

Name: Ken Buchanan
Career Record: [click](#)
Nationality: British
Birthplace: Edinburgh, Scotland
Hometown: Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom
Born: 1945-06-28
Stance: Orthodox
Height: 5' 7½"
Reach: 178
Manager: [Eddie Thomas](#)
Trainer: [Gil Clancy](#)

- 1965 [ABA](#) featherweight champion
- International Boxing Hall of Fame [Bio](#)

Further Reading: [The Tartan Legend: The Autobiography](#)

http://www.stv.tv/info/sportExclusive/20070618/Ken_Buchanan_interview_180607



Ken Buchanan was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 28 June 1945, to parents Tommy and Cathie, both of whom were very supportive of their son's sporting ambitions throughout his early life. However, it was Ken's aunt, Joan and Agnes, who initially encouraged the youngster's enthusiasm for boxing.

In 1952, the pair were shopping for Christmas presents for Ken and his cousin, Robert Barr, when they saw a pair of boxing gloves and it occurred to them that the two boys often enjoyed some playful sparring together. So, at the age of seven, the young Buchanan received his first pair of boxing gloves.

It was another casual act, this time by father Tommy that sparked young Ken's interest in competitive boxing. One Saturday, when the family had finished shopping, Tommy took his son to the cinema to see *The Joe Louis Story* and Ken decided he'd like to join a boxing club.

Tommy agreed, and the eight-year-old joined one of Scotland's best clubs, the Sparta. Two nights a week, alongside 50 other youths, young Ken learned how to box and before long he had won his first medal – with a three-round points win in the boys' 49lb (three stone seven pound)

division.

ON A WIDER STAGE

When he was 17, Buchan won his first senior title, taking the East District bantamweight championship. Soon after that, he reached the final of the Scottish Championships, but was outpointed. This earned him an international debut, where *he* scored a win against Switzerland, and a trip to the European championships in Russia, where an East German beat him in his first contest. The following year in 1965, Buchanan won the Scottish and ABA titles, and again he went to the European championships, where skeptics felt that politics had something to do with his controversial defeat by the reigning European and Olympic champion Stanislav Stepashkin of the USSR.

By now, it was time for the 20-year-old featherweight to think about those offers that had been coming in for him to turn professional. Eddie Thomas, who lived in Merthyr, Wales, finally secured his signature for £500, even though other managers had offered more and most people



ABOVE: Buchanan, in action against Jimmy Isaac, in the 1965 ABA featherweight final at the Empire Pool, Wembley.

expected Edinburgh's ex-British featherweight champ, Bobby Neill. To get the job. However, Thomas was already training British, European and future world feather champ Howard Winstone, and he clinched it by agreeing that Buchanan could continue to live in Edinburgh. Thomas immediately curbed Buchanan's willingness to mix it in his contests, emphasizing the benefits of defensive techniques and ringcraft. In Thomas's opinion, the less punishment a fighter took, the longer his career lasted. However, right from the beginning, the Scot's relationship with his manager was very uneasy.

Buchanan relates how, after training, Thomas would tell him to urinate in his hands and nib it on his face to make his skin hard. Ex-heavyweight world champion Jack Dempsey used filthy salt water for the same purpose, but Buchanan's father criticized Thomas and told Ken not to do it, instructing him to nib petroleum jelly around his eyes instead, to keep the skin supple. Buchanan also grew irritated as Thomas spent more and more of his time with Winstone, deputizing assistants to train Buchanan.

The main reason for the problems that developed was due to the boxing set-up at the time. The influence of leading post-war promoter Jack Solomon was declining as Harry Levene, his latter-day rival, teamed up with Mike Barrett, Jarvis Astaire and Mickey Duff to form a partnership which more or less controlled big-time boxing in Britain. These four promoted fights at the Albert Hall and Wembley's Empire Pool, but as Thomas's fighters weren't favoured by this partnership, a newcomer like Buchanan was unable to get a place in a major show.

In fact, nine of Buchanan's first 10 contests took place at the National Sporting Club, London. The new NSC, located at the Cafe Royal in Regent Street, liked to maintain the old traditions of the original club, such as combining the boxing with dinner, watching in silence and applauding politely only between rounds.

BEST OF BRITISH

Buchanan made his professional debut at the NSC, in September 1965, stopping Brian Tonks in the second round. As Buchanan continued to win fights before this elite gathering of club members, it is not surprising that he felt frustrated. This wasn't turning into the path to glory that he had imagined and which he knew his skills deserved. Like all great champions in any sport, Buchanan knew how good he was, and he was not happy making these trips to London to dispose of rivals without the publicity and appreciation that he felt he deserved.

