

The gloves are off

Lance pounds the Eagle and then calls it quits

DRAGONS star Lance Thompson made his boxing debut on Friday night — and then retired. GRANTLEE KIEZA was with him before, during and after the event

AS the hymns of 60,000 gentle Jehovahs Witnesses were echoing around Telstra Stadium on Friday night, Lance Thompson was in a dressing room at the Sydney Showground next door preparing to unleash his own personal Armageddon as a professional boxer.

The Witnesses are spending four days at the Olympic venue learning about Christian love and compassion. Lance has spent five weeks learning how to rip someone's head off.

In the end, the Dragons second-rower won a four-round split decision over 33-year-old Central Coast veteran Huso Smajlagic, aka The Big Eagle.

The Dragons firebrand followed other rugby league stars Anthony Mundine and Solomon Haumono into the fight game on Friday and after one win from one fight promptly retired with a 100 per cent success rate.

Lance took the bout to raise money for charity and



ABOVE: Lance Thompson prepares for his date with destiny, and, (left) in action during Friday's bout with Huso Smajlagic

because he'd always nurtured a desire to see what it felt like to fight for a living.

"Boxing four rounds with that guy is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," said the St George Illawarra second-rower, who wore red and white trunks, was trained by Dragons conditioner Brian Wilmott and had old team-mate Paul McGregor in the corner.

"It was intense out there. In rugby league you don't have someone trying to knock your head off every second of the game but my opponent tonight really made me fight hard."

The two battered fighters embraced in Lance's dressing room as 30 or so half-smashed footballers, enjoying the end of season drinks, gathered around

them to sing the Dragons song.

Nathan Long, Shaun Timmins and Nathan Blacklock were among the crowded throng bellowing "Thommo, Thommo" as the winning fighter sculled a welcome Carlton Cold and embraced his opponent.

The Big Eagle, leaking blood from a cut right eye, had a smile bigger than his

ample waistline as the footballers burst into a chorus of "Eagle, Eagle".

The Dragons boys promised to drive The Eagle around the field at their first home game next year while his fight with Thompson is played on the big screen.

"I've had 15 fights and only one guy punches harder than Lance and that was the Korean national champion

at 95kg," the Eagle said. "He's a good boxer with power. If he wanted to swap sports I think he could make a real go of boxing."

The Eagle is hardly the best boxer in the world but he has a ton of guts. Or at least a good few kilos of it. Plus a couple of love handles and cleavage that could use the men's bra that Kramer tried to flog on Seinfeld.

The Bosnian born brawler took up boxing to lose weight and trimmed down from 150kg to 89kg. He said he put on seven kilograms to face Thompson.

Right from the first bell the Eagle was in a flap, swapping haymakers with Thompson and copping some head-snapping right hands the 98kg Dragon had perfected sparring with world rated junior-middleweight Nader Hamdan.

The pair traded heavy punches in close and the occasional headbutt and at the end Thompson had blood around his right ear while the Eagle had a cut right eye and blood down his chest and ample belly.

Thompson's bout raised \$15,000 for the St George Foundation and the Children's Hospital at Randwick, while promoter Jeff Fenech used the night to raise money to buy a car for the mum of three-year-old cerebral palsy victim Muhammad Leece.

Property mogul not crying fowl

Manchester City striker **ROBBIE FOWLER** has bought a new house. His 85th. The budding property mogul has bought a \$5 million mansion in a secluded woodlands area and he's actually going to live in this one (he rents out the other 84). And he's moving in with wife Kerrie, despite a tabloid report about him and **STEVE MCMANANAM** getting up to no good with some blonde slapper. How does he afford so many houses? Fowler is getting a touch over \$100,000 a week playing for Man City and \$25,000 a week from Leeds, the club he left nearly a year ago. Sometimes, he has to save up for three whole weeks before he buys another property.

Blackpool can't bear assault

From one of the more interesting aspects of British football, another mascot fight! Oldham Athletic's mascot **CHADDY THE OWL** has been barred from Blackpool's ground for beating up rival **BLOOMFIELD BEAR**. The assault was so brutal, it included the removal of one of Bloomfield's feet. Blackpool press officer Matthew Williams said: "I was in the press box and they were play-fighting, when Chaddy waded in and seemed to be kicking ten bells out of Bloomfield Bear."



'ERE WE GO

All the Premier League scandal with our man in the UK
ANGUS MORRISON

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

'The first time I wore them home, my wife said - 'What the hell have you got on?'

— West Bromwich Albion midfielder Andy Johnson, after the players were ordered to wear tights to improve circulation.

