



JUST BUSINESS

British light-heavyweight champion **Joshua Buatsi** tells Tempus about stepping out from Anthony Joshua's shadow, his plans for world domination and how he developed a winning philosophy

Words: Michelle Johnson | **Photography:** Michael Shelford | **Shoot Director:** Georgia Peck



Joshua Buatsi is the definition of today's gentleman boxer. In the ring, the undefeated, 26-year-old British light-heavyweight champion is a force to be reckoned with; calculated power meeting explosive force.

It's this awesome combination that saw him take a bronze medal at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games before being snapped up by Anthony Joshua's management team (after a brief bidding war with American promoter Floyd Mayweather) and launched into professional boxing in July 2017. Incredibly, Buatsi won the British light-heavyweight belt on 31 March this year, less than two years after going pro. But off-duty Buatsi exudes confidence, warmth and charisma, whether stopping for selfies with sports fans who recognise the rising star during our shoot at BXR London, or speaking of his current success with a pragmatic wisdom that belies his youth.

"People call me humble," he tells Tempus. "But let's be real; when a man has nothing it's easy to be humble and to talk quietly. Right now, I'm British champion, I'm highly ranked, but I

haven't made it yet. Talk to me in two years and let's see if I've still got the same energy. Then you can judge my character."

It's this driving confidence, along with his technical skill, that makes Buatsi such a sure bet. Already, the light-heavyweight has seen big-brand interest from the likes of IWC Schaffhausen – for whom he was a London ambassador – and is sponsored by Nike ("I spent all my money on Nike gear before I went pro, so it's great," he laughs). Buatsi takes each marker of success as a stepping stone to more, taking cues from his peers and mentors, such as manager Joshua – the most famous British heavyweight of this generation – while keeping his feet firmly on the ground with help from his core team, his unshakeable faith and his family, who brought Buatsi from their native Ghana to Croydon, aged nine, to better his education. Now, nicknamed 'Just Business' by friends, that legacy is becoming clear.

In our exclusive photoshoot and interview, Buatsi tells Tempus how his sport keeps him humble, and how he plans to dominate the business of boxing. »

“WHEN A MAN HAS NOTHING IT'S EASY TO BE HUMBLE. TALK TO ME IN TWO YEARS AND LET'S SEE IF I'VE STILL GOT THE SAME ENERGY”



Above: Buatsi wears a suit by Hackett London and an IWC Schaffhausen Portugieser Yacht Club Chronograph. **Right:** The 26-year-old British light-heavyweight champion displays his dominance in the ring.





Gentleman boxer Buatsi wears a suit by Huntsman,
Hackett London shirt and Finlay & Co glasses

How would you describe your philosophy as a fighter?

That's quite a hard one. As fighters, we always want to fight, and the name of the game is to hit and not get hit. This is what I'm doing day in, day out, and I'm constantly trying to improve my skills. I think it's common to be a pressure fighter – to stand toe to toe and try to hit the other guy as many times as possible – but I think the real skill and discipline is learning to hit your man when he's not ready to engage; to disengage all interaction. I'm obsessed with improving my craft and learning how to get hit less often while dishing out the punishment. There are a lot of talented fighters that are more advanced than I am, but when I get into the ring I find a way to win. And I always say a prayer. I get on my knees and say, 'God, for all the wrongs I've done, forgive me. But as I go into this fight, I need you to help me'.

For me, every fight has always been serious, but

opportunities like there are here in England. Even poverty in England, it's not as extreme as what I saw in Ghana. Some people have been in the same place for years, with no house, no clothes, without knowing where their next meal is coming from. I live a good life, and so for me to have come here and got these opportunities, I have to make the most of it. What can I complain about?

What's been the biggest challenge you've faced since turning pro?

I think it was moving from amateur to pro. Amateur boxing is a sport; professional boxing is a business. If you're signing a contract, you need to understand the money involved. I learned a lot very quickly. The first thing I did was phone my dad, who had drummed education into my sister and me from a young age, and he advised me to go to university. So I studied sports science business management,

fight someone that also knew how to fight.

As an amateur you were fast-tracked to the Olympic team.

I've always looked for ways to separate myself from the pack. I was fast-tracked as an amateur, got a great training team at the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield where the British team is based, and after two years I won an Olympic medal at Rio 2016. Usually people wait for about two Olympics cycles – so eight years – whereas for me, it was two. I knew I had to put the work in if I wanted to achieve.

Was there a moment that you remember when it all changed for you?

Honestly, I think the thing that pushed me into the second gear was my fourth fight as an amateur, which was the first time I'd ever lost. It took losing that fight to understand how serious boxing was to

“ AMATEUR BOXING IS A SPORT
PROFESSIONAL BOXING IS A BUSINESS ”

now I'm at the level where the stakes are higher. I want to make sure that each fight is highly anticipated, that I'm putting on a show – and then making sure I do good things with the success that comes with winning.

How do you intend to use your success to give back to others?

The truth is, it's easy to talk. I don't want to do things for the wrong reasons, and so I'm quite private about what I'm doing for charities at the moment. I feel like boxing is a vehicle; fighting and winning brings in the money and publicity to do great things for others and help others to be heard. Success gives you a platform, and I feel like I have an obligation to help people. I have a blessed life: I fight, I win, I've got a platform, I get opportunities that others don't.

When I was growing up in Accra, Ghana, I saw people stuck in a system where there are no

because I knew I had to understand my business. It helped me a lot, and some of my teachers still come to my fights.

You took up boxing in London as a teen. How did your career start?

I thought boxing was boring when I was growing up. I came to London when I was nine. And you know, you leave Ghana for England to take the educational route; to get the smart jobs. So it's mad to go back now as an adult, because none of my family ever anticipated that boxing would be a career for me. My mum lives in Accra now, and when I visit I can see that people are happy that I've done well.

