



**POP-STAR
POTENTIAL:**
Style experts say that
Colin McMillan has
'cross-over' appeal
that opens new areas
of possibility

Colin McMillan, educated and articulate, is at the forefront of a new breed of boxer, transcending the sport's traditional base, reports
CHRIS BRYANS

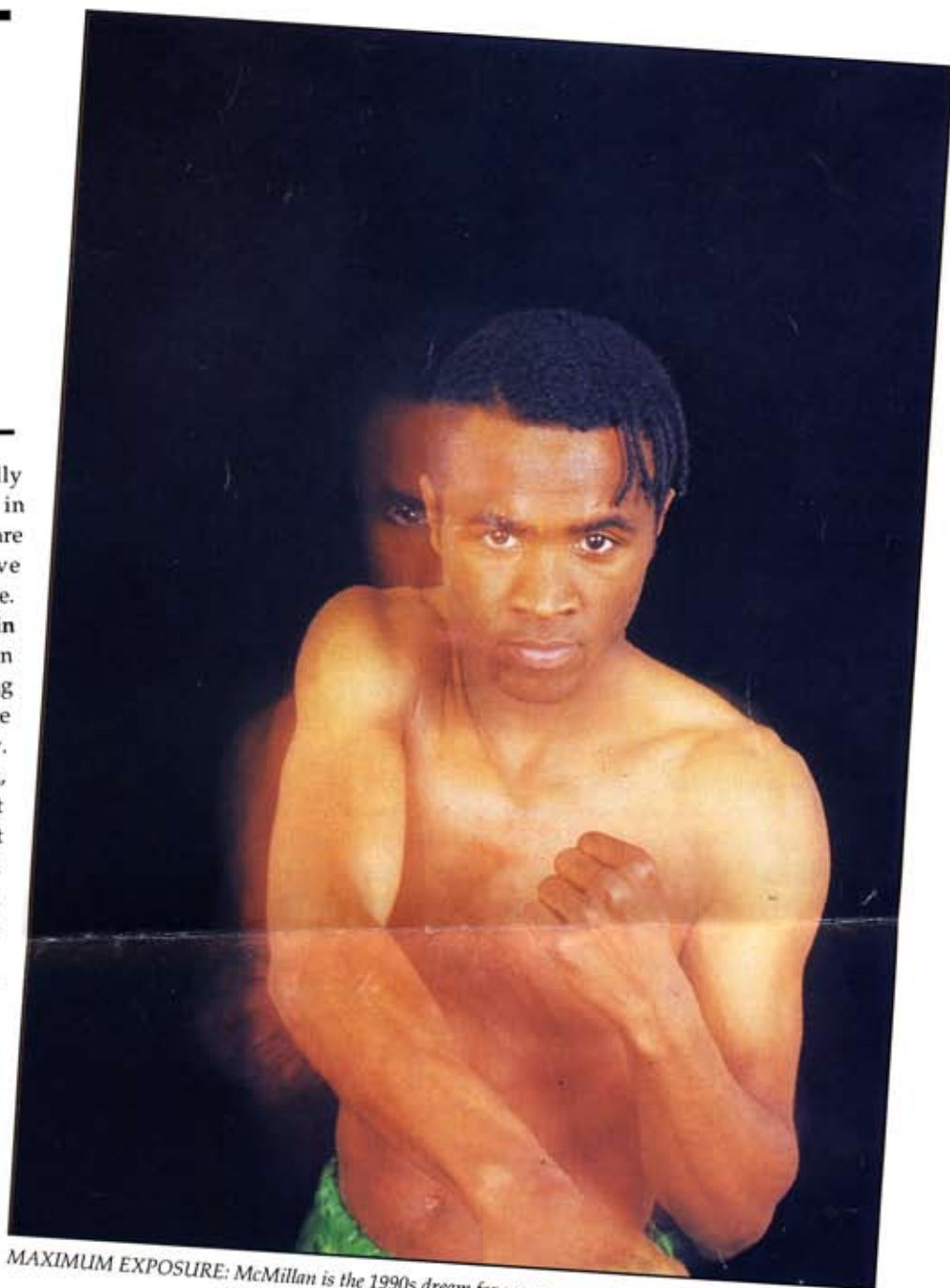
Conservatism has perpetually been the order of the day in British boxing, but changes are afoot, possibly with explosive consequences for the sport as a whole.

Take the case of 25-year-old **Colin McMillan**, featherweight champion of Great Britain since a breathtaking seventh round stoppage of Gary De Roux at the London Arena in May. Until now it has been Chris Eubank, the former WBO middleweight champion, who has best characterized the new and forceful image of an intelligent boxer, skilfully plying his trade in the ring, but equally as comfortable outside it, whether discussing the merits of Western attitudes towards the Kurdish rebels or the power of Nigel Benn's left hook. But McMillan has attracted attention, too, as an articulate, thinking fighter.

