouble. He was a little shit; worse than that, he ended up supporting Manchester United.

It was in the New Inn, he was only about eight years of age,

and one of the customers came and said, 'What team do you support then, Matthew?' He didn't know who he supported so the fella gave him a United badge. It was the size of a one-pence piece and Matthew was so impressed with this 'medal' he ended up supporting United.

We've had our arguments like all brothers do but we were very close when we were younger. He took a shine to boxing, too.

I was getting into the sport more and more seriously. It didn't always go my way, of course; I also lost fights. I was eleven years old when I thought my world was coming to an end. Robbie Grainger was a good fighter from Liverpool, and he'd beaten me on points. It was close but I thought I deserved the decision; I ended up boxing him a couple of years later and beat him. Then I was beaten by another lad from Liverpool, Tommy Lewis; I'd defeated him the first time but lost the re-match. There was a balcony over the ring that night and the changing rooms were upstairs. I took it so badly I didn't want to go downstairs, let alone go home; it was my second loss and my mum had to come in and get me because I was up there sulking and crying. 'Pull your face up,' my mum – who was my biggest fan – said.

Sale West was a small Manchester club that had some good kids but never anyone who'd gone on to national titles or anything like that. A couple of lads went pro but never really did anything. It was in the community centre, a basic place, and I got on well with Paul Dunne from the start. Paul was a former pro who'd had thirty fights and won more than he lost. He had

a thick Irish accent that was hard for me to understand at first but from the outset he taught me how to roll, how to box and how to weave, which in the amateur game is quite rare.

Even as a novice I had been catching shots and throwing body punches – and I used to knock people out on a regular basis with body shots, which is not something you see much of in the amateurs. As a schoolboy, people were saying, 'There's this kid from Manchester who can't half body punch.' I'd just been brought up that way. Paul guided me to eight national schoolboy titles, and he and his chief coach, Jimmy Taylor, took me everywhere. My dad was there, too – if I needed to get to a fight he was always good about taking me there – but usually Paul and Jimmy did most of the driving and we were up and down the country looking for as many opportunities to get fights as we could.

If I had a fight on a Monday, weighed in and then the fight didn't happen for whatever reason, then I would go to fights with some of the other lads on the Tuesday and weigh-in there and hope to get matched. Then, on Wednesday, another couple of lads from the gym might be fighting somewhere else so I'd jump in the car and go with them, then weigh-in and try to get a fight. Even if I wasn't matched I was such a boxing junkie that being on the road and being surrounded by the sport every night was my life. It was all I wanted to do.

I trained every day, with the sounds of Oasis filling the cellar or my headphones when I was in the gym or out on the road. The minute this Manchester band came bobbing along I was constantly listening to them. I liked Oasis from the start,

with 'Roll With It' and 'Wonderwall', all the songs that would become classics. I had them on when I was training for the schoolboys, in the junior ABAs . . . I've always been a very proud Mancunian. I supported City and listened to Oasis and the moment I heard a Manchester band was doing all right I said, 'Okay, let's have a listen to them.' As much as I love City, and come derby day I always want us to knock ten bells out of Manchester United, later in my career, whether people were City or United fans, they would all come to support me. There aren't many fighters who can unite two sets of supporters but when I was fighting, I did it.

I had a little following, too. My mum and dad were my first supporters and, as I got older and the fights got bigger, we would take a load of regulars from the pub, fifteen, sixteen, eighteen people or so, as well as my wider family and some pals, and we would shoot off to Leyland or Nantwich or Wigan.

It was the ABA youth titles and early stoppage wins that set me apart from a lot of other boxers my age. I was mature in the ring and you could tell that from when I boxed a kid called Jamie Moore.

I was only about fourteen when we boxed in the schoolboys at Blackpool and whereas I'd already won a load of titles, Jamie was only having what I think was his eighth fight. He was a southpaw and dressed a bit like me, all in black – black vest, black shorts and black boots. I thought, 'Jesus, he looks a scrapper.' He looked at me, put his arms out and beckoned me in, saying, 'Come on then.' It was like looking in the mirror: 'This

fella is coming for a fight.' He meant business. Jamie came out and I threw a few jabs, then followed them with a left hook and was really impressed by the way he rolled under the punch. I actually spun round and thought, 'Eight fights? He must be a ringer. That was good.'

A little later in the round, I barged up to him on the ropes and fired a left hook to the body, forcing him to bring his hands down, and I pinged one over the top. Little Jamie went down, got up and I hit him with a few more so the referee gave him a standing count. Then I followed up, hit him with a load more and the referee stopped it. After the fight, and bear in mind I was only fourteen so I don't know who I thought I was, I said, 'Hi ya, Jamie, all right?' He said he was okay.

'I don't want to sound patronizing,' I carried on, 'because it was over in the first round, but I was quite shocked you'd only had eight fights. I'm pleased I caught you when I did because I was in for a hard night. Don't be disheartened. Stick at it.' I was fourteen and giving that kind of advice. I've been mates with Jamie, who went on to win the European light-middleweight title as a professional, ever since.

It was wins like that that meant I was hard to match. Even by the age of about twelve or thirteen they had started calling me 'The Hitman'. Ted Peate gave me the nickname because I was so aggressive. He would say, 'Jesus Christ. Look at him, here, the Hitman.' I looked like I wanted to kill everyone because I was so aggressive. It got to the point where other trainers and parents were refusing to put their boys in with me. There was an article in the old *Amateur Boxing Scene* magazine,

which *Boxing News* used to bring out, after my coach called them, saying I was a nightmare to get fights for:

> Any club looking for an opponent for a 17/18 year old weighing 65kgs need only contact Paul Dunne. Paul is the Sale West coach and Richard Hatton is the boxer willing to travel anywhere and everywhere for a bout (Europe included). The club are experiencing great difficulty in finding opponents for this talented young boxer.

We were constantly putting adverts out like that, but we were hardly inundated with replies.

Paul Dunne started taking me around all of the professional gyms for sparring when I was about sixteen. We went down to the Collyhurst and Moston Lads Club with Brian Hughes and I used to spar with people like European champion Pat Barrett, Delroy Waul and Robin Reid when he was world super-middleweight champion. Pat was a real puncher and he knocked me down once with a body shot, a left hook to the body, and it was the first time I'd ever been down from one and I'd never felt pain like it. I was quite good for my age so Pat had to open up to keep me off – and rightly so – and he hit me to the body, nearly snapping me in two. I thought, 'Jesus Christ, that's a bit good. I need to be able to throw them.' I couldn't get my breath and was in real pain, and that's when I realized, really, that – with me being short and stocky – body shots could be the way forward.

I'd also go over to Salford and train at Billy Graham's gym,

the famed Phoenix Camp. Carl Thompson, the WBO cruiserweight champion, who was also there, said, 'Hey, Ricky, if you stay at this you're going to be a world champion. You can go all the way.'

When people like that started telling me, I really began to believe it.