However, this was not a bad apprenticeship for Buchanan. In the last three months of 1965, and the whole of 1966, he had 15 more contests, winning five by stoppage and 10 on points. In 1967, he won his first pro title and began taking on French, Italian and American challengers. By now a lightweight, Buchanan outpointed John McMillan to win the Scottish championship, and then outpointed Rene Roque, and stopped Franco Brondi and Al Rocca. In October, he outpointed the former Northern Ireland lightweight champion, veteran Jim 'Spike' McCormack and was in line for a British title fight.

The reigning champion was Maurice Cullen, a stylish boxer who had won the title in April 1965 and successfully defended four times before stepping into the ring against Buchanan at the Anglo-American Sporting Club, London, in February 1968.

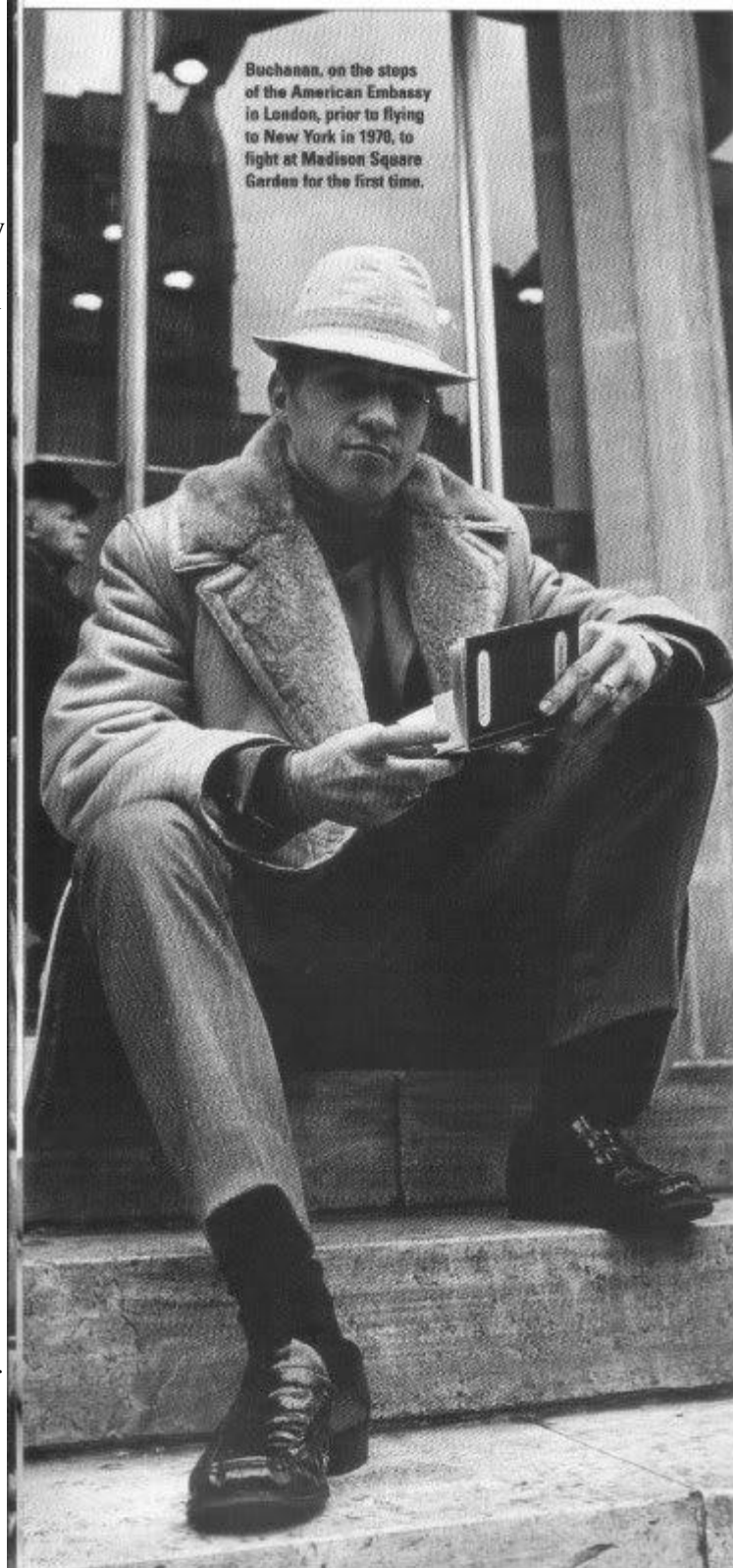
Cullen was 50, and the experts made him favourite over the 22-year-old Buchanan. He rarely used his right hand, but had one of the best left jabs in the business.

Buchanan, with an all-round ability that allowed him to box with the best, but also fight and punch with both hands, got on top in the sixth round of what had begun as a hard fight. He got through to Cullen and put him down for counts of four and seven, in the ninth. Cullen was in trouble again, and dropped for counts of eight and nine. The champion staged a brave comeback in the 10th, but in the 11th round he was soon helpless in the face of another Buchanan onslaught, and a perfect left hook put him down for the fifth time. He staggered to his feet, but fractionally after the referee's count had reached 10. Buchanan was the new British lightweight champion.