To those inside the sport, this brand of boxer is far from being a fresh phenomenon, and the term "new breed" used by the style magazines is often decried. For the boxing fraternity, it is a label used only by those on the outside looking in, as it were.

"It's something that has always been there," says Cardiff light-heavyweight Nicky Piper, unbeaten as a professional and also one of Britain's most intelligent sportsmen with an IQ of 153. "But now it's being brought out a lot more. You have to be intelligent to be at the top. Someone like Lloyd Honeyghan might not be very literate or well read, but he's obviously very intelligent."

The difference now, though, is that after speaking their minds, the boxers are actually putting their views into practice.



MAXIMUM EXPOSURE: McMillan is the 1990s dream for managers and marketing men

A CHANGE OF IMAGE

Here, Eubank reigns supreme at the moment, but that mantle could shortly be passed to Colin McMillan.

He's intelligent, photogenic, forthright,

witty, charismatic and, say some arch observers who watched him totally befuddle De Roux, a potential all-time great British fighter.

He's been called "the hottest thing on two feet", "a featherweight version of Sugar Ray Leonard and Sugar Ray Robinson rolled into one" and, perhaps most significantly, simply "a good fighter" by seminal American fight figure Ray Arcel. You sense that all it needs now is for someone to write: "I've seen the future of British boxing and it goes by the name of Colin McMillan."

His skills echo a past age when boxers boxed, all grace and poise, simultaneously self-effacing and supremely confident, and his face has been featured in the pages of *The Face*, *Time Out*, *Sky*, *For Him*, and about every other style magazine of the moment.

In short, Colin McMillan is the 1990s dream for managers who, more and more, are seeing the boxer as not merely the pugilist, but as one who, marketed correctly, can cross over and appeal to people across the board: in fashion, in pop, in "style". The 1990s manager wants to splice together the boxer and the showman to prise open new fields of opportunity in a sport which, using its own terminology, is well behind on points in the age of the consumer.

But there is a difference with Colin McMillan: he doesn't have a manager. He takes care of business himself.

He is an astute businessman who happens to wear boxing gloves: commercially aware enough to stay independent (although he's advised by Jonathan Rendall, boxing writer for *The Independent on Sunday*, and trained by former amateur heavyweight Howard Rainey), and reap the rewards he and he alone has sweated for in the ring.

In turbulent times for the sport when talk of a boxers' union has been heard and some elements are looking to do away with the old and bring in the new, the example McMillan is setting as a successful entrepreneur who has "done it" without the traditional managerial figure could have far-reaching implications for a sport that, like it or not, is being dragged kicking and screaming into the 1990s.

But even now, says Denis Campbell, author of two recent articles in *The Face* and *Time Out* highlighting the new and aggressive attitude to selling a fighter, boxing is still only at the point where football was a few years ago. The fresh



PHOTOGENIC: McMillan is sought after by advertisers

forces within the sport, though, are developing apace.

"The difference between a Frank Warren promotion and a dusty old promotion down the York Hall, Bethnal Green is amazing. The razzmatazz sports - football, wrestling, American football - have been a lot quicker on the uptake - but they have had the people and the directional sense to tap into that pop star potential. Now boxing is catching up", says Mr. Campbell.

"To take one example", says Frank Burke, press officer for Frank Warren, "a year or two ago British fight promoters were still knocking out posters publicising a boxer as so-and-so 'He comes to fight' 'Ding Dong Battle' - all that kind of thing. We thought we'd change the posters, make them attractive to anyone who sees them. The first one was for the George Collins - Kirkland Laing fight. You've got to take your influences from everywhere: film, comics, whatever - an eclectic approach. Don't just confine it to boxing or your market will be too limited."

Sound counsel indeed; counsel that McMillan has followed religiously. But though he finds himself within fingertip reach of lucrative sponsorship deals, it was by no means certain in his early days as a professional that he would make it through the vital formative period.

"I met Colin when I invited him as my guest to the boxing writers' dinner," says adviser Jonathan Rendall, who boxed himself, as a light-heavyweight, during his

days as an undergraduate at Maudlin College, Oxford.

"One of my briefs as Srikumar Sen's deputy on *The Times* (before Rendall joined *The Independent*) had been the London ABA finals and the ABA finals themselves, where I saw Colin, and he became one of my favourite boxers. So when he became a pro I tried to give him as much publicity as I could."

McMillan had turned to the paid ranks under Terry Marsh, the former IBF light-welterweight champion, but "things didn't work out" and they parted amicably.

"At that particular time, Terry would have managed me until such time as I could manage myself," says McMillan. "But when we separated I needed someone who knew how the boxing world

operated to help me out in the early days. A lot of outside work has to be done and it's difficult to do it all on your own. But the kind of offers I was getting didn't seem good to me."

