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PRANK OUTSIDER

Tonight YouTuber Logan Paul, “the internet’s biggest idiot”, takes on the fearsome boxing legend Floyd Mayweather. Does he know what’s about to hit him?



How did an internet
prankster end up in
the ring with an
undefeated boxing
superstar? Ahead of
tonight's big fight,
Logan Paul talks to
Helena de Bertodano

**“I’M A
MODERN-DAY
GLADIATOR”**

Logan Paul is the first to admit that he is the “internet’s biggest idiot”. Given that he rose to fame with stunts such as jumping over speeding cars and smothering himself in peanut butter to attract dogs in a park, he has a point. But if the 26-year-old American YouTuber, actor and now professional boxer is an idiot, he is a hugely successful one, worth \$19 million at the latest reckoning. His exhibition boxing match tonight with the 44-year-old undefeated American boxing legend Floyd Mayweather at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami — which will be broadcast live worldwide on pay-per-view — will make him even richer, regardless of the outcome.

In recent years there has been a rash of social media stars entering the boxing arena. It all started with YouTubers trash-talking each other and then settling the score with a punch-up in the ring, much to the delight of their followers. Promoters took note, sensing there was money to be made by putting on showcase bouts that appealed to a vast, non-boxing fanbase.

Logan Paul was at the forefront, taking on the British YouTuber KSI in an amateur bout at Manchester Arena in 2018. They drew that fight. The pair returned the following year — this time in Los Angeles, and as professionals, in an event brokered by the British promoter Eddie Hearn. Paul lost by a split decision in what was widely derided as a sloppy fight, but one watched by millions and streamed around the world.

As a parent of three teenagers I have become peripherally aware of this phenomenon: the house comes to a standstill whenever one of their crazy slugfests is on. But the attraction for legions of young fans lies as much in the build-up and aftermath — complete with the trash-talking and viral memes — as in the event itself, which is more of a circus than a fight.

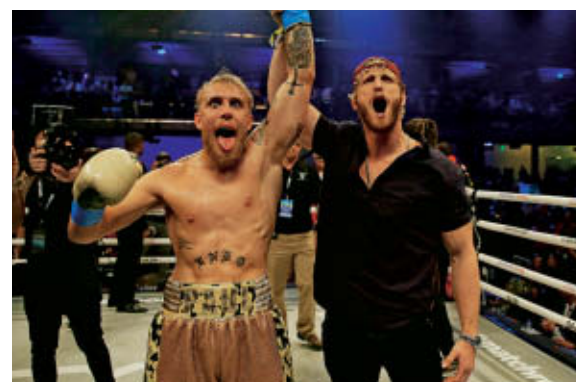
Many boxers and boxing aficionados feel the YouTube stars are tarnishing the “noble art” and are urging the trend to stop before someone is critically injured. But others, including Mike Tyson, have said they are doing the sport a favour — helping to reverse its decline by drawing in a new generation of fans. Teenagers are glued. In the UK the price for tonight’s fight — £16.95 on Sky Sports Box Office — has been lowered with younger audiences in mind.

YouTubers fighting YouTubers is one thing. But Mayweather, who retired in 2017 with a 50-0 record across five weight divisions, is a different matter entirely. Hearn, who has nothing to do with tonight’s event, has called it “dreadful” and distanced himself by telling the YouTube boxing channel iFL TV: “I did Logan Paul against KSI, but it was a fight between two YouTubers who couldn’t really fight — now you’ve got a bloke who can’t fight against one of the greatest fighters of all time.”

