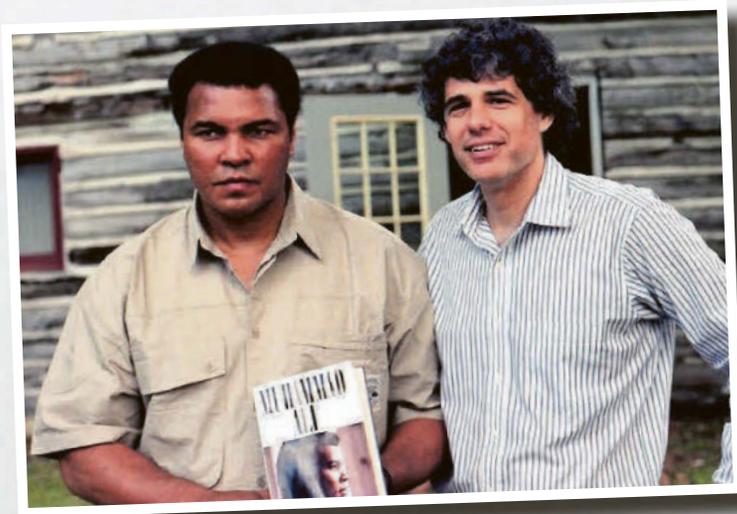


# IRISHFAMILY **insidesport**

12-PAGE SPORTS PULLOUT

**Legendary  
boxing writer  
Thomas Hauser  
on chronicling  
the life of  
Muhammad Ali**



# RING MASTER

## TRASH BOXING FIT FOR THE BIN

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

TRASH boxing. That's the phrase Thomas Hauser uses.

He sees far too much of it in the sport now. From YouTubers stepping into the ring to the circus that surrounded Conor McGregor taking on Floyd Mayweather.

"Conor McGregor (below) and Floyd Mayweather was a circus, but you also could sell Mike Tyson and Roy Jones in an exhibition," he said.

"Boxing has always had sideshows but they were just that — not the main events.

"And now what's happening in the United States with Logan Paul and Jake Paul ... I call this trash boxing. That's becoming the main event.

"McGregor/ Mayweather didn't do anything to advance the sport of boxing. It made a lot of money for some people.

### Racist

"I'm not criticising them for doing it but I'd be very critical of Showtime taking racist, homophobic, misogynistic language by those fighters and turning it into a marketing tool.

"Showtime should be ashamed."

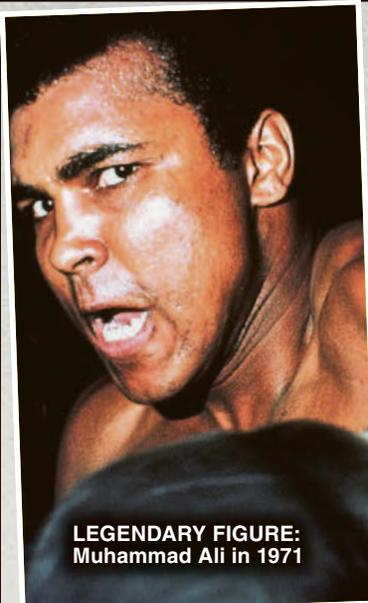
As Ali's Boswell, what did Hauser make of McGregor being compared to the Greatest?

"Well, there are people who compared Donald Trump to Abraham Lincoln, people who compared Boris Johnson to Winston Churchill ...

"LeBron James is an incredible athlete, just extraordinary. He's a better athlete than Tyson Fury or Anthony Joshua or Deontay Wilder.

"If he got into a ring with any of those three, he'd get knocked out in the first round.

"They've lost the sense of what's real and what isn't in politics, and they lost the sense of what's real and what isn't in boxing."



LEGENDARY FIGURE: Muhammad Ali in 1971

IF a film is ever to be made of Thomas Hauser's extraordinary life, the opening scene may well be set in Madison Square Garden.

On March 8, 1971 — a week after the then Wall Street lawyer's 25th birthday — Muhammad Ali lost to Joe Frazier in a bout that is remembered as 'The Fight of the Century'.

It was such a big deal that *Life* magazine's official photographer at ringside was Frank Sinatra.

Hauser was there too — far, far away from ringside. In the last row, high up in the Gods.

What film director could resist focusing on him there as a foreshadowing of what was to come? Hauser would go on to write the official Ali biography — widely rated as an all time great sports book.

And Hauser is generally regarded as the greatest writer ever to focus on boxing.

One of the reasons why he gave up law and was attracted to the fight game was access. He could go into gyms and chat to the biggest names in boxing.

### Ultimate

Hauser went on to become the ultimate fly on the wall, spending time with dozens of fighters over the years in their dressing-rooms before and after fights.