"He seemed sort of directionless," says Mr. Rendall. "He was then 2-1 as a pro, having just lost to Alan McKay on a cut eye, and it seemed ridiculous for a fighter of his talents to be scrapping around the small halls, looking for fights, which was what was happening."

So Mr. Rendall agreed to bang the drum, as it were, on McMillan's behalf.

"I thought that if it was known that he was looking for someone, then one of the major players on the British scene would come in for him, so I agreed to sort of give him a reference, get in touch with some people I knew. But to my great surprise I rang around everybody and no one was really interested."

With hindsight, it seems, there are none so blind as those who will not see.

"Perhaps the problem was that he hadn't gone with one of the majors when he started as a pro", says Mr. Rendall. "And then when he lost to McKay, people only saw the result in the paper: Alan McKay w rsc 3 Colin McMillan. People didn't want to know whether he got stopped on a cut or what."

Things reached an impasse until the two met up again at a York Hall show where McMillan was vainly attempting to gain admittance.

"He was outside trying to get in, so I took

him in with me and we talked and I ended up by saying: 'Hang the lot of them'."

Most boxers, when a contract is dangled before them, think purely of the short term, taking the view that you should never look a gift horse in the mouth. But McMillan could see the pitfalls.

"There were people who did want to sign him, but only on the three-year contract," says Mr. Rendall, "and Colin, being the intelligent man he is, didn't want to sign something like that, which is weighted towards the person he signs with."

"So I suggested to him that he go self-managed and if he needed advice in or out of the ring then he could come to me."

Enter Frank Warren, who agreed to give Colin spots on his shows, which inevitably meant high-profile exposure of the kind that, to someone of McMillan's talents, was pure lifeblood.

From there progress was, if not spectacular, then encouragingly steady.

Frankie Taylor came up with a piece on him in *The Sunday People* and through the combined efforts of Frank Burke at Warren's office and Mr. Rendall, Colin began to appear in the mainstream media, culminating more recently in a spot on BBC 2's *Reportage*.

But McMillan, though the most celebrated example, has far from cornered the market in this field. In recent years some managers, Barry Hearn and Frank Warren for example, have embraced the aforementioned notion that boxing must move away from just being boxing and into

the wider, more lucrative avenues that come from appealing across the spectrum. There is a new perception of boxing and boxers: as stylish, almost pop culture figures who are beginning to amalgamate all the previously disparate elements of youth aspirations into a more unified whole.

Yuppie boxing, even?

'Alan McKay w rsc 3 Colin McMillan.

People didn't want to know whether he got stopped on a cut or what'

- Jonathan Rendall

"Yuppie only in the sense that it is beginning to understand the dynamics of style and promotion," says Denis Campbell.

"But I definitely think there is a new perception - the new massive promotional drive. Gary Stretch, for example, is seen in the pop pages of the *Daily Mirror*. It's the sort of niche where footballers found themselves years ago. The odd one or two have crossed over before, but pretty rarely."

It's a point emphasised by Jonathan Rendall.

"Even a figure like Muhammad Ali earned nearly everything inside the ring. The only endorsements he ended up doing were for minor dog foods and things like

starting to mix fashion and pop, the building blocks of popular culture," says Mr. Campbell.

But with the concentration of, dare one say it, American style presentation in these new quarters, dark voices have muttered that with some, though, most agree, not McMillan, it is a case of style over substance: the Gary Stretch factor, for want of a better term.

Mr. Campbell sounds a warning.

"Some of the lesser-known members of some stables I've been to who are being marketed in this way are absolutely disastrous boxers, who will never make it on any level that you or I could understand."

Barry Hearn himself, quoted in *The Face*, said: "One, you've got to sell tickets. Two, you've got to win. I'm not sure which is more important . . . I think selling tickets may just have the edge."

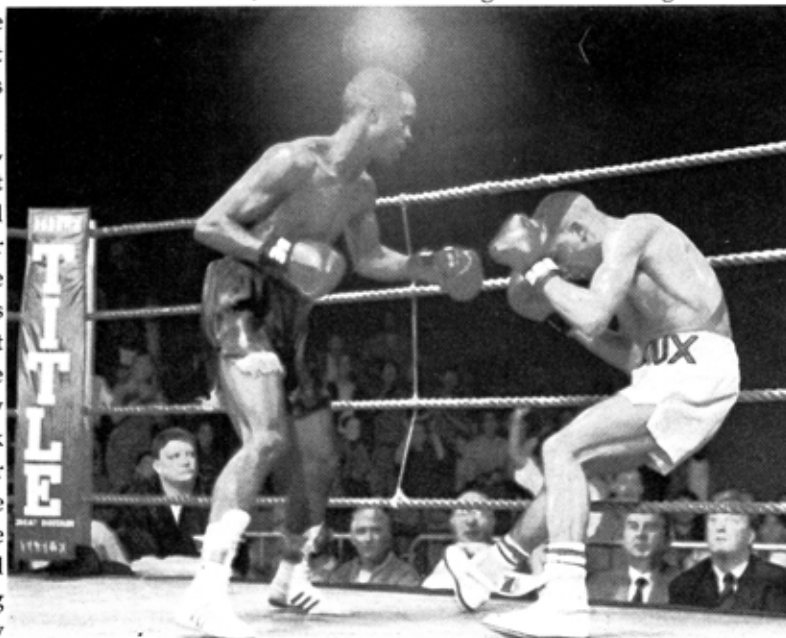
The WBO middleweight title fight in April between Eubank and Stretch is, perhaps, the best case in point. Stretch hadn't set foot in a ring for a professional bout for over a year but somehow qualified to fight for a "world title" with only one contest as a middleweight behind him. Predictably, he was stopped in six rounds.

