

## **LEGEND'S CORNER: WELCOME NCITA**

Boxing legend, Welcome Ncita is one of the best sporting personalities ever to come out of South Africa. The former IBF Super Bantamweight Champion, affectionately known as, “The Hawk” had an impressive total of forty-four fights, losing just three and winning one in an illustrious career that spanned for almost two decades.

Ncita made six successful defences of his IBF junior featherweight world title, was undefeated in thirty-two fights at some stage, making him one of the most decorated boxers of our generation.

He sat down with Boxing SA Media to look back on some of the moments in his career.

### **Early childhood memory...**

I was born in Duncan Village, East London and we moved to Mdantsane in 1978 with my family. It was during the previous regime, so coming from the getto it was not easy. I grew up playing football in the dusty streets of Duncan Village with my friends. We tried to use what we had during those times, to have fun.

It was not easy though, because one moment you would be in a braai at some house and the next, you watch someone being stabbed, I grew up in that kind of environment. We were forced to make choices exceedingly early in our lives, and it helped to have a family that will show you the way.

It was when I moved to Mdantsane that I fell in love with boxing. I remember I was at Luzuko Higher Primary School when I started, I started taking the sport seriously and by the time I was at Nyameko High school I became a world champion!

### **My first professional fight...**

It must have been 1984 as I turned pro in 1983. I fought with Vuyani Mgasho at Centenary Hall, Duncan Village. It was a huge fight, and the build-up was crazy as everyone in East London and surrounding areas was talking about the fight. We were both upcoming stars at the time.

One thing about East London, a future champion would be identified at amateur level and they would know, “here we have a world champion,” so there was already a talk in the boxing circles about how far I could go in my career but I did not allow that to go to my head. My focus was always on boxing, and many tournaments that were happening week in week out in East London, during those days.

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

It was Cape Championship Title, a provincial title. I fought against Frazer Nzaze from Gqeberha (previously Port Elizabeth). He had already made name for himself in the boxing circles, and I was not given a chance to win against him.

I was skinny, and outside East London, not really known but managed to win the with KO in the seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) round. This surprised lot of people in the boxing fraternity. I then started campaigning for the national title.

Johannes Miya from Joburg was next in line! He was hot! No one gave me a chance to win the Flyweight National title. I won and brought the title to the Eastern Cape for the first time.

### **My first international fight...**

It was in 1986, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1986, Civic Centre, Hartford Connecticut, constituent state of the United States of America located in the northeastern corner of the US or close to Virginia (smiles). I came up against Ricky Dias.

### **My toughest opponent...**

I had never had an easy fight! All my opponents were difficult, I can name a few that were more difficult. Jesus Salud! I came back after his fight with a closed eye, and that happened to me for the first time. He was a two-time world champion and was a top boxer. Then there was, Sugarbaby Rojas. What a guy! Crazy! Chased me, all over the ring, even beating me on my bum (laughs). Lastly, Kennedy McKenny, he was an Olympic medallist, a star!

### **My favourite Arena...**

I was on the zone as a boxer, and it never really mattered to me where I fought. I was always focused on the opponent and the job ahead of me. I would even forget my manager; I was that focused!

Notable though, I never had an opportunity to fight at the Maddison Square Garden Arena in New York. I remember most of my fights were in Italy.

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

It was R25 in 1983, and I gave it all to my mother. I used to give all the money to my mother after fights and she would give me some.

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

It must be when I won my first world title. It was a proudest moment for me, my family and my trainers and South Africa. I was still at school and a first world champion after Terror Mathebula in 1985!

### **My favourite fight of all time...**

I am a huge fan of Sugar Ray Leonard and all his three fights with Thomas Hearns. I was fascinated with Sugar Ray's footwork, charisma, and personality in the ring!

### **My favourite Coach/Trainer...**

I worked with the best! I consider myself truly fortunate to have worked with Emmanuel Stewart who made a world champion. He has trained the likes of Thomas Hearns, and later Lennox Lewis and Wladimir Klischko. He started me from scratch and taught me everything about boxing.

George Benton! He also trained Evander Holyfield. He taught me a lot about the Science of boxing!

My story is unfinished without Luther Burges, my father from another country. He was not just a trainer and taught me a lot about life, never mind boxing!