When I was 15 my best friend bought a set of gloves to the estate I lived in. Everyone sparred with each other, and naturally I thought the biggest guys would always be the strongest guys. Then I found out that size didn't matter against skill – and I wanted to learn about the art. It was captivating to

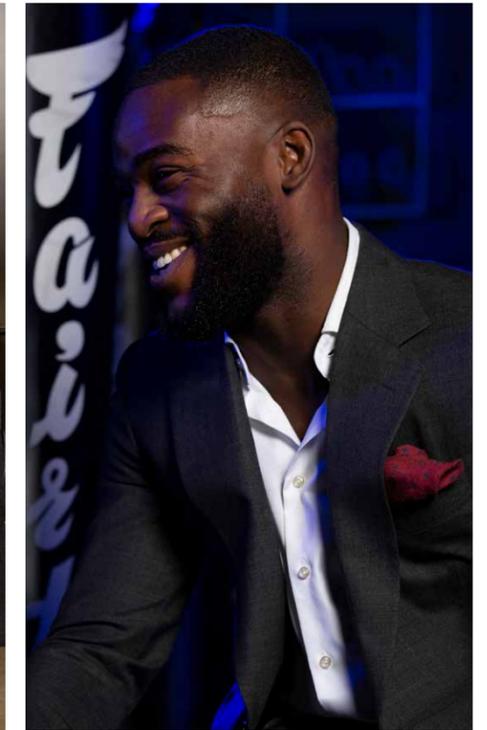
me. Winning bronze at the Olympics also made me realise I had something, and could compete on an international level. Every fight was a hard fight, and I couldn't pretend winning was a fluke at that level. When I won that medal, I felt like I had something tangible to show people after years of hard work, to show that my goals and aspirations were beyond being number one in just my own country. And then from winning my professional debut to winning the British title, I'd shown that within two years I could be the best in Britain at my weight. So now I'm looking for other moments where I can say, okay, this is another first for me. The one thing I never think about is losing. It's not something I'm familiar with. But the other thing boxing teaches you is to be humble and not to brag or over-celebrate – you have to look for the next improvement.

How does boxing teach you to be humble?

I think you develop a sense of true confidence. »



This page: Buatsi has already gained interest from luxury brands, including IWC Schaffhausen. Here, he also wears a suit by Hackett London and glasses by Finlay & Co



not empty bravado. I don't need to brag to seem bigger or scarier, because I know what my body can do. Boxing has taught me how to be calm. It also makes me feel like I need to help people who are more vulnerable – I have been known to intervene in robberies, or break up fights or bullying outside of the ring. It's mad how much I've learned from boxing. It gives you a mentality and way of life that's not just about what you do in the ring.

It's harder getting used to fans, who can be a bit fickle when there are negative reports about you, but that's part of life. People are opinionated. Before boxing, I thought the loudest man in the room was the strongest. Now, I'm happy to be the quiet guy in the background, because I know what I'm capable of. Even in the ring, I'll be happy to win but I don't ever want to celebrate the fact that I've hurt another person. You're always one punch away from getting knocked out; boxing can humble anyone.

You've been compared to your manager, Anthony Joshua. How do you respond to that?

Personally, I think there's a risk that comparing myself to other successful people can bring me down. My theory is that it's good to benchmark other people's successes, but never to compare yourself. So I think, okay, this person had this great fight at this specific point in their career – am I in the same place or do I have to work harder to get there? I let that inspire and motivate me. It's like a company examining a bigger brand's growth in the same marketplace. If I'm doing well, I could brag about it, or I can look at other athletes and see their success and let it motivate me further. I'm so grateful for all that I have and what I've achieved.

Then, the four people who have been with me from the start, they keep me grounded as well. My trainer Mark Gillespie has been with me since I was 15; my best friend Shane Sobers – he likes to hold my belt – is the man who introduced me to boxing. Duane Sinclair

who looks after my water, gum shield – he's literally in my corner – and then my friend Kevin, who looks after my wellbeing. He makes sure I'm in the right frame of mind before a fight; he prays for me.

Do you feel your faith has an impact upon your success?

My faith as a Christian is really important to me. That's why Kevin is such an important part of my team. Sometimes, when you're nervous or building up to a fight you don't want to talk to anyone, you don't want to pray. So he prays for me, that's his sole purpose. As long as I know he's there, doing that for me, I'm cool.

We're all proud people. Boxing is a prideful sport: you're fighting in front of a crowd, you don't want to be embarrassed, you don't want to be the one on the floor. Your pride is on the line. I think there's a way to counter that, to package it so that's not the part of you that's up in everyone's face.

What are your goals for 2020?

I get this question a lot. Whenever someone asks I say, it's to win my next fight. In the industry I'm in, you can't overlook a single fight. When the anticipation starts to build around me, it's hard to take it a day at a time. Yes, I did win a British Championship title, and I'm grateful. But we're all anticipating the European Championship and then World Title. And until that happens, I can't really speak about it. I have to take it one fight at a time. As an amateur, I never once said I wanted to win an Olympic medal. I lived in the moment. That's how I operate; I'll win my next fight. ①

Art direction: Ross Forbes

Stylist: Thomas Mwadime

With thanks to: Nike, Huntsman, Hackett London, Finlay & Co, IWC Schaffhausen, BXR London

Opposite: Buatsi wears Nike in the ring. **Above (l-r):** Sharing a joke during our photoshoot; tailoring by Huntsman of Savile Row (centre and right)

“ I DON'T NEED TO BRAG TO SEEM BIGGER OR SCARIER, BECAUSE I KNOW WHAT MY BODY CAN DO ”