"The Stretch-Eubank promotion was an amazing piece of selling," says Frank Burke at the Warren office. "They transcended the event. The main thing was to be there. The promotion is just so important."

Another example, says Mr. Burke, was George Foreman's excursion on to British soil last September.

"Before Foreman actually landed over here tickets had been going pretty slowly, but after he arrived and put on a great show at the press conferences we sold tickets like they were going out of fashion."

Another danger lies in the fact that someone who does bridge the gap between boxing and the wider expanse could become a victim of indiscriminate promotion. Just as important, it would seem, as actually succeeding in breaking the shackles that have traditionally chained down the sport, is the way you subsequently use that opportunity. Again, Stretch is perceived as



McMILLAN showed he could fight when he stopped Gary De Roux to win the British title Professional Sport

that," he says.

Now, it appears, the intention from the outset is to ensure that the boxers work on three or four different levels aside from the obvious one as a fighter.

"Obviously, the hard sell of boxers is as old as the hills, but in terms of the breadth of their appeal I think the attempt to widen it is definitely a new thing. They are

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the ultimate example of how not to do things.

"He signed up with a PR company in the West End," says Mr. Rendall, "and they placed him with page three girls and being seen in night clubs with various female pop singers.

"In the end *Private Eye* did a piece in the media section asking who this mysterious Gary Stretch figure was: 'No one knows what he does, but he keeps on being associated with these women.'

"In the end, if you can't sell a story of real substance, then you don't really have a story worth selling and I think a lot of the Stretch stories were not worth selling in the end.

"It must have been worrying for him. He was getting a lot of newsprint but news-space doesn't always translate into money and he was getting fame for often a lot of the wrong reasons."

Practically famous for being famous, it appears.

Similarly, Mr. Rendall and McMillan are anxious to steer a course away from the extreme brand of publicity garnered by Nigel Benn, although a commensurately high public profile is the ultimate aim.

"Benn was pursuing a particular image," says Mr. Rendall. "For example, when they held the initial press conference for Benn against Anthony Logan there were three people there. But during that conference Logan was rubbishing Benn and Benn took the bait and tried to attack Logan."

Needless to say, the word was spread around to the desired effect. At the next press conference there were about 50 reporters in attendance. They knew there could be fireworks.

"So if Colin were to attack his opponent at a press conference his publicity problems might be over for ever," says Mr. Rendall. "But it's not something he wants to do and it's certainly not something I would encourage him to do."

Much more specifically targeted is the way Mr. Rendall would like McMillan to be advanced to the public. He stresses the

need to be selective, particularly difficult in these times of recession: to compromise now, to take the money and run from a source one might otherwise reject might be briefly beneficial, but one false move could endanger future success.

"Let's imagine," he says, "that the *Sunday Sport* wanted to sponsor Colin McMillan. All credit to them, they have covered boxing a lot. But though they might give

associate him."

Rather than, in willy-nilly fashion, take any and all offers that have come their way, McMillan and Mr. Rendall have carved out a niche that is now reaping its own rewards.

The Face, never a magazine to colour its pages with anything less than strictly non-tacky material, have dedicated a fair amount of space to McMillan.

"We pick on subjects that reflect what is happening today and Colin McMillan is certainly representative of that," says deputy editor John Godfrey.

And McMillan was recently featured modelling for clothing giants *Everlast*. They were searching for a new name to introduce a line of gym, leisure and sportswear that maintained the original boxing line, worn in the past by Muhammad Ali and Rocky Marciano, but which would attract all sports men and women.

McMillan fitted the bill perfectly and in *The Mail on Sunday* last February he sported *Everlast* wear during the International Mens and Boys Wear Exhibition for the launch of their autumn/winter '91 collection.

And now, after the success of that initial shoot and Colin's breathtaking showing against De Roux, they seem eager for the association to continue.

"We wanted a boxer, intelligent and articulate and with an individual style and a sense of independence," says Roger Wilkinson of *Everlast*. "And Colin was the ideal choice for us with a personality and boxing style which appeals to a wide audience."

