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Boredom is food & drink for Joshua

Chris McKenna

JOSHUA BUATSI reckons being locked away in Hayward in California is giving him the hunger to succeed – and keeps him away from family food gatherings. The British light-heavyweight is set to face long-time pal and fellow unbeaten foe Dan Azeez at Wembley Arena tonight. Buatsi, 30, has been training with Virgil Hunter over in the US for the last three years and believes he's blossoming under Amir Khan and Andre Ward's old coach. "But it means long stints away from home for the Ghana-born Londoner in the quiet city of Hayward, which is just under 30 miles from San Francisco.

Sessions It suits Buatsi to be bored between training sessions at the gym because it means he is not getting invited out to eat all the time with friends and family like he was when training at home. "Where I am in the States there is nothing to do but boxing, so for that purpose it is superb," said Buatsi, the Rio Olympic 2016 bronze medalist. "I have a lot of family and friends that always want to meet up in England. "There's always some sort of food gathering and, as you know, we are in a sport where weight is quite important. "There are too many opportunities in England to go out to eat."



STAR MAN: Tony Ward in his heyday with Ireland

I find it so hard to watch, it's catastrophic and wrong

TONY Ward was in good company this week, showing his support alongside Dr David Hickey, Michael Darragh Macauley, Tyrone McKenna and Rebecca O'Keefe and Irish Sport for Palestine.

At first glance it might seem reasonably straightforward – a former Ireland rugby superstar as one of the 300 or so sporting signatories of a petition delivered to Leinster House. But his story had history and background – his father was Jewish and part of a family that fled Poland, on the run from Nazi persecution. Ward's view of current events in Gaza, he says, stem from an abhorrence of daily killings with no sign of stopping rather than an in-depth deconstruction of the Middle-East and wider problems.

Complex

If nationalism connected to sport is something we understand; we want Ireland to win games because sport is simple. The real world is altogether far more complex. "There is an irony in that my background is Jewish," he says. "My father and his family were from Mlawa in Poland (two hours north of Warsaw) and in danger of being exterminated by the Nazis in World War Two.

"From growing up there, his family had to flee and it turns out that a lot of Jewish people who had to flee went to America – but his story shows he sort of stopped off on the way in England. "Then following wherever he got off the ship he ended up growing up in Whitechapel, which is in the East End of London. "Ward still hasn't heard the full details but later on Saul Solomons, the son of a tailor by trade, changed his name to Danny Ward. "My dad met my mum, June,

HORROR SHOW: Palestinians search amid the rubble of Al-Urube school after the Israeli attack on the Nuseirat refugee camp in Deir al-Balah, Gaza, (right) former rugby star Tony Ward



"I add my earnest plea for an immediate end to the indiscriminate and merciless bombing – the cold-blooded slaughter we are witnessing from our living rooms on a nightly basis.

"I do so as an Irish sportsman, but also as the son of a Mlwan Jew driven out of his Polish homeland during German occupation in WW2."

TONY WARD STATEMENT TO IRISH SPORT FOR PALESTINE

IRELAND LEGEND TONY WARD ON HIS HORROR AT WAR IN GAZA AND HIS JEWISH BACKGROUND



Derek FOLEY EXCLUSIVE

somewhere along the way – it might have been when both of them were on the way to a trip over to Ireland, I am not sure, before they got married and then I arrived on the scene," he says. "She was a Catholic girl and he was a Jewish guy and they got married but in order to do that he, obviously, had to give up his religion. "My mum and dad, in their initial years, even though I was born the year before, lived in Leeds, hence my sort of well known love for Leeds United

and I am season ticket holder to this day. I still go over. "My dad died a young man, he is buried in Leeds, I was five at the time and my mum decided we would return to Dublin." That's a tale, still unfolding for Ward – via continued research, that doesn't so much colour his view of the conflict engulfing Gaza as add to an overarching sadness. "From the way it is going at the moment, it is catastrophic, that's for sure," says Ward. "What happened in October was insupportable but what has happened since, what we are seeing is even worse again. It is daily, and in our sitting rooms on the TV. "I find it so hard to watch, I

sometimes have to turn it off. It is that horrendous, we are taking beyond rights and wrong, just wrong. "This is not a tale of a red corner and a blue corner, not a sporting contest in which winners and losers shake hands in the aftermath. **Side** "I am a sportsman so in something as simple as that, football for instance, you had a side and that was the be-all and end-all of who you supported and that was it, that's the way it worked all around the world. "When I was a schoolboy playing schoolboy soccer or rugby and the referee gave a bad decision against you, you might

think it was the worst thing in the world and it might take you a few weeks to get over it. "But as you go on in life you learn and I don't think right or wrong comes much more complex or simple in some ways, it is almost a contradiction to what we are witnessing now in Gaza and wider Palestine. "Ward was one of the Ireland players who refused to go to South Africa in 1981 for a highly controversial tour at the height of the Apartheid regime. He was one of the biggest stars in the game and it was one of the biggest stories at the time. But in general, sport and in particular rugby has become more complicated since his playing days when the Campbell/Ward debate was headline news. Back then, the Ireland rugby team was akin to a springtime novelty, four games over nine

weekends and, as there were five teams in the Five Nations, there was a gap for each team of almost a month at one point in the tournament. "In 1980, for instance, Ireland played their second game on February 2nd and their third game on 1st March! "You would play for your country on a Saturday and you would play for your club on a Sunday," continues Ward, "it was a different era, you did it because you wanted to, it was what you did. "Obviously, it was a little bit different with the away games but without fail if you were at home in Lansdowne Road with Ireland on a Saturday, you would play with your club, which in my case was Garryowen on Sunday." It is enough to make him wonder how he would fare if he was a young player today. "It is a very different game but I would love to have got the opportunity because one notable thing about the current professional game is there is not a lot of space.