Mayweather, now a promoter in his own right, has spotted that it is worth stepping out of retirement for this. He has boasted that he will make upwards of \$100 million (£70 million) from the fight, while Logan “the Maverick” Paul, who has just the one professional bout to his name, stands to make considerably less (£14 million, according to reports). “It depends how many pay-per-views are sold,” Paul tells me. “[But] I didn’t take this fight for the money. I took it because it’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

I meet him, over Zoom, at his house in Puerto Rico, where he lives when he is not at his mansion in Encino, California, or his 80-acre ranch in the San Jacinto Mountains, California. Wearing a backwards baseball cap, yellow Maverick T-shirt, tracksuit bottoms and “four-dollar slides”, he is sitting at a desk in a large

LOGAN PAUL STANDS AT 6FT 2IN AND WEIGHS 190 POUNDS. MAYWEATHER IS 5FT 8IN AND WEIGHS 160 POUNDS



Top: Paul trash-talks Floyd Mayweather at a press conference in May. Middle: his professional debut against British YouTuber KSI in 2019. Bottom: celebrating his brother Jake’s victory against AnEsonGib in 2020

open-plan room with floor-to-ceiling windows, the sun streaming in through the fronds of palm trees outside. His African grey parrot, Sir, catcalls and whistles in a large cage over his right shoulder.

Mayweather is the overwhelming favourite but Paul is the bigger man, standing 6ft 2in to Mayweather’s 5ft 8in, and weighing 190 pounds (13st 6lb) to the veteran’s 160 pounds (11st 4lb). Although Paul has promised to “decapitate” Mayweather in the first round, much of the hype is now around how seriously the veteran intends to hurt him. Doesn’t Paul worry that things might go extremely south tonight?

“Oh, they absolutely can... or they can go extremely north and I can solidify myself as one of the greatest upsets in sports history.” He is taking his training

incredibly seriously — “from two to four hours per day, six days a week. We take one day off. When we’re not boxing, we’re recovering, eating or sleeping.”

At a prefight press conference last month Mayweather said: “I’m 100 per cent sure it’s going to be a knockout — it’s not really a fight for me. It is to him.” The event quickly descended into headline-making farce. Logan’s brother, Jake, 24, also a YouTube celebrity turned professional boxer, swiped Mayweather’s cap and ran off with it, sparking a brawl.

Jake is now tipped to fight Mayweather next. He has had more success in the ring than his brother, with three professional wins to his name and no losses. The latest was in April against the retired professional mixed martial artist Ben Askren, 36. Thanks to my teenagers I watched that fight too — which mercifully lasted less than two minutes. As Jake roared in victory, Logan — who is a larger version of him — lumbered on to the screen to grasp him in a sweaty hug. Logan, explained my sons, is “the nice brother”. Jake is universally known as “the bad guy”, perceived as more arrogant and his online content more aggressive.

“We’re yin and yang,” Logan tells me, glancing back at Jake, who is playing music in the background. The brothers are here with two boxing coaches, a videographer, of course, and a private chef “who is also a nutritionist who’s worked for some of the best fighters in the world”. There are also three security guards. Logan claims he had to increase security after Jake enraged Mayweather at the press conference.

Many will shrug this off as one big publicity stunt, though Logan says he was genuinely worried. “Probably the only time I’ve been scared in my adult life is when Jake took Floyd’s hat and I was afraid he was gonna get shot or something. Or I was gonna get shot trying to protect him.” Mayweather, who was involved in a string of criminal cases for violence from 2002 and served two months in jail for domestic battery in 2012, seemed furious, yelling: “Don’t disrespect me.”

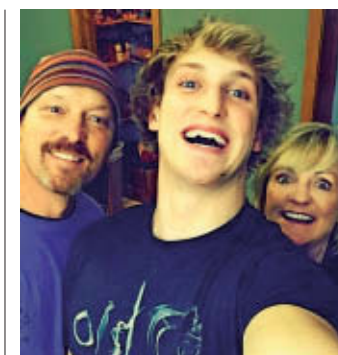
“When a man with the resources that Floyd Mayweather has, says, ‘I’m gonna kill that motherf***er,’ that’s a death threat. Security goes up. [People get] Jake and I confused all the time. So if it’s Jake’s problem, it’s now my problem too.”

But he is not mad at Jake for riling Mayweather.

“I think fighting an emotional, angry Floyd will be better than fighting a calm, collected, strategic Floyd. Part of our shtick is being able to get under people’s skin. We can just annoy people if we snap our fingers. And Jake really got under Floyd’s skin.”