"Now we are looking forward to working with Colin in the future and are currently discussing plans for specific dates and events."

But, says Mr. Rendall, boxing remains very much *sui generis* with regards to sponsorship, purely because of the nature of the beast.

"As far as marrying up commercial factors outside of purse money, it is more difficult than in other sports because there



'People within the trade can tell who is for real and who is just hype'

- Colin McMillan

him two or three thousand in the short run, which will pay off his mortgage for a couple of months, in the long term it could put off all types of other sponsors because they don't want to be associated with someone who has had that kind of identification [with a publication noted for lurid stories, many of prurient interest] in the past.

"You have to be careful with whom you

is no precedent. If a sponsor is behind an individual boxer, then what that sponsor must always be terrified of is the health angle. If you have a cyclist who is just breaking into a team for a stage race, and he is at a similar stage relatively to Colin McMillan, he can go to the sponsors and say: 'We know how much you're paying Stephen Roche. He's getting so much, so on that scale I should be getting XXX amount.'

"So whenever you're approaching potential sponsors, you're going in completely blind, and that can put them off because they feel that because there's no precedent, there must be a fundamental flaw, which I suppose in a way there is."

"It's very much a sanitised point of view," says Denis Campbell. "After all, the aim is to bludgeon people. There will always be that enormous turn-off factor that has to be overcome."

"The plan is for boxers to work on those other three or four levels and then say, almost as a PS: 'Oh, by the way, this person knocks people out for a living'."

Thus, says Mr. Rendall, you have to approach it from a different angle.

"You have to have something in the boxer which will be attractive to the sponsor whether he wins or loses; they are really supporting the personality."

"And that's where Colin comes in. The best thing he has going for him is his natural charm. He's the sort of guy whom people take an immediate liking to, he has an innate charm and that's not really something you can teach. That's really his best asset and it makes marketing him very easy."

So, despite the physical risks inherent within the sport, McMillan appears on the brink of breaking down the age-old barriers to major league success.

So much for McMillan the product. What



THE REAL THING: The victory over De Roux won mass acclaim for McMillan

about McMillan the boxer? After all, as McMillan says himself: "At the end of the day, when you enter the ring it's a one-on-one situation and you have to be able to fight. People within the trade can tell who is for real and who is just hype."

Unlike other boxers, who glare moodily from the fashion pages but fall foul of the "all that glistens is not gold" accusation when they actually lace on the mits, it seems that McMillan is, to use an Americanism, "the real thing." No two ways about it - he can fight to back up his image.

With big things in the offing before he fought Gary De Roux, a mistake at that stage could have proved fatal. At a press conference three weeks before fight night, champion De Roux was visibly angered at being treated almost as a sideshow to the Colin McMillan story. Frank Warren spoke of world title challenges in the autumn as if De Roux was merely an annoying fly to be swatted away. Although the situation was not of McMillan's making and he appreciates that "it must have irked Gary", some felt that McMillan might be the fall guy on 22 May.

Consensus in some quarters held that McMillan didn't possess sufficient resolve for the big occasion, having twice failed to lift an ABA title, losing to Paul Hodgkinson, former European featherweight champion and a potential future opponent for Colin,

and Welshman Floyd Havard.

But all McMillan's detractors espied was a master class of boxing of a quality that was just about as good as it gets. "Talent like that from a British fighter is about as rare as hen's teeth", someone commented to me; an unusual simile but just about on the mark. *The Times's* Srikumar Sen paid what seemed to some the ultimate compliment for a boxer when he

wrote that McMillan's destruction of a respected fighter, who had earned his right to be champion the hard way, was awash with more talent than even Herol Graham might have been able to muster.

It might be splitting hairs to try to evaluate how good it really was, but you get the picture. To be sure, it was a heady brew and at the same time payback for all those who had been unconvinced by Colin's skills.

But while ringside positively buzzed at the virtuoso performance it had just witnessed, one person somewhat less surprised by it all, though, of course, no less elated, was Jonathan Rendall. It was confirmation, if confirmation was needed, of what he had known for some time.

Trips to America, workouts in the toughest gyms, and glowing tributes from some of the most astute brains in the sport merely reinforced his own belief that he was adviser to a potential superstar.

Because of Mr. Rendall's unswerving faith in McMillan's abilities, it was decided there was no point in dallying around: McMillan was put in at the deep end, sparring with former world amateur champion Kelcie Banks, who is trained by Cornelius Boza-Edwards, the Ugandan-Lononder ex-world champ who now lives

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in Las Vegas.

"Colin was in hostile territory," says Mr. Rendall. "We went down on the first day to the Golden Gloves in downtown Las Vegas and they were pretty confident, saying they should go easy on this guy."

"But Colin not only beat Banks over the four rounds, he gave him a cut lip. I've never seen Colin so intense as he was on that day. I'm not saying that Kelcie Banks is going to become a fantastic champion as a pro, but it still remains that as an amateur he was the best in the world and in the gym he's a formidable proposition: he's getting up towards six foot tall and, when Colin sparred with him, he was weighing just upwards of the lightweight limit."

