

# Fighters

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His hair is straight and dark with sweat. Droplets cling to his stubble hold the light. There are beads on his brow and at the end of his nose. His eyes are wide and alert. His mouth still holds the shape of the gum shield.

He's an amateur in a dark vest, no more than 17, sitting in his corner with the ropes and the crowd behind him, looking up at the second who is out of the picture but obviously talking. His expression carries pain and an enormous sadness: something's wrong.

The picture's framed on a pub wall beside Muhammad Ali, Rocky Marciano and Joe Louis, all in the ring.

It's not for sale, the woman behind the bar said.

Who is it?

My boy.

The old guy in the corner with a half his half pint gone, just in from a smoke and looking at the crossword was staring from across the bar.

That's me in there, he said, third from the left, in the crowd. He was 16, Scottish flyweight, junior champion, amateur, great, a good young fighter. I'll get you a copy if you like. Come back and see me. I'm always here.

I brought the photie in, the woman said when she put down my whisky. He was hopeless, won fuck all, thought he could take a doing till he got one. He looks the part, but he was a hopeless fighter.

The old guy pushed his glass across the counter. She half filled it. He took a slug and was waiting outside when I left.

She never wanted him to fight, always wanted him to get beat so's he'd chuck it. She used to give him ice cream and pizzas when he was training. But he was a prospect, lost a few fights, one really badly, got a right doing and gave it up. Sits in the hoose, now. She looks after him. He's some size, with the cakes and sweeties he's getting. It's a shame. He could've been good. Could've been a fighter.