Buchanan now fully expected to make some real money from boxing, but over the next 17 months there was no defence of his title forthcoming. He won four other fights in 1968 and began 1969 by appearing on BBC television when he brilliantly outpointed a good Puerto Rican, Frankie Narvaez. For those who tuned in, it was clear that Britain had a top-class fighter.

A contest was then scheduled for June 1969, in Nottingham, with Carlos Teo Cruz of the Dominican Republic, and billed as a final eliminator for the world title. Cruz had won the world title a year

earlier from Carlos Ortiz, but had dropped it four months later to Mando Ramos. Buchanan was frustrated when Cruz withdrew before the fight (eight months later he died in a plane crash), and an angry Buchanan stopped the substitute, Jerry Graci in the first round.



It seemed to Buchanan that his chance of a world title light had gone. He was married, had invested in a smart home in the expectation of a profitable boxing career, and yet he found himself down to his last few pounds in the bank. His stablemate, Howard Winstone, had by now won and lost his world title and Eddie Thomas was still on no better terms with the Duff-Barrett-Astaire group. With his manager 400 miles away, and seemingly uninterested, Buchanan was out in the cold as far as the big promotions were concerned and there looked to be little chance of him getting a British title defence.

In a state of depression, Buchanan now took a step that shook the British boxing world, and which he has regretted ever since. He sent his licence and Lonsdale Belt back to the British Boxing Board of Control and, at the age of 24, announced his retirement. In the normal course of things, after 34 unbeaten contests and as the lightweight champion of Britain, the opportunities should have been infinite. Yet, so far as he could see, Buchanan was finished. He went back to carpentry, his trade as an amateur boxer, and claimed to be better off and happier, able to have a drink and not worry about his weight.

FUNERAL REUNION

Barely two months later Buchanan's mother, Cathie, died. Eddie Thomas travelled to Edinburgh for the funeral and Buchanan's father persuaded her that his mother would have wanted him to resume boxing. Buchanan went to see Thomas and they agreed to wipe the slate clean. Buchanan went back into training again to serve out the last two years of his contract.

In January 1970 he challenged Miguel Velazquez for the European title at the Palacio de Deportes in Madrid, Spain. Buchanan won the first half of the fight, but faced a rally by the Spaniard and, after being forced to take a count in the ninth round, was outpointed. In the way of all fighters, Buchanan thought he had won and claimed that the Italian referee was swayed by the home support. He also claimed that he had fasted before the fight because a trial weigh-in had told him he was 11lb overweight, while at the actual weigh-in he was 3lb under and weakened by the unnecessary fast. Whatever the excuse, Buchanan had suffered his first professional defeat. However, all that really mattered was that the talented Scot was back in the ring and things were about to start looking up for him.

After a couple of points wins in early 1970, Buchanan defended his British title for the first time, at the Empire Pool, Wembley, against Titian Hudson. The Scot gave an impressive performance and knocked out the challenger in five rounds. The world champion at the time was Ismael Laguna of Panama, and he was due to fight ex-champ Mando Ramos in San Juan, Puerto Rico. When Ramos pulled out, a substitute was needed and Laguna's manager, Cain Young, sought for an opponent that he felt his man could beat without too much difficulty. As far as Young was concerned, Buchanan was perfect.

Buchanan and Laguna came together in the open-air Hiram Bithorn Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico, in September 1970. Laguna opened strongly, exploiting his fast hands and the extraordinary speed of his footwork, and after three rounds in the hot sun, the pale Buchanan began to feel the heat sapping his strength.

By the middle rounds. Buchanan's jab was working at top gear and he realized it was more powerful than Laguna's. Buchanan staggered the champion in the 12th and, although practically exhausted, he kept going to the end. He finished the stronger of the two and took a split decision, with each of the three judges having only a single point between the two.

NO BRITISH RECOGNITION

Buchanan, at 25, was the first British lightweight world champion since Freddie Welsh in 1917. The rejoicing, which extended to pouring champagne into his bath did not last long, however. In fighting Laguna Buchanan had defied the wishes of the British Boxing Board of Control who only recognized the WBC and had withdrawn recognition from Laguna on the flimsiest grounds. On his arrival back home, nobody could convince the BBBC that Buchanan was a world champion. So far as they were concerned, the title was vacant.

Buchanan was even more depressed by his welcome home in Edinburgh. Putting on a sombrero to meet the expected crowd, he found a reception committee of just six, and four of those were his wife Carol, son Mark, and his parents-in-law. Edinburgh, it seemed, still did not care about its outstanding world champion. However, 10 weeks after he had won the title, Buchanan finally discovered a place where he was appreciated.