He calls out to Jake to turn the music down and explains he is “the problem child”. So what does that make you? “An angel. I have not always been an angel. I used to enjoy making a ruckus. But I’m reformed.”

The influence of the Paul brothers is huge, especially on teens and preteens, who make up the bulk of their followers. Logan has more than 100 million subscribers across all social media platforms. His YouTube videos have more than 5.7 billion views. Over the years he has tried acting, singing and directing, but boxing is his current passion. “There’s nothing cooler than pugilism, the art of fighting with one’s fists,” he says. “It is the most primal, legal way of seeing who is the better man.” He quickly adds “or woman” — he has been in trouble for misogynistic comments in the past. “We are modern-day gladiators and back in the old days the entire city would gather in the coliseum to see the gladiators fight it out. In my opinion it is the coolest, highest form of entertainment there is.”



Above: with his parents, Greg Paul and Pamela Stepnick. Right: filming beside the body of a suicide victim in Japan, 2017, for which he has apologised

WEEKS AFTER THE TOKYO INCIDENT HE TASERED TWO DEAD RATS AND REMOVED A LIVE FISH FROM WATER TO “PERFORM CPR” ON IT

He hasn’t been hurt badly — yet. But he says he doesn’t want his followers to copy him by taking up the sport. “It’s dangerous. You’ve got to be missing a few screws.” Why does it appeal to him? “Let’s rewind to when we were kids, when there’s a fight in the playground, everyone gathers around.” Would he be at the centre of that fight? “No,” he says swiftly. “I’ve never even been in a street fight, I’m too smart. I won’t insert myself in [an unregulated] situation where things could go extremely south. I’m a de-escalator.”

He didn’t box at high school but he did wrestle, qualifying for state-level championships in 2013. “I was one of the best wrestlers in Ohio,” he claims, and “one of the best [American] football players in Ohio.”

When KSI challenged him to a boxing match in 2018, Paul initially called for a mixed martial arts bout, in which he could put his wrestling skills to use, but that call was dismissed. Eventually he agreed to box.

“I’ve always loved physicality, man going up against man, and me trying to prove that I’m the better one.”

His real “talent”, though, is showmanship. More specifically, recording himself being himself. “I don’t have a special thing or quality. I really am just a regular guy from Ohio. I’m a man of the people who happens to like creating videos. It’s just me shooting myself in the foot and then showing the world what an idiot I am.”

As children the brothers would video each other making prank calls. An early video shows a preteen Paul placing a food order and giving his address as “Butthead Street” while blasting an air horn. “You’re a jerk,” says the woman on the other end of the phone line. “Don’t call back again, I’ll call the cops.”

As he grew older he started posting sketches on the video-sharing platform Vine, then moving to YouTube and creating a television show called *Logan Paul Vs.* He would wrestle with an alligator or a bear, hire people to act as secret service to “arrest” his brother, anything to get attention. “I was on a rampage, to say the least,” Paul says. “Fame, money, followers. Nothing else mattered. All I wanted to do was create content that would shock people. It was a horrible mindset to be in.”

He didn’t care what people thought of him. “In a world where everyone is so afraid of being judged, I was unapologetically myself. They say, ‘Just go and be yourself.’ Well, I did and it worked.”

Not caring about what you say or do can backfire, though, and his moral compass — or lack of one — has been called into question on a number of occasions. For Paul his internet life divides into two halves — before and after what he refers to as “the Tokyo incident”.

In December 2017, aged 22, he sparked international outrage by uploading a video of his visit to Japan’s Aokigahara forest at the foot of Mount Fuji, known as a destination for people planning suicide, which included footage of Paul joking beside the body of a



A preteen Paul films a prank call to a takeaway at the start of his lucrative career

suicide victim. He removed the video 24 hours later after it had been watched 6.5 million times. YouTube suspended his projects on YouTube Red (the ad-free channel now called YouTube Premium) and removed him as a “preferred ad partner”. One could say he had a lapse in judgment — but, by his own admission, in those days he had no judgment. The next day he issued what seemed to be a heartfelt apology and three weeks later a video on suicide awareness, saying he wanted to be “part of the solution”. He also pledged to donate \$1 million to suicide-prevention agencies. His channel was put on a 90-day “probation period”.

