

## **LEGEND'S CORNER: NIKA KUMALO**

Nika ‘The Sting” Kumalo is one of South Africa’s favourite boxing legends, one of the select few fighters to hold two South African titles.

He produced many memorable performances in the late eighties (80s) and early nineties (90s) but just did not make it to the top after losing two cracks at the WBO welterweight title. A talented boxer, with a mean punch, earned himself the nickname, ‘Sting.’

Originally known as ‘Schoolboy,’ growing up kwaLanga, Kumalo still active in the boxing world is a member of Boxing SA Ratings Committee and was in attendance during the Weigh In at Emperor’s Palace last month ahead of the showdown between South Africa Shervhantaigh Koopman and Brandon Cook.

He sat down with Boxing SA Media to reflect on the hights of his wonderful career that saw him opening doors for some of the boxers to fight abroad.

He retired from boxing with a credible record, of thirty-nine (39) wins nineteen (19 knockouts), seven losses, two draws.

### **Childhood memory...**

I remember growing up eMdolomba, Black City, kwaLanga in Cape Town where I was born. My mum, Nomathamsanqa Moya was 15 years old when she gave birth to me. My mother is now, seventy-six (76) and I am sixty (60)!

People always ask me about “Kumalo” (smiles). People referred to me as, that “Kumalo boy,” and Kumalo was my grandfather. The ‘nickname’ grew on me, and I adopted it, and it is now in my ID. I was born Nika Moya.

At home, we were four boys: Mpumelelo, Zet and Duze. We grew up with our cousins from the maternal side.

I went to Molema Primary, Moshesh Primary School and then Langa High. I was at Secondary when I started boxing. It was Monde Sibhaca that introduced me to the sport. His brother, Basheu Sibaca was a top boxer, and South African Featherweight Champion.

Monde, a teacher was also a boxer himself. He encouraged me to go to Harlem Boys Boxing Club in 1974, aged just ten (10).

### **First professional fight...**

I turned professional in 1982, and my first pro fight was against Thobile Mali. I was now the one that was meant to fight Mali, I was a sub. It took me one (1) minute, twenty-five (25) seconds to knock him out in front of a packed Europe Centre in Cape Town in April 1982.

In 1983 I won Boxer of the Year Award in the Western Cape. I did well under the watchful eye of my trainer, Monde Sibaca.

### **My first title fight...**

It was against Brian Mitchell. He knocked me out in the second round. I was on a 14-fight winning streak going to the fight. I was number one (no. 1) in the junior welterweight and the lightweight. My confidence was high, and I chose Brian Mitchell. He had beaten my mentor, Sibaca so there was a lot at stake going to the fight. It was not to be, but never gave up.

I won my first title in Johannesburg at Eldarado Park against Busheou Moseu in the lightweight division. I did not have much time to prepare for the fight as I spent the whole December and part of January in the bush. I only had three (3) weeks to prepare. I remember signing the contract in the bush and training while I was in the bush.

I took an early fight to Johannesburg from East London on February 7, 1987. I was on an 20h00 flight back to East London with my belt. I decided to combat him, knocking him out in the nineth (ninth) round.

I defended my title three (3) times in 1987; twice against Aladin Stevens and against Luvuyo Kakaza whom I knocked out after two minutes in the first round.

I remember, Old Buck flew me to Joburg just to receive my belt, throwing a huge party that day.

### **First international fight...**

It was in Australia against Australian champion, Dale Atongo and lost to him on points. It was a 'home decision' (he smiles).

I was an SA Champ, at 23 and got a shot on world title fight in 1990 at the age of twenty-six (26). I think I had passed my peak years if I may be honest. My trainer and promoter thought Manning Gallaway would be an easy opponent for me. I always struggled against, 'weaker' opponents and I lost the world title fight in Green Point Stadium.

Put me with a Lion, then, you bring the best in me! Nonetheless, no regrets against Gallaway, I still gave my all.

### **Toughest opponent...**

It must be Phumzile Madikane. Funny thing, I knocked him in round eleven (11), in 1989. Still, it was my toughest fight. I remember he was ahead on points, tall and using his jab well.

It was a third time coming up against him, we had met once in amateur ranks and twice as pros. We used to train together and knew each other well.

In Cape Town when we fight, it was like Soweto Derby, Kaizer Chiefs vs Orlando Pirates. The town would be on stand still!

### **Favourite Arena...**

Good Hope Centre! It could take eight thousand (8 000) inside. I could feel them. I remember, for big fights, you would not find anyone in the townships. I was a drawcard in Cape Town and loved the Europe Centre.

I was one of few boxers who had an opportunity to fight world title in front of my home fans against Manning Gallaway and that was in the Europe Centre.

### **My first cheque in boxing...**

It was R80 in 1982. I gave 15% of that to my trainer. I was eighteen (18) and gave the rest of the money to my mother. It was just before Matric exams.

### **Highlight of my boxing career...**

It was when I was in New York. They took three boxers from South Africa and one or two from other countries. I was in New York with the late Dingaan Tobela and Francious Botha. Botha lost, while Dingaan returned to South Africa, and I was left alone to continue to defend the flag. I did very well there, beating every opponent I met, and it was after the World Boxing Challenge that I had a chance to fight Gallaway.

### **Favourite fight of all time...**

Roberto Duran versus Sugar Ray Leonard, all three fights. Roberto won the first one. He was my hero. I remember going to Panama City, in the US to meet Hands of Stone.

He fought all the big guns, Haggler, Sugar Ray, at top boxer that is why I could not miss an opportunity to meet my hero.

### **My favourite trainer...**

Angelo Dundee. He also trained Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard. He is for me the best trainer ever! He always told us about Ali's story. Ali was in trouble, and he cut his gloves forcing the referee to stop the fight. This allowed Ali time to recover and to change his strategy. He bounced back to win that fight (laughs).

Boxing authorities saw it fit to review the rules, today boxers have about three or four boxing gloves.