

Ken Buchanan remembered

Boxing legend Ken Buchanan, MBE, would have loved this.

The cheeky former joiner from Portobello being paid the ultimate accolade by his home city with a memorial service in St Giles' Cathedral, founded in 1124 by King David 1, and a centre for civic services like the Most Noble Order of the Thistle and the Kirking of Parliament, and less than a year after a special service following the death of Queen Elizabeth attended by King Charles III and members of the Royal Family.

Buchanan's final journey then took Scotland's first undisputed world boxing champion past his statue at the top of Leith Walk and to the former site of Sparta Boxing club where he trained throughout his glittering career. His wishes were respected.

He died aged 77, around a year after his family announced he had been diagnosed with dementia, he passed away, nature crippling a man of huge talent who had punched his way from obscurity to the top of the pugilistic world, and Ken did it the hard way.

The technically gifted and gritty fighter won the WBA lightweight world title by dethroning Panama's Ismael Laguna, but had to fight in the stifling heat of Puerto Rico on September 26, 1970 in the Hiram Bithorn Stadium, Laguna's cornermen having cunningly contrived to have their man in the shaded corner and away from the burning sun during the fight.

Others may have crumbled but Buchanan always had a stubborn streak, a man who thrived on adversity. He beat the weather, he downed Laguna and then annexed the WBC title by beating Ruben Navarro on February 12, 1971 in the Sports Arena, Los

Angeles.

Accolades poured in on the steely Scot who proudly sported tartan trunks. The man nicknamed The Fighting Carpenter was acclaimed as the American Boxing Writers' Association's Fighter of the Year ahead of American-born greats like Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali.

Indeed, such was Buchanan's global reach that he topped the bill at Madison Square Garden in New York. Typically, there was a twist. Ali was on the undercard in a comeback contest.

The lauded heavyweight arrived at The Garden to find that he had not been given a dressing room. His trainer asked if Ali, one of the most significant sporting figures of the 20th century, could share with the Scot. He was given the nod but Buchanan chalked a line down the middle of the room.

And he told the man nicknamed The Greatest – twice Buchanan's size, incidentally – that there would be consequences if Ali crossed the line. They later became friends.

Controversy was never far away. Buchanan lost the world lightweight title in on 26 June 1972 to Panamanian legend Roberto Duran, nicknamed Hands of Stone, in Madison Square Garden. However, the Scot claimed that Duran, who at one time held world championships in four weight classes, and voted by The Ring magazine as the fifth greatest fighter of the last 80 years, had punched him illegally in the groin to end the fight after 13 rounds, Buchanan's only inside-the-distance stoppage.

And, Buchanan's Welsh-born trainer, Eddie Thomas, sliced swelling around an eye, which was unseen by the referee, to restore the Scot's sight in the 1971 title rematch with Laguna.

Of course, Buchanan did fight in Scotland. His 15-round bout against fellow-Scot, Jim Watt, in the then Albany Hotel in Glasgow on January 29, 1972 for the British title – Buchanan won on points – is still talked about by boxing buffs

as a classic. He won British and European fights during a professional career which started in 1965 and ended in 1982.



The sad news broke on Saturday that Ken Buchanan had died at the age of 77.

The Ken Buchanan Statue was unveiled in August 2022 by former Lord Provosts Donald Wilson and Frank Ross for world champion boxer Ken at the top of Leith Walk on Little King Street

Photographed with fellow boxer, Jim Watt. PHOTO Alan Simpson Photography

Sadly, he lost his last four fights against men who, with respect to them, Buchanan would have swatted aside at the height of his career, to Steve Early in Edgbaston, Birmingham, to Langton Tinago in Salisbury, to Lance Williams at Wembley Arena and to his final opponent George Feeney in the National Sporting Club, Piccadilly, London, on January 25 1982. He lost on points.

Yes, there were broken marriages, a failed hotel business, and

he was forced to return to the trades to earn some much-needed cash, but let's accentuate the positive. This was a man considered by good judges as one of Britain's best. Some believe, the best, and let's applaud his record which reads 69 fights, 61 wins (27 by KO) and eight defeats.

Buchanan, raised in the Edinburgh coastal suburb of Portobello, and born to Cathy and Tommy, a tram driver, was a sporting great. Tommy travelled the world watching his son and we have to thank him for introducing Ken to boxing as a young boy.

A trip to the cinema to watch a film called The Brown Bomber about world heavyweight champion, Joe Louis, was pivotal. Little Buchanan, just over three stone at the time, won his first title that year. Little did we know then what was to come.

The famed fighter claimed it was his mum's death which spurred him on. He so wanted to visit her grave to show her the world championship belt.

Ken Buchanan, MBE, born 28 June 1945, died 1 April, 2023. Dead but not forgotten. RIP.



The Funeral of former Champion Boxer Ken Buchanan a cortege goes past his statue at Little King Road Edinburgh. Photo Alan Simpson Photography



The Funeral of Ex Champion Boxer Ken Buchanan a cortege goes past his statue at Little King Road Edinburgh. PHOTO Alan Simpson Photography



The Funeral of Ex Champion Boxer Ken Buchanan an cortege goes past his statue at Little King Street Edinburgh. PHOTO Alan Simpson Photography



The hearse carrying Ken Buchanan's coffin leaves St Giles following a service held there. PHOTO Nigel Duncan Media