

Tough sacrifice but Smith has title present in mind

by FRANK SMITH

For most 22 year olds, a birthday which consists of not going out with friends, avoiding alcohol and being kept away from your family for the rest of that week sounds like a terrible way to mark the occasion. For Mitchell Smith, he wouldn't want it any other way.

Smith is chasing a dream. The Harrow Weald boxer is fighting for a version of the European championship on Saturday as he builds towards a British title shot next year and, hopefully, world honours in 2016.

The English super featherweight champion saw his two-year-old daughter briefly on Monday morning, his birthday, but has only seen her four times in the last eight weeks as he chooses to live away from his partner and their children whilst he is in training.

In the afternoon, family time was swapped for cardio and pads sessions and in the evening he had a photo-shoot ahead of Saturday's vacant WBO European title shot with Hungarian Zoltan Kovacs at the ExCel Arena in London.

Smith, who has won all nine of his fights as a professional, told the *Harrow Times*: "It was tough [only seeing his daughter for 15 minutes] but it is for the best. Being away from my family makes me a tougher person. Come Saturday nothing will stop



'Being away from my family makes me a tougher person': Mitchell Smith. Picture by Action Images

The former Bushey Boxing Club member continued: "I'm not a big one for birthdays and Christmas if I'm honest, because I wasn't brought up that way. My birthday present will be walking in on Saturday night and seeing my daughter's face when she sees that belt and also bringing it back to the rest of my family, like my dad and my brother."

Smith thanked his dad John, who now runs Bushey ABC, for helping arrange his ticket sales.

"I have sold 1,500 tickets from our doorstep and someone at (promoter) Frank Warren's office said not even (British boxing legend) Ricky Hutton sold that many from his door step, which is quite a statement. I guess my boxing is doing the talking," Smith said.

The fighter from Harrow Weald says preparations for Saturday's bout have been perfect and a large part of that is down to sponsor Paul Winter, of Winterwell Build, and his wife Karen, who allow the boxer to stay at their house and cook for him during his training camps so he can remain 100 per cent focused on his boxing.

Hungarian champion Kovacs (11-4) has only been stopped once before but Smith, who is trained by former WBU champion Jason Rowland, is confident he will end the fight before

the closing bell on Saturday night.

He said: "Kovacs is quite tall and rangy, I'm expecting him to try to keep it long and for him to be wary of what I throw. But I am super fit and if I get him against the ropes and go to work on him then I'm looking to open him up."

"I am confident I can get the stoppage; I am hitting hard, I'm doing the weight properly and this is the best I have felt leading into a fight. I think I could get the stoppage by around rounds four to six."

The EBU's version is considered the main European title but victory on Saturday should lift Smith into the top 15 in the world with the WBO.

Smith is also likely to be an interested observer that night when Gary Sykes and Liam Walsh fight for the British belt as he targets a shot at the crown early next year.

"I should be fighting in February and I have heard whispers that the British title could come up. I've heard a few people say I might get a British title shot in February," he said.

Smith would preferably like to win the prestigious British strap outright, which would involve winning three title defences, but says that aim would have to fit into his greater ambition.

The 'Babyface Assassin' doesn't lack confidence and boldly states: "I will have a world title by 2016 for definite." Now that would be some present for his 24th birthday.

Stones break home duck

Wealdstone clinched their first Conference South home victory of the season after Gordon Bartlett's men sealed a 1-0 win over Concord Rangers on Saturday.

Chances were sporadic in the opening period. Scott McGleish battled as the lone striker but he found opportunities hard to come by.

Concord did create an opening but goalkeeper Jonathan North saved brilliantly to deny Jordan Chiedozie.

The hosts' best chances of the first half fell to Joe Turner. He first sent a snap-shot wide before wasting a good opportunity at the back post.

Concord started the second period brightly but Wealdstone fought their way back into the half and Shaun Lucien looked menacing when the home side attacked.

McGleish had more joy after the break and saw a long-range effort tipped over by Josh Vickers.

However, in the 74th minute, the deadlock was broken. Lucien tricked his way past several defenders, crossed into the area and McGleish dropped down to head home.

Lucien then missed a chance to double the advantage before late pressure from Concord was well dealt with by the Stones defence.

Wealdstone face St Albans City in the FA Trophy third qualifying round on Saturday.

■ Harrow Borough lost 3-1 to Dulwich Hamlet in the Ryman Premier on Saturday.

Jack Dixon, Nyren Clunis and Omar Coroma scored to put Hamlet in control and Greg Ngoyi's late strike was only a consolation for Borough, who travel to Enfield Town on Saturday.

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