'Drink when you're driving, you only drink when you're driving, drink when you're driving.'

— compassionate West Ham fans chant at West Bromwich Albion, whose striker Lee Hughes (pictured) is on a charge of dangerous driving causing death.



Time to promote Team Beckham

Confirming earlier reports, our Becks has apparently paid off his marketing agency and got into bed with wife Victoria's promoters, headed by Simon Fuller, the man responsible for the God-awful Spice Girls. Fuller plans to promote the Beckhams as, wait for it, a single brand. Like Ben and Jerry's ice cream, I guess. Only not as appetising. In other news, Beckham wants former team-mate Ruud Van Nistelrooy (pictured) at Real Madrid. Big shock. "He is a great player and I would enjoy having him at Madrid," he said. "I enjoyed playing alongside him in Manchester and I can say that as well as being a marvellous companion, he is one of the best players in the world." And at a mere \$100 million, well within the Real budget.



PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
CHELSEA	15	11	3	1	29	10	36
ARSENAL	15	10	5	0	29	11	35
MAN UTD	15	11	1	3	29	9	34
FULHAM	15	7	4	4	26	19	25
LIVERPOOL	15	6	4	5	22	16	22
C ATHLETIC	15	6	4	5	22	20	22
N'CASTLE	15	5	6	4	21	20	21
STON	15	5	5	5	13	11	20
B'HAM	15	5	5	5	12	18	20
MAN CITY	15	5	4	6	22	19	19
M'BRO	15	5	4	6	12	15	19
SIPURS	15	5	3	7	18	20	18
BOLTON	15	4	6	5	14	21	18
B'BURN	15	5	2	7	23	24	17
LEICESTER	15	4	4	7	23	23	16
P'MOUTH	15	4	4	7	17	20	16
EVERTON	15	3	5	7	15	19	14
A VILLA	15	3	5	7	11	21	14
LEEDS	15	3	3	9	13	34	12
WOLVES	15	2	5	8	11	32	11

FIXTURES

LAST NIGHT: Leicester City v Birmingham City, Manchester United v Manchester City, Chelsea v Bolton Wanderers, Liverpool v Southampton, Middlesbrough v Charlton Athletic, Newcastle United v Tottenham Hotspur, Portsmouth v Everton

TONIGHT: Aston Villa v Wolves (11pm); Arsenal v Blackburn (1am Mon), Leeds v Fulham (3.05am Mon)

NEXT SATURDAY: (all 2am Sun). Birmingham City v Middlesbrough, Blackburn Rovers v Aston Villa, Bolton Wanderers v Arsenal, Charlton Athletic v Newcastle United, Everton v Leicester City, Fulham v Chelsea, Wolves v Liverpool

TOP GOALSCORERS

13 — Alan Shearer (Newcastle United)
11 — Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Manchester United)
10 — Thierry Henry (Arsenal)
8 — Nicolas Anelka (Manchester City), Michael Owen (Liverpool), Louis Saha (Fulham)
7 — James Beattie (Southampton), Frederic Kanoute (Tottenham)



Hostile: John Terry

Turks standing sinks further

Does world football really need Turkey?

Fans are banned from visiting the country because they tend to get stabbed, and even when you take a game out of Turkey and play it in Germany to avoid trouble, all hell breaks loose.

Besiktas gave Galatasaray a break as the world's worst-behaved club as they took 50,000 fans to Gelsenkirchen to take on Chelsea in the Champions' League.

And most of the 50,000 took a handful of coins, which they proceeded to throw at the Chelsea players. Those who didn't take metal money took flares, which they set off in the stands

and fired on to the pitch. As you do.

It's racist to say you don't like Turks, but it's not if you say you don't like Turkish football fans. That's simply commonsense. The sigh of relief from Euro 2004 organisers when Latvia knocked Turkey out of the tournament could probably be heard in Australia.

UEFA, famous for slapping teams over the wrist with a soggy bus ticket, have charged Besiktas with improper conduct.

"It was lucky that nobody was hurt," said Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard. "We had bundles of coins coming at us, even in the warm-up."

Defender John Terry, not quite the

patron saint of fair play himself, compared the experience to playing for England in Turkey in their final Euro 2004 qualifier in October.

"This was one of the most hostile crowds I have ever played in front of," he said.

UEFA spokesman Mike Lee said: "We have opened disciplinary proceedings against Besiktas for the behaviour of their fans, which was unacceptable. That will lead to a disciplinary charge and a hearing in the New Year."

The Turks, unsurprisingly, are crying foul. Wait till they get kicked out of football - then they'll really go off on this one.