In December 1970, Buchanan made his first appearance at Madison Square Garden, on the undercard of the Muhammad Ali - Oscar Bonavena fight. His opponent was Man unbeaten Canadian welterweight, Donato Paduano, who was nearly a stone heavier at the weigh-in. Buchanan realized that he would have to use all his speed and skill to overcome this dangerous opponent, and he put on a brilliant boxing master class, emerging unmarked for a decisive points win. The fans gave him a rare standing ovation and he was a favourite at the Garden from then on.

BELOW: The relationship between Buchanan and manager Eddie Thomas was strained at the best of times. The pair finally parted company after the world lightweight title defence against Laguna in September 1971.



In 1971, Buchanan began to enjoy his status as one of the best world champions around. The first defence of his title was scheduled to be against Mando Ramos, whose place he had taken to beat Laguna, but three days before the fight Ramos withdrew again. American champ Ruben Navarro stepped in and took on Buchanan in his native Los Angeles. Buchanan's purse was \$60,000, much better than the \$10,000 he received for beating Laguna.

The 10,360 fans had visions of a local victory when Buchanan was down in the first round, but referee Arthur Mercante ruled it a slip. Navarro was tough, but there was only one fighter in it from the fifth round and Buchanan retained his title by scores of 9-4 (twice) and 9-2.

LAGUNA RETURN

The victory over Navarro earned Buchanan the title of undisputed champion and even the BBBC recognized him; not that the powers that be allowed him to be undisputed champ for long. In June, Buchanan signed for a return with Ismael Laguna, but because the WBC listed Pedro Carrasco their number one challenger, they withdrew recognition from Buchanan. This time the BBBC stayed loyal to Buchanan, who earned \$100,000 for his rematch with Laguna.

Soon after beating Laguna, Buchanan split with Eddie Thomas. Their contract was up for renewal in December and Buchanan let it be known that he needed to discuss certain things. Thomas pre-empted discussions by announcing that he was no longer interested in managing a back-stabbing, ungrateful boxer. Some of the trouble may have been because Buchanan's father, Tommy, had recently been granted a manager's licence. Buchanan, however, claimed that this was not a move to oust Thomas, but just part of his long-term plans, such as buying a hotel or gym to give him a business after his retirement. Whatever the details, the successful world championship team parted in acrimonious circumstances.

Buchanan was the British Sportswriters' Sportsman of the Year in 1971, and his first fight after breaking with Thomas was at Wembley where he outclassed Canadian champion Al Ford. He then went to Johannesburg to knock out Andries Steyn, before losing his world title to unbeaten Roberto Duran. Buchanan has always claimed that he was beaten by a low blow after the bell.

The disappointment did not affect Buchanan's winning ways elsewhere. In the remainder of 1972, and in 1973 and 1974 he won 13 contests without defeat, stopping ex-world champion Carlos Ortiz in 1972, and outpointing British lightweight champion Jim Watt in 1973 to regain the title. In 1974 he went to Cagliari, Sardinia, to take the European crown from Italy's Antonio Puddu. In the Santa Elia Stadium, Puddu was knocked out in the sixth round, and seven months later Frenchman Leonard Tavarez was stopped in the 14th at the Parc des Expositions in Paris.

In February 1975, Buchanan got another chance at the world title when he went to Tokyo to challenge Ishimatsu Suzuki (who later changed his name to Guts Ishimatsu), but Buchanan injured his eye in training and the wound reopened in the fifth round. He fought well, but lost a unanimous decision. Five months later, Buchanan went back to Cagliari to defend his European title against Giancarlo Usai and stopped him in the 12th. The home fans were so upset that they threw bricks and bottles into the ring, and Tommy Buchanan needed seven stitches to a head wound. The trophy and belt were ignored in the rush to the dressing room and Buchanan never received them. Back in Edinburgh, at the age of 30, Buchanan retired.

PERSONAL PROBLEMS

Buchanan now had more time to devote to his hotel in Ferry Road, Edinburgh. However, he suffered a blow in 1977 when his wife, Carol, sued for divorce and went to live elsewhere with his two children. Eventually, the hotel business began to wane, and when investments were lost Buchanan was forced to sell up.

In 1979 he returned to the ring after an absence of four years and won two fights in Denmark. That December he fought Irelands Charlie Nash who was the reigning European champion. only to lose a narrow decision. It was Buchanan's last title fight. but sadly he went on to fight six more times up to January 1982, losing the last four before retiring once again.

Buchanan went back to work as a joiner, but in 1983 he was tempted to return as an unlicensed fighter. He went through with it out of pride rather than accept a benefit night at the NSC. He won easily enough at the Ilford Palais. London, and took a second fight. which he also won, but this time his eye was cut and needed stitches. Thankfully. he decided to call it a day for good.