It wasn’t long before he appeared to return to his old ways. Just weeks after the Tokyo incident he Tasered two dead rats and removed a live fish from water to “perform CPR” on it. YouTube responded by suspending all advertising on his channel, citing his “pattern of behaviour”. The suspension lasted just 18 days but he now describes this period as “the single most defining moment of my life”. “The internet held me accountable... I had to retrace my steps and in that journey I developed qualities that I don’t think I had. Or maybe was never going to have.”

He does not spell out what those qualities are: perhaps empathy, or even humility. Of course he also had to adjust to a new commercial reality.

Born in Ohio to Greg Paul, a roofer and estate agent, and Pamela, a nurse, Logan and Jake had a rocky upbringing. Jake has referred to “pain” in their childhood, and I ask Logan if he can elaborate. “There were real challenges,” he says. “My parents went through a nasty divorce when I was seven. My dad is this really intense guy and sometimes he’d get physical with us. He whooped us into shape and we probably deserved it — we were little punks.”

There was food on the table “75 per cent of the time”. At their father’s the boys were often left to their own devices. “Some days we’d ask, ‘What are we having for dinner?’ and he’d say ‘Yoyo’, which stood for ‘You’re on your own’. My mom was the opposite. She married a doctor who had money and a nice house. Then we’d go to my dad’s and it’s a little grungy.”

Nevertheless he credits his dad with instilling a “work ethic” that he considers to be their saving grace: “I really do owe all of my success to my father.” Greg would get the boys to clean up houses he was trying to sell. He would “flip a house to make a quick buck”, and sometimes they were “hoarders’ houses”. “There would be faecal matter. Piss. Disgusting environments where you’d have to scrape sludge off the floor with a scalpel. He’s making us work with no pay. I was considering calling child labour and being, like, ‘Help, dude, I’m nine years old and I’m being worked to death!’”

But he says his dad tried. “At Christmas he would buy Pringles or Pop-Tarts and maybe, if we were lucky,

socks. And he’d wrap them in newspaper. Those were our gifts. I loved it. I wouldn’t change it for anything. The lack of things I had growing up makes me really appreciate the things I have now.”

He remains close to both parents. His dad “is now working on my ranch as my groundskeeper — being paid way too much money,” Logan says. His mother still lives in Ohio and tells me that Logan was a curious, smart and active child. “When we told Logan ‘no’, he always tested the boundaries of how far he could go.”

The brothers, too, are close. “Part of the reason I like being here with Jake is because we can relate on so many things that not a lot of other people [have experienced],” Logan says. “We grew up together. We came from the woods. Now we’re in the tropical forest.”

The parrot calls out “*Que pasa?*” (What’s up?) over his shoulder. Logan says he used to teach it swearwords but stopped when his grandfather texted him to say: “I know you think this is funny. But that bird’s going to live until he’s 50 and when you have kids and your in-laws are over and your bird is going, ‘Hey, motherf***er’, it’s not funny.’ I was, like, ‘You know what, that’s a great point.’”

He has learnt who he can trust. “I have a pretty good read of people,” he says. “Most people don’t make it past phase one. Anyone who talks too much about money or fame [is out]. I’m surrounded by a lot of people with money. And I’ve come to realise that cool people don’t give a f*** about money. Money doesn’t make you cool. Being cool makes you cool.”

Not that he doesn’t value money, he explains, but after a certain point it doesn’t make much difference how much you have. “I’m there. I have a lot of things. A lot of material objects. I buy stuff that makes me happy, that I think is fun or funny. I just bought a \$40,000 8ft-tall dinosaur leg. I think it’s the coolest thing in the world. Do I need it? Absolutely not. Do I want it? Sure. Big time.” Thinking he must mean a sculpture, I ask him what it is made of. “It’s a dinosaur, a real dinosaur.” Can he show it to me? “It’s in Encino, California.” He also “spent over \$2.6 million dollars on Pokémon cards, because I love it”.