"Something wonderful happened which was fighters came to me asking if I would write them for history," he said.

"I asked myself 'What would it mean to history if someone had been in Joe Louis's dressing-room and wrote down everything that happened before he fought Max Schmelling?'"

"It's also an enormous amount of fun. I remember Ricky Hatton's dressing-room before he fought Floyd Mayweather.

Sugar Ray Leonard was there. Ricky put on his boom box and the music was pounding out. Ricky was dancing around and I couldn't see how he could go to the ring as he'd be exhausted.

"The music was pounding and Ray turned to me and said

NATURAL: Hauser wrote one of the best sports books ever

# No one had a greater impact than Ali



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## HAUSER ON BRINGING THE LEGEND TO BOOK

'I'm too old for this'. Then the door opened. Tom Jones walked in. I was thinking 'Who's next, fucking Elvis?'"

"I was sitting down — Sugar Ray on one side of me, Tom Jones on the other. Then the track changed — 'Da-da da-da-da!' Keith Richards' guitar screaming. The Rolling Stones' *Satisfaction*.

"Ricky was bouncing around singing 'I can't get no!' Sugar Ray and Tom Jones were either side of me singing 'I can't get no!'."

### Undercard

"I said to myself 'If you have to work a Saturday night, this isn't a bad way to do it'."

"I've been in dressing-rooms before fights with Roy Jones, Evander Holyfield, Katie Taylor, anonymous fighters on the undercard. I was in with Kevin McBride, the Irishman, before he took on Mike

Mollo. Kevin was knocked out in the second round.

"I remember how I finished that piece — Kevin was still the only man in that arena to have knocked out Mike Tyson."

One of those Hauser spent time with is Katie Taylor.

He was invited into her inner sanctuary before the win over Victoria Bustos in New York three years ago.

Hauser makes it clear that he is a fan of Taylor, but that women's boxing largely leaves him cold.

"In general, I have a fairly low view of women's boxing and the way it's conducted today — and that's simply because there aren't that many good women fighters," he said.

"John Sheppard does a won-

derful service with BoxRec and he did a study not that long ago and found that there were more available women's championships than there were active women fighters. That's just ridiculous.

### Super

"Any fight can be nominated as a championship fight. It's bad enough with the men — because you have four sanctioning bodies and super champions and world champions and interim champions..."

"There was a recent fight in the UK, and the marketing was all about one of the women having long blonde hair and fake boobs. Now it ended up being a good club fight — at a low skill level.

"It was entertaining but to call it a world championship fight was an insult to boxing and an insult to someone like Katie Taylor, who takes her craft really seriously.

"Technically, she's a good fighter. We know her weakness — she doesn't have a lot of power, but she is very competent and conducts herself outside the ring in a gracious and elegant manner.

"If women's boxing had more Katie Taylor, it would be much better. I'm a big fan of her — as a boxer and as a person."

Taylor has been described as the greatest Irish sportsperson of all time. Does that stand up?

"Do you count Barry McGuigan as Irish? Yes. Well, let's put this in context. McGuigan was a legitimate world champion and an incredibly important symbolic figure in Ireland at that time," said Hauser.

"There are other great Irish fighters. Great Irish footballers and athletes and people in other sports whose accomplishments have eclipsed Katie. That's not a

LEGEND: Muhammad Ali and (below) the boxer poses with Author Thomas Hauser

## BOXING'S PAST NO EXCUSE FOR KINAHAN

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

BOXING has a chequered past — and that's an understatement.

For decades, boxing was run in the US by Mafia figures like Blinky Palermo and Frankie Carbo.

Boxing's past is used by some fans to excuse the rise of Daniel Kinahan. According to Thomas Hauser that doesn't stand up.

"You can also justify slavery and say it's in the Bible. If you look at Leviticus, there's a chapter and verse that justifies slavery. It was used for centuries by the church to prop up slavery," he said.

"What used to happen can't be used to justify what's happening now.

"When I think of what's happening now, it's very

troubling. I would like to see the media pay more attention to it.

"In my case, I don't have direct knowledge, I'm over here in the United States, I don't know the players involved.

"I watched the Panorama programme and they did a very good job with it. And I suspect some people have concerns for personal safety, some people don't want to upset relationships, some people might not think it's that bad.

"I can't speak for anybody else and, because I don't have direct knowledge of it, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to go into it.

OUT ON HER OWN: Thomas Hauser is a big fan of world champion Katie Taylor



knock on Katie Taylor."

He has written more — and talked more — about Ali than any other boxer that he has come across.

### Justice

Little wonder. Ali was one of the most dominant personalities of the 20th century.

Without doubt, there was nobody bigger in sport so trying to do justice to his story created uncertainty in Hauser.

