

Blunden follows famous Lads' Club names after pro debut win

Owen Blunden has Dylan Draper on the ropes
Picture: MARK HEWLETT



Boxing

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Owen Blunden realised a dream when he followed in the footsteps of Norfolk's fighting elite.

The 20-year-old from Norwich made his debut in the year-ending boxing show at the weekend, turning in an impressive performance in beating Dylan Draper from Braintree on points.

The transition from the amateur ranks can be a tough one: Blunden has been put through some strenuous paces in the past few weeks by trainers Graham Everett and Jon Thaxton, two men who have been influential in the careers of Blunden's heroes, twins Liam and Ryan Walsh.

Both were members of Norwich Lads Club, as was Blunden – who was delighted to see Liam helping out in his corner on Sunday.

"That was just amazing," said Blunden. "As a Norwich Lads Club fighter it was great to have a former Norwich Lads Club fighter there. I always looked up to the Walsh brothers and all their achievements in the amateur game and now the professional game, so having Liam in my

corner for my first fight was amazing – it was a dream come true."

Blunden had good support at the Holiday Inn Airport Hotel on Sunday – a venue he knows well from his amateur days, which perhaps helped settle any pre-fight nerves.

"I did have some nerves – every boxer has and if they say they don't I think they are lying," he said. "But they are controlled nerves and I use that to my advantage. I just felt good and I felt ready, probably over-ready."

"I have good support and that lifts me up every time I fight. The support is massive and that boosts me when I am in the ring. I have fought maybe four times here as an amateur so it was like being at home for me in a sense and that settles me down as well."

"When I was coming here I felt nervous but when I put the gloves on and worked the pads with Jon the nerves were being punched out ahead of the fight itself."

"My confidence within the first round popping the jab out, keeping behind it like Graham and Jon said and round after round my confidence kept growing and at the end I felt really good."

"Graham and Jon just said to box clever behind the jab, keep him at range and don't get drawn into a fight and that is what I kept in my head."



Owen Blunden on his way to victory

Picture: MARK HEWLETT

sport

Racing

It was a family affair when Militarian, bought for just £650, took the £16,000 feature chase worth more than £10,000 to the winner at Fakenham.

Trainer Andrew Martin's Chipping Norton yard is home to the gelding, ridden by son James to land the spoils at 7/2 from Forth Bridge, owned by The Queen.

"It's not easy being a small trainer so this is a tremendous boost for the team. I bought Militarian three years ago at the Ascot sales. I think the price of £650 was an oversight. We have done a lot of work with him," said Martin.

A winner at Taunton three weeks ago, Militarian was always near the head of the five-runner field and was well produced by his amateur rider to score.

Champion jockey Richard Johnson and trainer Olly Murphy had a strong hand for the meeting and they won the handicap hurdle with Todd. The gelding had been second and third at Fakenham but won at 9/4 after a thriller which saw four in line at the final flight. Todd proved the stronger, winning by half a length.

However, Murphy and Johnson fell foul of the stewards in the handicap hurdle. Favourite The Very Thing was produced before the final bend and got up to beat Working Class, under Harrison Beswick for Oliver Sherwood, by a head. However, after a stewards' enquiry, Working Class, at 11/2, was awarded the race, Johnson's mount having bumped his rival several times. As well as losing the race, Johnson was banned for two days for careless riding.

The Princess Royal's Chequered View got the better of top weight Thomas Todd to win the second chase under Conor Shoemark for trainer Martin Keighley. The 5/2 chance and the runner-up were side by side at the last but Chequered View prevailed.

Newport Pagnell trainer Stuart Edmunds doesn't like leaving Fakenham without a prize and his only runner, A Little Chaos, obliged in the opener. Ridden by Ciaran Gethings, the filly made every yard to win at 9/1.

The finale provided an upset when Kilbrew Boy under Kielan Woods for trainer Ben Case, won at 11/4, beating the odds-on favourite, French import Doncesar De Pretot.