He trades cryptocurrency as a relaxation technique between boxing practices. “The way I view money now is that it’s just a game, who can get the most.”

I have to say that I did not expect him to be as likeable as he is. Over nearly two hours of conversation he is entertaining, gives thoughtful answers and makes an effort — in short, he has social graces. When my 18-year-old son, Joe, pops in to say hello, it’s all “Yo, bro” and banter. And when Joe tells him that he was rooting for KSI, not Paul, during his last fight, Paul is delighted. “I love that the UK loves KSI. Like, I think that’s so cool. I don’t have a problem with the guy.”

He explains that he used to put on an act online but has settled into being himself. “This is the real me. This guy’s friendly. When I’m on stage before Mayweather I’m gonna be more of a dickhead. But if I’m at a party flirting with a girl I’m a little teddy bear.”

His last long-term relationship was with Josie Canseco, a 24-year-old model and daughter of the baseball star Jose Canseco. After they split last year her angry father issued an online threat to Paul and Jake, challenging them to a fight. “No problem,” Paul taunted on Twitter. “I love smashing Cansecos.”

Smashing — at least in the US — is crude urban slang for having sex. And that’s the problem many people have with Paul: he may have come a long way in the past three years but sometimes still appears connected ➤➤➤

“SOME DAYS WE’D ASK, ‘WHAT ARE WE HAVING FOR DINNER?’ AND DAD WOULD SAY ‘YOYO’, WHICH STOOD FOR ‘YOU’RE ON YOUR OWN’”

to a world where girls are “smashed” and guys who disrespect you are offered out for a beating.

He used to have a reputation for misogyny in his music videos. “I was just a kid, dude. Your view on everything is shaped by the information you intake and the people you surround yourself with. I was consuming content that was derogatory towards women so I wasn’t in the right place to be making responsible content. And then as I transitioned into adulthood I really did start to realise my content and its message affects people. I’ve always felt women are equally if not more important than men. I just don’t think I’ve portrayed that publicly. Y’all are the shit. Y’all are way better than us, we need you.”

He doesn’t have a girlfriend at the moment. “I’ve come to realise I’m a hopeless romantic and I may never find love,” Paul sighs, adding that he dreams about having a family. “Two boys, one girl. The girl is gonna be the youngest so her brothers will protect her.”

What is he looking for in a partner? “I have a list,” he replies enthusiastically. “Do you want to hear it?” He scrolls through the notes on his phone to read the one titled “Girlfriend qualities”, pausing between each word. “Wit. Confidence. Intelligence. Opinionated. Empathetic. Self-aware. Active listener. Sexual deviant. Talented. Worldly. Foresight. Insightful. Attractive. Curious. And, most importantly of all, not a f***ing lunatic.” He shakes his head. “I’m starting to think this list is unrealistic. Do you think this person exists?”

I suggest he may have to move out of California to find her. How many of these characteristics does he have? “I’ve probably got 90-95 per cent of this list.” He starts chortling: “Ironically, the one I probably haven’t mastered is ‘not a f***ing lunatic.’”

He may act like an idiot but he is clearly not stupid. Originally he planned to become an engineer. “I got a full academic ride [a scholarship that covers the entire cost of college] for engineering. I wanted to create a product that would revolutionise the world. And then I blew up online. And the product that I created that revolutionised the world turned out to be myself.”

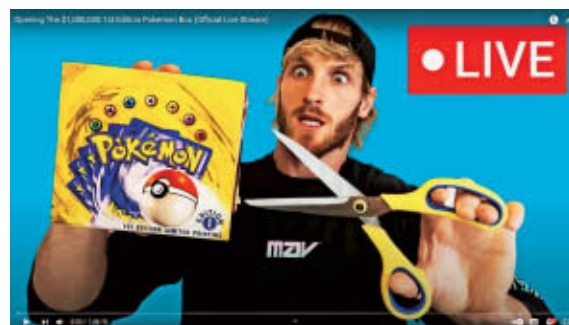
When the “Tokyo incident” happened he says he didn’t immediately understand the outrage. Talking about himself in the third person — as if another being entirely — he says: “A week after the incident the kid definitely knew he did something wrong but still didn’t understand the magnitude of the mistake. Everyone’s maturity arc is different in life, mine’s always been a little slower than the average person. It wasn’t a one-week journey. Or a year journey. This is the end of a three-and-a-half-year reconfiguring of Logan Paul.”