American pride had been dented, by a "limey" of all people, and, as Rendall says, war had been declared.

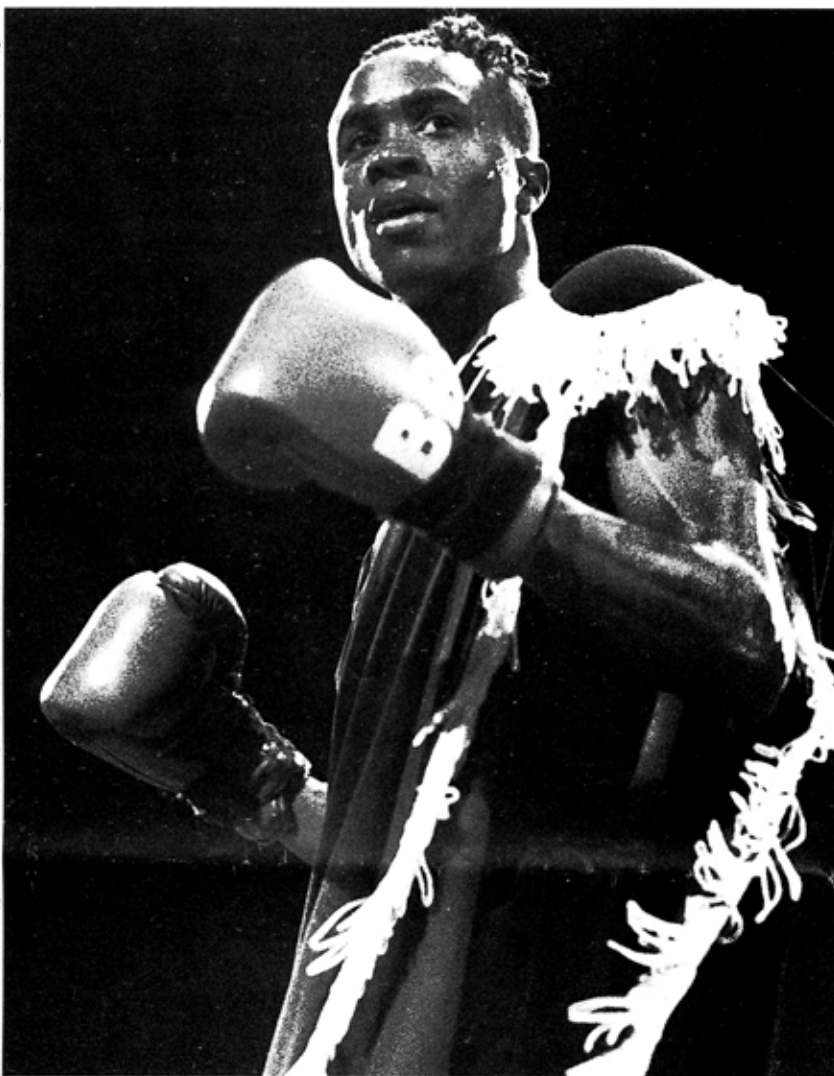
"When we came back the next day they put Colin in for four rounds with a Puerto Rican light-middleweight who had just started his pro career. Only then did Boza-Edwards put Banks in with Colin again, fresh, as it were, after Colin had just had four tough rounds with a light-middle. But he still handled Banks for three rounds before tiring in the fourth."

"Banks had still not established his superiority and he wanted to fight on for a few more rounds, but Colin just thought it was getting a bit ridiculous."

Mission impossible, though, had been accomplished.

"Colin had proved himself in the gym, Boza was happy to have him as part of the camp for the rest of that week."

But that wasn't Colin's first excursion in the U.S., says Mr. Rendall. Just after the two got together in 1989 they went out to New York's lower east side - "a very dodgy area" - where they went to seek the approval of legend Ray Arcel. The straight-



'I would like to think that I will always be in the driving seat, in control of what is going on'

- Colin McMillan

talking Arcel was 90 by this time and in his career had been the mastermind behind a score of world champions, including the equally legendary Roberto Duran. Not, you'd be correct in assuming, a man to be easily impressed.

"Ray said to me as soon as I got there: 'I gotta warn ya, if this guy's no good, I'll tell ya straight off,'" says Mr. Rendall.

But after an agonising wait with "bated breath" in the Times Square gym Arcel delivered his verdict. "Don't worry. This guy's a good fighter," he said.

There then followed trips to Gleason's gym and lunch with Mr. Arcel.

"I just wish this guy was ten years

younger. He's such a marvellous guy," said McMillan after talking with the great man.

But had he been at the London Arena to see Colin dazzle, demoralise and finally demolish De Roux, Mr. Arcel might have wondered what even his mephisto conjuring could have added to McMillan's performance.

