

BUGNER ([redacted]) Joe

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Ali's Old Pal Doesn't Figure To Spoil 'Farewell' Fight

That very charismatic Muhammad Ali pops up in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Monday night against Joe Bugner, the English heavyweight from Hungary (his parents fled during the uprising in 1956). Bugner is 25 now and it's his eight-year advantage in age that makes many people think he will dethrone Ali. But don't bet on it.

Bugner was a sparring partner for Ali in July, 1972, when The Great One fought some palooka named Al (Blue) Lewis, well-muscled in body and head, but not much for skill, in Dublin, Ireland.

Ali enjoyed training with Bugner, who was on the same card. The two dressed together and one day Ali said, "Joe, I can't talk to you like a friend no more. We may be fighting in that ring and I can't be friends with men I fight, not till later."

Bugner seemed pleased by the attention he received from Ali. Nobody at the time knew how good or how bad Bugner was. He was the European heavyweight champion, but that's like being head of the Nebraska Navy.

Their sparring sessions in Dublin seemed more like dances. Few blows were struck in anger or even in friendship.

Fight night at Croke Stadium the crowd went mad when Ali, suffering from a cold, finally put away Lewis in the 11th round. Bugner cut up a pork chop named Paul Neilson, a blond with a fire hose of fat around his middle, and that fight was stopped in the fifth.

Bugner, at 6-foot-4, is a statuesque boxer who appears to be on leave from a museum. He fought Ali in Las Vegas in February, 1973, and nobody gave him much of a chance. But he stayed the distance of 12 rounds and he shook up Ali twice. Other than that, it wasn't much of a fight.

Bugner said before that fight that he had adopted American methods of training. "Your American boxer does nothing else but fight," Bugner commented. "He has no other job on the side and he prepares well. Boxing is a profession with an American and I have made it my profession, too."

Ali has been dropping hints that he will retire after the Bugner fight, but one must remember that the late Maurice Chevalier made something like 10 "farewell" tours before he quit—and not by choice.

Don King, who has promoted several of



BUCHNER (7/1/70)
1972

There seems to be a definite love-hate relationship between Ali and the general public, much of which wants to see him get his block knocked off. But it will be a time of famine when Ali retires.

He has that certain something. There is a memory of Ronald Reagan, who was in Dublin for a speech, coming out of the Gresham Hotel just behind Ali. Crowds had jammed the streets and Ali cheerfully pushed his way through accompanied by a continuous ovation. About that time Reagan came out, all smiles at the reception.

Nobody had the heart to tell him the truth.

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Ali's fights, has been in a panic at the prospect. So has much of the boxing fraternity. King has the rubber match lined up between Ali and Joe Frazier and it is bound to carry the richest gate in history. A Bugner-Frazier match would be hardly the same draw and boxing without Ali will take years to regain public attention.

It is possible Bugner will spoil Ali's announced intention of naming his successor upon retirement. But it is not probable. Great fighters like Ali aren't beaten by second-raters until physically over the hill. Ali proved against George Foreman that if he trains, he can still outfight anybody. Ali hardly looked impressive for Chuck Wepner, but then the Great Man can't bother overworking himself and trained for the fight by changing bath towels every day.