Was there no hesitation before he posted that video? “Deep down I knew it was wrong. But the bad part of me had grown into this massive thing and pushed me to do the wrong thing. I f***ed up.”

That could have been the end of Logan Paul the celebrity but he had enough self-belief to carry on. “I remember thinking, ‘Wait, everyone’s telling me I’m a piece of garbage. And this thing definitely indicates that [I am]. But I know deep down that I’m not.’”

His support for the Black Lives Matter movement is part of this new-found sense of responsibility. He gave a powerful speech last year on his podcast following the death of George Floyd, which remains his pinned tweet, with nearly 21 million views. “I can’t compute racism,” Paul says today. “It doesn’t make sense to me. Even I, internet’s biggest idiot, know which side of the

Paul hosted a live unboxing of rare Pokémon cards in February. The packs were sold at auction for a total of \$1 million



HE SAYS HE WOULD RUN FOR PRESIDENT. "I'M NOT KIDDING. I COULD SEE MYSELF DOING IT"

fence to stand on. It’s 2021, we are so beyond that.”

There again, his copybook is not unblotted. Back in 2012 he would make racist jokes about penis size and also posted some derogatory tweets about Asians. His brother was criticised after mocking a fan from Kazakhstan for sounding like a “terrorist”.

Paul is trolled relentlessly but says this doesn’t bother him. “The internet is a nasty place. You have to have some thick skin to be able to survive. And I’m open to feedback on my character.” He describes a party where a girl spat on him. “She’s, like, ‘You filmed that person in Japan. I think you’re a horrible person.’ I was, like, ‘I completely understand. I believe I’ve made the necessary steps to improve myself. And I want you to know that I have nothing but love for you.’ There is no war between me and my haters. I commend people who have the courage to say shit to my face.”

He does not have a plan for the future. “I’m just a master of rolling with the punches.” But when the comedian Tim Dillon floated the idea on the *Joe Rogan Experience* podcast in 2019 that Logan Paul — with his millions of dollars and millions of fans — could one day run for president, Paul tweeted afterwards: “I’ll do it.”

Is he serious? “I’m not kidding. If I’m sitting around and I have a feeling one day that I could lead the country in a very impactful, positive way, I could see myself doing it.”

What do you think you could do for America? “No idea. But I will say this. If I were to undertake something like that — just like my internet career now — I would lead with authenticity. I don’t think there has been an office that has been fully transparent and upfront with the people for a while. And I’d like to be that.”

The only question he will not answer is how he voted in the last election. “Too much smoke,” he explains. But he provides a clue by volunteering that Trump is “a piece-of-shit human being... I say that wholeheartedly. I don’t know much about his politics. I just don’t like him as a human. And I think if you’re going to be the president of the United States I want to like you.”

Right now all his focus is on tonight’s fight: “I have one mission — to work my ass off to beat Floyd Mayweather.” Even his brother has said he could “see no path” to Paul winning the fight. “I don’t know what he’s trying to do when he says that,” Paul muses. “There is a little bit of brother rivalry that exists. Maybe he is just trying to be realistic. I get it. My closest friends, my idols, my brother, they’re all, ‘Yo, you’re going to get your ass kicked.’ And I just don’t believe them.”

The fight, he says, will make boxing history. “I expect it to be hell on earth when I enter that ring. I expect to come out bloodied, beaten... and victorious.” ■

Watch Mayweather v Logan Paul tonight at Iam on Sky Sports Box Office for £16.95 or on Fanmio.com for \$49.99 (about £35)