"But I think the opportunity is there to maximize your potential although I would worry that while the modern player is getting that, in some cases I'd worry there is over-exposure. "It would have been great to have played a game I loved so much and had it as a livelihood but I am older now and that's life! "Ward admits to being a fan of the current Ireland team – and he felt the World Cup quarter-final disappointment keenly. **Well** "I think it was just frustration, I actually thought Ireland played very well through the World Cup and that's despite what the Pat Spillanes – who was a college mate of mine in Limerick – of this world think," says Ward. "It was plain wrong to just dismiss the effort out of hand, that it was just another quarter-final defeat. "We played well against New Zealand but guess what hap-

pened? We lost. It was just one of things but I certainly thought we did ourselves justice in the tournament and Pat Spillane was wrong in the way he talked about the effort. "As it was South Africa went on to win the competition, I had thought they would and they were my prediction before the competition." Andy Farrell has been very impressive and there may be more to come. "I can't find a fault in how he goes about his business and have enormous respect for him," says Ward. "Maybe I've an element of bias because he is from the north of England – they are a different breed – and as I mentioned I've lived there and as I said I am still a big Leeds fan. "I just love the way he seems to present himself to the players, I love the way he talks to them and about the team. I liked the selection for France, I think we are getting there, still going to improve.

"I didn't think they would throw Joe McCarthy in so early and ahead of James Ryan. "That was a bold move. I really admired the idea and that left Iain Henderson out, which was something I never expected. "It showed that Andy Farrell even though he relies very much on continuity and experience, where possible, that he is still brave enough to take in, obviously, what he sees on the training pitch and in all the matches on a weekly basis. "But then if given the magic wand what would he have changed for Marseilles last night – or for Italy next week? "Look, I'm a romantic and this is not a team selection criticism but I'd love to see Jordan Larmour in the side because I love the way he plays, I just love it. "I totally get why he is not there – they're worried about him being under the high ball against a team like France – and understand why Calvin Nash was there and he is a superb player too."

EDEL KNEW IT WAS SERIOUS

Declan KING

"JANUARY, you were doing so well!" sums up the start of 2024 for Ireland Women's captain and Gurranaברה Credit Union Brunell cup-winning skipper Edel Thornton before it all went wrong. Thornton had just led her club to a first ever Paudie O'Connor Cup but, last Sunday against Portlaoise Panthers, she went down screaming in agony after just four minutes and knew something was wrong. Turns out, it was her ACL. "I know I screamed but the initial pain subsided as I tried to stand up and I had the dreaded wobble in my knee and I knew something was really wrong," she says. "Well I'll definitely be out for this season and a good part of next, but I will also miss the upcoming international series of games."

port her to get back as quickly as possible." "Back to the league and the game of the weekend is Killester against The Address UCC Glanmire, who are without coach Mark Scannell; we spoke with his assistant Ronan O'Sullivan. "The team is looking forward to the game, as the recent games against Killester have been close and always played in a great sporting manner," said O'Sullivan. "The team is also very determined to try to achieve the best possible results while our head coach is missing from the sidelines." The other two games are just as interesting, as Catalyst Fr Mathews play SETU Wildcats and FloMax Liffey Celts face DCU Mercy.

Fixtures

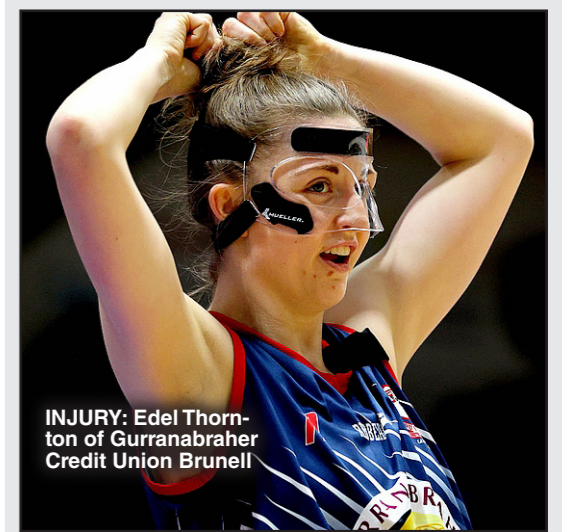
In the InsureMyVan men's league it is now all about play-off positions – with a number of appetising fixtures as Killester host Belfast Star as part of a club double-header at the Oblate Hall in Inchicore.

Griffith College Eanna go to Ulster University for what will be anything but an easy fixture for the visitors, as Darren McGovern told us. "It's a big test for us up there," said McGovern. "They have made some changes and I think for the better. We found a way to win last week and we'll be travelling north with one objective and that's producing a good enough performance that leads to a win."

Tough

Elsewhere, it's Energywise Ireland Neptune against Maree, Bright St Vincent's play EJ Sligo, UCC Demons entertain Templeogue, Garvey's Tralee have a derby against Flexachem Killoeglin and Maigh Cuillinn host Irish Guide Dogs Ballincollig@MTU. "I have no doubt she will be back stronger. Edel has a fantastic family and network around her and they along with us will help and sup-

They also have really tough games against their closest challengers Killester, FloMax Liffey Celts and SETU Waterford Wildcats. Tough games at the best of times but without their talisman, even more so. The Irish Daily Star also spoke with the Irish national team's head coach James Weldon. "I am absolutely devastated for Edel, she is an incredible young woman and leader for us and will be really missed on and off the court," says Weldon. "I have no doubt she will be back stronger. Edel has a fantastic family and network around her and they along with us will help and sup-



INJURY: Edel Thornton of Gurranaברה Credit Union Brunell