Doubters were, for the most part silenced by that performance. But it is a truism that big punchers pull in the crowds, and, as some of the daily newspaper reporters pointed out, the knock against McMillan is that even though he dropped De Roux in the seventh, it was due to the cumulative effect of punishment doled out over the previous six rounds.

Adviser Rendall conceded that "Colin is by no means a one-punch hitter" but stops well-short of the accusation that the fighter might have problems, as

some have said, hitting his way out of a light fog.

"I think the 'can't punch' thing is quite strange," he says. "We've become too obsessed with the knockout in recent years. Most knockouts, clean knockouts as opposed to people going over and saying they don't want to get up, is a matter of good matchmaking."

"To be a heavy puncher you have to put yourself in the position where you could be hit hard yourself, and that's why there's no mystery as to why the big punchers often get knocked out themselves. It's the nature of the approach to the game."

"But as far as Colin's record is concerned, a lot of the people he has fought have decided after one or two rounds that this guy is so fast that they have decided to cover up and get out of there intact."

"The only person who really came out to win against him, really try to knock him out, was Darren Weller and he came on to punches and paid the price."

"I always remember what Emanuel

Steward once told me. 'Tommy Hearn is not a big puncher,' he said, 'Tommy Hearn hits people when they don't expect to be hit. If he came into the room and told me he was going to hit me in the stomach, then it would hurt. But it wouldn't knock me over because I'd know it was coming.'

"But then I could go into the next room and my five-year-old niece would poke me in the ribs and I would be over because I wasn't expecting it."

"It's all timing and I think that when Colin comes into the championship phase he'll start stopping a lot more people."

Some have also expressed the concern that Colin might, to the detriment of his boxing career, be in danger of suffocation by the publicity machine when he really strikes the big time. Before he had lifted even a Southern Area championship, McMillan enjoyed a measure of exposure granted to few other fighters. What might it be like now he has won something?

Denis Campbell of *Time Out* agrees that some fighters might be overwhelmed by it all and find themselves no longer in control of their own destiny, but says that "McMillan is the exception".

"He's pretty sparky and plugged in," he says.

Frank Burke at the Warren office agrees: McMillan is nobody's fool.

"If Colin goes to me: 'I don't want to do this sort of stuff, I don't want to be bothered,' then that's the end of it".

"He'll ring me up all the time asking what's happening with this, what's happening with that. He was producing T-shirts for the fight with De Roux and he sat round with me and we thrashed it out - 'I like this, I think that's rubbish,' that sort of thing."

And though Jonathan Rendall is no mere apple polisher in the scheme of things, decisions are thrashed out between himself and the fighter before McMillan delivers his final and unalterable verdict.

"If it [publicity and marketing] did ever threaten to get out of hand then I would just stop it," says McMillan.

"Training is the most important thing and everything else is secondary. Those things have to be fitted around your training schedule. If they were to conflict, then gym work would come first. The *Reportage* feature, for example, was done on the day after my fight."

"I would like to think that I will always be in the driving seat, in control of what is



NON-PUNCHER?: McMillan stopped import Herbie Bivalacqua in the third

Professional Sport

going on".

But at the same time he is fully aware of the need to accommodate commercial factors. Most managers and promoters don't tend to look outside the sport, he says.

"You have to transcend boxing and you have to get mainstream people interested in you," he says. "That's very important for all boxers. After all, you're out there to get as much recognition as you can and that equates into a better financial position for you in the end."

And aside from financial remunerations, it would appear that this emphasis on promoting boxers as articulate creatures is bringing forth hitherto hidden respect for a profession previously thought by mainstream media to inhabit only "thick pugs".

"In the past if you spoke to people and told them you boxed for a living, then they immediately had their own stereotypical views of what you would be like," says Nicky Piper.

"But with the new angle of actually promoting fighters as the intelligent people they have always been, you do tend to get a lot more respect from people outside of

boxing who otherwise might have dismissed you out of hand."

And as McMillan says, anything he or any of the other boxers can do to improve their own image, must also by definition reflect upon the whole of the sport.

"In the long run it's going to benefit everyone," he says.

With his slight build, diminutive even by featherweight standards, unmarked mahogany features, sunny side up disposition, and delicate lisp, Colin McMillan might seem a peculiar choice for the 1990s' face of such a raw and uncompromising profession, but it seems inevitable that he's the shape of things to come, both in and out of the ring.

"He even has his own, personal correspondent," says Rendall, as if to emphasise the embarrassment of riches.

"When I was interviewed for the job on *The Independent on Sunday*, I told them that if I got the job I didn't want to write on Colin because I feared a conflict of interests. So we have a guy called James Rampton, the TV reviewer, who is the official Colin McMillan broadsheet correspondent."

How can he go wrong?

