

# Sheffield steel

## Serving soldier has his mind set on a second career in big-time boxing

Interview: Richard Lenton

IT IS almost mandatory these days for a promising young boxer fighting out of Sheffield to adopt a flashy, switch-hitting style.

From Herol Graham to “Prince” Naseem Hamed and Junior Witter, the Steel City has produced a plethora of world-class fighters capable of bamboozling their opponents by launching bombs from both orthodox and southpaw stances.

The latest new kid on the block, Rfn Ross “The Boss” Burkinshaw (3 Rifles), who grew up idolising featherweight legend Hamed, is no exception.

The 20-year-old had grizzled veterans of the fight scene purring with enthusiasm following a sensational professional debut last November.

Burkinshaw, who boxes in the 8st 6oz bantamweight division, completely overpowered and outclassed Welshman Robert Bunford within the opening minute of his first paid assignment at Barnsley’s Metrodome Leisure Centre.

However, while most boxers insist that they “don’t get paid for overtime”, Burkinshaw admits he regrets ending proceedings so quickly.

“It was great to stop him in the first round but I wish it had gone on longer so I could have showcased my skills,” said the rifleman, who sold 256 tickets for his professional bow, making him an instant hit with his promoter Frank Maloney. “Making my debut was

the best feeling ever. Glynn Rhodes (Burkinshaw’s trainer) was saying ‘you’ve got to enjoy tonight because you only get one debut’ and he was right. I never wanted the night to end.”

The Army boxing team graduate, who is on the verge of a top-ten ranking among the British bantamweights, followed up his demolition of Bunford by grinding out a points victory over savvy ring veteran Delroy Spencer at Leeds Town Hall in February.

Unlike many journeymen boxers, Spencer, who has more than 50 fights on his ledger, always comes to win, and he succeeded in making life a great deal tougher for the rising star, who had to dig deep to emerge with a deserved 39-38 victory.

“I made it a tougher fight than it should have been,” the former Inter-Services flyweight champion told *SoldierSport*. “I should have kept it long range but I was trying to please the crowd and got involved too much.

“He gave it a good go, and the times I did catch him with big shots he would tie me up.

“Spencer told me after the fight that he thinks I can go a long way and I learned a lot from the fight. I realise now that I can’t just go in there and knock everyone out, and that it’s not such a good idea to just try and entertain the public.”

Despite his assertions to the contrary, the fact is that boxing is an entertainment business, and The Boss is already attracting attention after generating a considerable amount of excitement during his fledgling professional career.

Burkinshaw was led to the ring in Leeds by a bugler and half a dozen colleagues from his Edinburgh-based battalion, and Frank Maloney has promised him an appearance on Sky TV next time out.

“Sky wanted to see what my entrance was like, how the crowd responded and how I fought and they weren’t disappointed,” Burkinshaw said. “They’ve also got some footage of me as a 14-year-old, shadow boxing behind the scenes at one of the big fights, saying

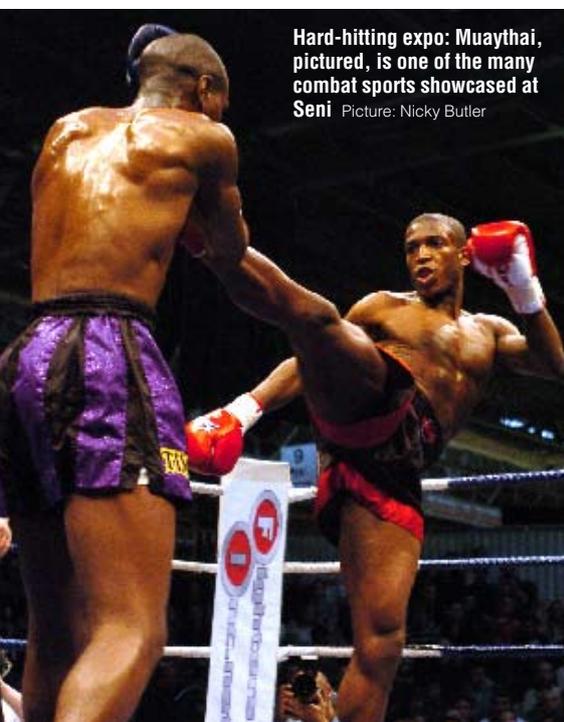
that I was going to be a pro.