"When I was first asked, I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it. John Kennedy was my boyhood hero. Outside of that, I don't think there's a person on the planet who would have had the impact on me that Ali did," he said.

"When I was approached in October of 1988, Muhammad was starting to have significant physical difficulties, but I realised that he was still physically strong, there were no cognitive issues and he still had a good quality of life — that obviously changed later on.

"Some days, he looked good.

Some days, the light seemed to be all but gone from his eyes. I didn't want to work on this project if I was going to be depressed for two years. I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it.

"So Lonnie Ali asked me to come out to the farm in Michigan, where they lived at the time, to see how we all fitted together.

"The first day, I found it hard to make eye contact with Muhammad. I was just intimidated, I wasn't sure if he wanted me, I wasn't sure if he understood me.

"When I woke up in the morning after my first night's sleep, I went down to the kitchen and Ali was sitting there and he looked at me

and goes 'Cornflakes or granola?'

"I remember saying to myself 'Tom, relax, don't put him on a pedestal, he's Muhammad'. I don't think I'll ever have a project that brings me so much joy.

"It was a very serious responsibility because there had been so much nonsense, so many inaccurate things written about who he was and what he represented.

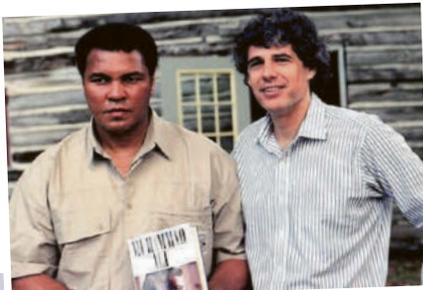
"They envisioned it as being an autobiography — I told them that wouldn't work for me. 'Number one, nobody would believe that Muhammad sat down and wrote it. Number two, there already had been one — *The Greatest* in 1976.

### Stories

"It was full of made up stories like Muhammad throwing his Olympic gold medal into the river after a confrontation with a biker gang. Never happened.

"I'd read a wonderful book about the Civil Rights movement in the US — *My Soul Is Rested* by Howell Raines, a decade earlier.

"He interviewed titans



ICONIC: Muhammad Ali holds the torch before lighting the Olympic Flame during the Opening Ceremony of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta

## 'DRUG TESTING NEEDED 365 DAYS A YEAR'

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

DOPING is a problem in all sports — but Thomas Hauser is particularly concerned about its impact in boxing.

That's because of the very real danger that a juiced-up fighter could do serious damage to his opponents.

"I believe that every single fighter who has any bargaining power at all should demand drug testing," he said.

"What they do is they might juice for four months after a fight, they'll have a big fight, they'll take a month off, then they'll juice for four months and build up their core strength.

### Demand

"PEDs aren't something you use three weeks before a fight, it's something that you do three months before, so my sense is that many more fighters with positions of power should demand that there be full-time drug testing 365 days a year, drug testing.

"I know it's expensive, but spot testing can still

accomplish something. Some aren't going to want to do it because they're reluctant to speak out, or they don't understand the issue, or they just don't think doing anything constructive should be done.

"But that's an area where fighters are really at risk, because we're not talking about running fast or hitting a baseball further — we're talking about hitting somebody in the head harder."

Boxing has many problems crowding around it, and Hauser feels it faces an uncertain future.

"I've never become disillusioned with boxing, because I never had any illusions about it. Boxing has always been a dirty sport, in some ways," he said.

"In the UK, my sense is that it's in a fairly healthy state. In the US, it's on life support. There are too many champions and people don't really know who the champions are.

## Fighters simply not 'famous' anymore

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

THOMAS Hauser is not the only one concerned about the state of boxing in the modern era.

"My mother is 95 now, she is not a sport fan but she could have told you that James Braddock and Ingemar Johansson were world heavyweight champion. I'm not even talking about the Muhammad Alis or Rocky Marcianos.

"Now, if you go to the street and ask people to name the heavyweight champ, some will say Anthony Joshua, or Tyson Fury, or Deontay Wilder. The answer you'd get most is, 'I don't think it's Mike

Tyson anymore'.

"Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua could walk through Times Square tomorrow and very few people would recognise them.

Wimbledon is coming up. There will be one men's champion." And he added: "At the French Open, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic played one of the greatest tennis matches of all time. The greatest take on each other. That hardly happens in boxing.

### Nonsense

"I mean, how many months have we spent with all this nonsense about Joshua/Fury?

"There are too many belts, fans aren't getting the fights they want, and there is an economic model that cuts the sport off from potential fans.

"Would Tiger Woods have become as popular as he was if you had to watch him on pay-per-view?

"There's no central authority working for the overall good of the sport, everybody trashes everybody else's shows."



HEAVYWEIGHT: Tyson Fury