We've all seen prospects self-destruct in the past and hopes turn out to be dopes, but **Colin McMillan**, the latest fighter for whom great things are being predicted, looks the proverbial surefire wager to go all the way. Nothing he's done so far, at least, has in any way cast doubt on the legitimacy of the glut of gushing epithets thrown his way, writes **CHRIS BRYANS**.

But the 25-year-old British featherweight champion says he's beginning to feel the weight of expectation on his shoulders in the run-up to his first defence of the title, against surprise challenger **Kevin Pritchard** at the York Hall on 4 September.

"I was thinking about it the other day," he said. "After the fight with Gary De Roux [which won him the title in May] people's expectations are now so high. Even in my last fight [a third round stoppage of **Herbie Bivalacqua**] people were saying I was much more aggressive, but from a technical point of view there were too many mistakes."

Nevertheless, to use an overworked phrase McMillan is on the crest of a wave after dissecting De Roux on that night of high excitement at the Docklands Arena. And while one doesn't like to be a prophet of doom, Pritchard, the aggressive former super-featherweight champion, does seem to constitute the perfect foil for McMillan to parade his extravagant talents once again, this time across town at the famous Bethnal Green venue.

"I like the guys who come at me, the ones I don't have to go looking for," said McMillan ominously.

And while McMillan acknowledges his opponent's strength and experience, this fight must be a last throw of the dice for Pritchard: he's dropping down a division, has lost his last two fights, and, after the second of those reverses - to Dane Jimmy Bredahl in three rounds last May - was advised to hang up the gloves by manager Jim McMillan.

It's an understatement to say that Pritchard's not expected to win. In fact, he will be seen to have excelled himself if he can last the distance. But then, similar opinions were expressed when Pritchard



McMillan will hope to dispose of Kevin Pritchard in the manner that he dealt with Herbie Bivalacqua

McMillan should shine

challenged the then unbeaten Hugh Forde for the 9st 4lb title last year. One big right-hander in the fourth changed all that.

But then he lost the crown in March in a see-saw eight-rounder with Robert Dickie when body blows unravelled the 29-year-old and it's difficult to escape the feeling that, in knocking out Forde so unexpectedly, the unfashionable Preston-based fighter's fifteen minutes of fame have come and gone.

Still, he's got the big right hand which has accounted for many of his 23 victims (against 21 losses and three draws). But McMillan illustrated against the ferocious De Roux that the structure of his chin is sound. And we all know there's nothing wrong with his skills in the finer aspects of the sport.

We shall see in time whether McMillan can cope as adeptly with the capable boxer as he obviously can with the aggressive types. But in 19 fights to date (18 wins and an injury-induced stoppage loss) weaknesses of any sort haven't made themselves apparent.

So it's on the cards that Pritchard will be in for a night of chasing, trying to run down the champion and corner him long enough to hit him. Everything points, though, towards it all being in vain.

New model Forde

The lure of a title and the conviction that everything will be all right on the night has brought **Hugh Forde** back down among the super-feathers for a crack at Commonwealth champion **Thunder Aryeh** at the Wolverhampton Civic Hall on 10 September, writes **CHRIS BRYANS**.

A tortuous nine-round tutorial administered in stern fashion by mountain high Canadian Tony Pep in February was, said the lanky Brummie at the time, evidence enough that his days in the 9st 4lb division were numbered. Those last few pounds were proving just too difficult to shift, he said.

And, after losing two in succession: to Kevin Pritchard - for the domestic super-feather title - and then the disastrous night against Pep, Forde did indeed look a rejuvenated fighter when he returned as a lightweight to outclass Richard Joyce in five rounds in May for his 21st win, against those two losses.

But now Forde will once more be attempting to whittle his frame down to the 9st 4lb limit.

"I've thought long and hard about this move and I'm convinced my future is among the super-feathers," said Forde.

"When I fought Pep I was having a bit of a rocky period with Barry (Hearn). And before that I had begun to get a bit complacent. I thought that victory was just a formality, so long as I made the weight."

Now, he says, he's as devoted as he ever was, and sees no problems, "if I follow my training schedule."

But Forde accepts that his situation is one fraught with potential pitfalls.

"If I get in the ring and it's not there, I'll have to accept that I've outgrown the division. But nothing I've seen from Aryeh scares me."

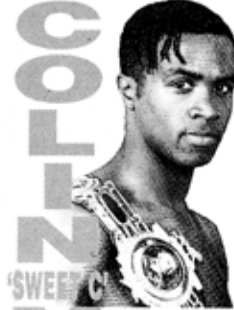
The Ghanaian champion has twice visited these shores, comfortably negotiating a lustreless challenge from Najib Daho last November and then cutting and stopping Mark Reefer in February in a fight that had hardly begun to get going. In neither of the fights was Aryeh really extended but Forde says he's ready for anything the African may try.

"With my physical advantages I'll be looking to outpoint him, but if I have to get involved then I will," he said.

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