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# Gypsy Joe the subject of programme on prejudice

## 'Traveller' tag never far from talented boxer and golfer

### GENERAL SPORT

by **Tim Street**  
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**ONE of west London's most colourful sporting characters will be the subject of a Channel 4 Dispatches documentary next month.**

A top amateur golfer (and one-time professional), as well as being London's unlicensed boxing champion, Joe Smith has certainly competed at both ends of the sporting spectrum.

Although he now calls West Drayton home, Smith's links to Hounslow run deep, from being born and bred in Hanworth to living for a number of years on a gypsy encampment in Cranford – while being a big Brentford FC fan too.

It was at Hounslow Heath Golf Club he fine tuned his game after falling foul of the snobs at his former club, Home Park in Kingston.

It is the kind of prejudice he faced there – as a gypsy trying to make his way in a game which often looked down on him – which is explored in the documentary.

The Dispatches programme, which looks at prejudices suffered by gypsies in general, holds up Smith as a success story who has flown in the face of closed-minded snobbery.

He said: "As a young kid I was one of the best players at Home Park and was regularly playing for Middlesex too, but they used a row over a plate of sandwiches – which they claimed my dad didn't pay for, but which we didn't even order – to kick me out. Some of their members just didn't want a gypsy boy representing them.

"And so I went to Hounslow Heath, which was a public rather than a private course, which had some real characters. They didn't care who you were, and I was welcome there.

"Funnily enough, the manager there at the time was Dave Carter, who went on to become the Brentford FC kit man, and who passed away recently. Top man was Dave, and it was he who encouraged me to become a pro golfer."

After winning tournament after tournament as an amateur, not to mention becoming London Junior Open champion at 15, Smith just failed to make the top grade as a pro, coming close numerous times to qualifying for the British Open.

The proud Englishman also made national headlines in 1999 when the PGA threatened to kick him off the UK Tour after he was spotted practising on the prestigious Princes Course in Kent with a St George's cross shaved into his head.

And it was at another of his former haunts, Wyke Green Golf Course in Osterley, that the Channel 4 team filmed him in action two weeks ago.

In it, he talks candidly about the prejudice gypsies still face in a world obsessed with equality and human rights, and of his hopes for the future of the dying culture he grew up in.

Smith said: "Up until 1744, being a gypsy was a hanging offence, and the 1954 Britannia Encyclopedia described us as having half the intelligence of a 10-year-old child.

"Sir Alf Ramsey was a gypsy, but he kept it secret, as did the authorities, as they didn't want their knight of the realm having his name sullied.

"My first cousin, Freddy

Eastwood, is also a gypsy, and a load of us went to watch him play for Southend at Wembley.

"Thankfully you don't hear racist abuse at football matches any more, but one bloke stood up after Freddy nearly scored and said 'not bad for a pikey'. He soon melted when we had a word.

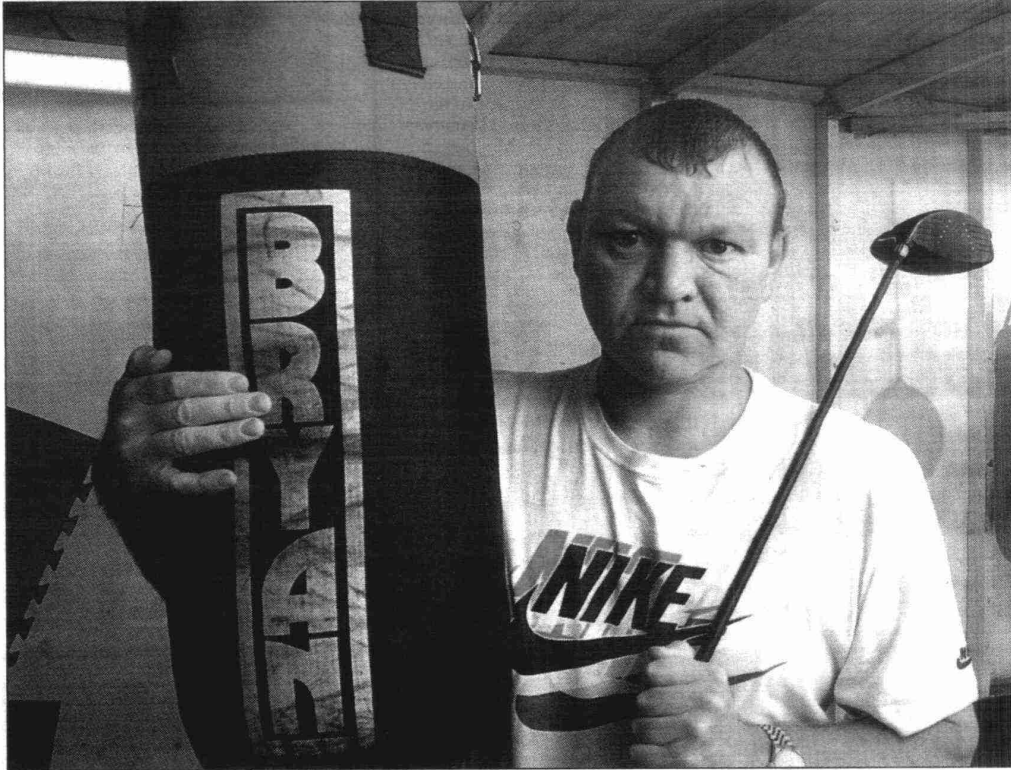
"But the traditional gypsy way of life is dying out, which is why I feel it's all the more important to instil the culture and value in my lads.

"One son, Trevor, is a professional boxer, while the other, Rymer, is a good golfer and has already played for Middlesex. So it's perfect for me that both strands of my life will live on through them."

● Joe Smith's life story is subject of a book, *Gypsy Joe*, published by London Books. See [www.london-books.co.uk](http://www.london-books.co.uk) for more details.

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