

Legend's Corner – Jan Bergman

Jan Bergman, affectionately known as “Kid” is regarded as one of the most exciting punchers in the 90s. Fast, with a dangerous left hooker, he looked destined for greater heights when he came through the ranks under the watchful eye of a man, he refers to as, ‘Oom Bokkie’.

The former South African junior welterweight and WBU welterweight belt holder, looks back to his two-decade career with pride. He took time to go down memory lane with Boxing SA Media early this week.

Early childhood memory...

I was born in Carletonville, but my parents moved to Toekomsrus near Randfontein, in Westrand where I grew up together with my younger brother, Sam. I went to Toekomsrus Primary and then to Randfontein Senior Secondary School.

My parents separated, not an ideal situation for myself and my brother, but as a child there is little I could do.

I started boxing at the age of 11, but it I was forced by circumstances (adds laughing). Thing is, every time my father sent me to the shops, on my way back home I would meet big boys who used to bully me and take the change. I would get home, and my father gives me hiding. I joined boxing because I wanted to fight back.

I think I learned very quickly and went back to the streets to beat up the bigger boys that were giving me problems. They were now running away when they saw me coming and that is how I ended up in boxing.

I later trained under the watchful eye of Oom Bokkie (Bokkie Martins) and Uncle Joe who later became my manager later in my career.

My first professional fight...

I came up against Simon Oupa Thobejane at Eldarado Park, Johannesburg in 1990. I knocked him out! That motivated me, I wanted more and to be more at that moment as more of our boxers were getting opportunities to fight overseas for world titles. I remember going unbeaten for a while.

My first title fight...

It was a Lightweight Provincial title fight in Nasrec against Edward Mogemi. It was a proud moment for me and a dream realised. I remember making successful defences and being on another winning streak against the likes of Rufus Seanego and Walter Mpungosa. That took me to a fight against Aaron Kabi, winning on a 12 round split decision for the South African junior welterweight title.

My first international fight...

It was in the US, my happy hunting ground. I never lost a fight in the US. My first fight there and my first international fight was at Arco Arena, Sacramento and I beat Jose Jiminez in November 1991. Good memories!

My first world title fight...

I came up against Koysta Tszyu in Newcastle, Australia for the IBF junior welterweight title where I suffered my first loss knocking me out in the 6th round.

My toughest opponent...

Koysta Tszyu was a tough! He was skilful and strong and had great strength. He is the toughest I have ever come up against!

My Arena...

It is between Nasrec and Carnival City. If I had to choose between the two, then I would go for Nasrec, compact and the atmosphere was the best for boxing. Loved it!

One fight I would wish to fight again or ask for a rematch...

Zab Judah was very lucky at the Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, USA for the vacant IBF junior welterweight belt, I knocked him down with a mean punch but broke my hand. I could not continue with the fight and took the knee on the fifth round. The fight was over, he had won. If I could ask for a rematch, it would be against him. I tried at some stage, but he and his camp did not agree to the fight.

My all-time favourite boxing match...

It must be one of Aladin Stevens title defences in Soweto, I do not remember the boxer. I was there as a fan, and it remains the best fight I have ever watched. It had all the drama, but Aladin showed his mantle that made him one of the best that afternoon.

Best friends in Boxing...

I made lot of friends in Boxing both locally and abroad. Mike Tyson was also a friend during my many times travelling to the US where I trained. When he came to South Africa, we hanged out together.

I was also close to Evander Holyfield. I remember when he came to South Africa, we were both invited to Felicia Mabuza-Suttle Show, a lifestyle magazine show on SABC. Boxing took me places and I met wonderful people, and I am forever grateful with all the friendships I made in the sport.

...OK, Mike Tyson vs Evander Holyfield, who you following?

Evander Holyfield! The gent knew what to do in the ring. I think people also do not talk a lot about the fact that he went on from Cruzeweight champion to win Heavyweight. The guy thin, with a waste of 32, going on to win heavyweight title, takes hard work.

Favourite Coach...