“They’re hoping to use that in a feature some time.”

As an amateur, Burkinshaw reached the ABA finals in 2005, won two Inter-Services titles and was ranked fourth in Britain. However, his intention was always to punch for pay after training with top professionals from the age of ten at the Glynn Rhodes gym.

“I started out doing jujitsu at Hillsborough Boys Club, but soon turned to boxing and had my first fight as an 11-year-old,” said the infantryman,

**‘I want to win the English title by the end of 2007 and the British title within two years’**



Hard-hitting expo: Muaythai, pictured, is one of the many combat sports showcased at Seni. Picture: Nicky Butler

## Fighting chance

OLYMPIC and World champion martial artists will go head-to-head at London Dockland’s Excel Centre next month as they battle to be crowned “master of the mats”.

The series of super bouts has been arranged as part of this year’s Seni Show, Europe’s largest combat sports exhibition, which will take place in the capital on May 19-20.

Tickets for the annual event, which will also feature ultimate fighting, boxing, thai boxing and wrestling contests, are priced at £8 (adults) and £5 (children) for a daily pass and £13.50/£6.50 for a weekend pass.

Fight aficionados can book their tickets through Ticketmaster on 0870 6077477 or online at [www.senishow.com](http://www.senishow.com)

However, five lucky *SoldierSport* readers will be able to attend the showpiece event without having to open their wallets.

To stand a chance of winning one of five pairs of tickets from us, simply tell us the English translation of the Japanese term “seni”. Is it a) fighting fit, b) fighting spirit or c) fighting talk?

Winners will be drawn at random from the correct entries received by April 30. Usual rules apply.



who proposed to his girlfriend Becky in Gran Canaria immediately after his professional debut.

"I've always been around the pros. I used to train with Ritchie Wenton, Herol Graham and Paul "Silky" Jones and I used to carry Clinton Woods's British, Commonwealth and European title belts into the ring for him.

"I also got to know Naz really well. I was sponsored by Naz's brother Nabeel at 14, and I was chilling in the changing room with him before his last fight against Manuel Calvo. It gave me the taste for big-time boxing and it's where I want to be."

It would be some story if Burkinshaw could achieve anything like the success enjoyed by Hamed, who reigned supreme as the world's top featherweight for the best part of six years.

But The Boss is hardly short of confidence and firmly believes that he has what it takes to compete at title level.

"I want to win the English title by the end of 2007 and the British title within two years," he said. "Hopefully I

can then move on to a world title. I'm a good boxer, I know I can do it."

In the interim, Burkinshaw insists he has no intention of ducking a fight . . . whether it be in the ring or in the line of duty.

"I'm committed to making a name for myself in boxing, but I also realise

**Unbeaten run: Rfn Ross Burkinshaw (3 Rifles) recorded his second professional victory over Delroy Spencer at Leeds Town Hall**

Picture: Action Images/John Clifton

that my Army career is paramount, and if I'm asked to go to Iraq tomorrow then I'm ready." ■

## TA retain top gun title

**FOR the second successive year the Territorial Army beat off competition from around the world to lift the Lexington Green championship trophy at the Armed Forces Skill at Arms meeting.**

Shooting against 210 competitors from six countries, the 14-strong team produced an unerring display to defend their title, finishing ahead of the Regular Army in second and US Army Reserves in third place.

Queen's Medal winner Sgt Dave

Fenwick (5 RRF) was again in fine form, top-scoring for his team and securing the honour of champion individual shot.

Team skipper Capt Peter Cottrell (3 PWRR) said: "It was an outstanding result and a proud achievement for the team. We achieved this result with minimal training, proving that teamwork really does matter. In the two key matches that comprise the Lexington, the team produced consistent scores to win by a convincing margin."