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One on One with Phikelelani ‘Stinger’ Khumalo

Phikelelani Khumalo made history on Sunday, 16 March 2025 when he became the first former professional footballer to be crowned, South African champion when he beat reigning champ, John Bopape at Escort Town Hall, KwaZulu Natal in a tournament headlined by Starline Boxing Promotion.

Boxing SA Media took time to talk to the Middleweight reigning champion, as he revealed his plans to defend his title and his goal in boxing.

Mtungwa, thank you for taking time to talk to us, congratulations on your victory a couple of days ago...

Sawubona bhuti (greetings my brother) and thank you.

Let us go back, what do you remember about your childhood...

I remember growing up eMthwalane, emaBheleni playing all sorts of sports. My father (Mlindelwa Khumalo) was also an athlete, and loved karate, so I remember he was always around and watching over me.

I knew at an early age that I will make it big in sport, but I was not aware which code I would excel. Later, I played more football, and I thought, I will be a footballer.

I had a happy childhood growing up with my two sisters, Sethabile, Sibahle and my brother, Sibusiso.

I continued to play football, and I like to think I was a decent striker. I scored a lot of goals during my childhood. I joined Golden Arrows juniors at the age of eleven (11).

What do you remember about your time at Golden Arrows and who did you play with?

When you are young you just want to play and win games. I worked hard at an early age, and a couple of my former teammates are playing football to date. I grew up and played with the likes of Ricardo Goss who is at Mamelodi Sundowns, Nkosingiphile Gumede, he is still at Arrows as a goalkeeper and a few other guys now playing in the ABC Motsepe League. Both Coach Wanda and Coach Mshibe coached us.

You also had a stint with AmaZulu...

Yes, I remember working with Coach, Japhet Zwane around 2016/2017. We played in the ABC Motsepe League, notched a few goals (laughing...)

I then moved to Maritzburg United where I joined forces with Coach Peter Petersen. Things really looked promising at Maritzburg United. It was disappointing as I had to move after eight (8) months, due to unkept promises. I was promised a good contract, and when that did not happen, I went home.

That must have hurt...

I was disappointed because also age was not on my side. I had a family to provide for, so I thought hard about continuing as a footballer or move on.

Then that is when the boxing bug took over...

Yes, it was always on my mind. I had been a boxer growing up but did not take it seriously. The coaches saw the talent, especially Trevor Wolmarans. He was the first person to buy me a pair of gloves and told me, "You will be a Champion," I was happy to reconnect and collaborate with him again just before the fight.

I registered as a professional boxer in 2019. I only had one amateur fight, but I was confident of making it. I knew if I worked hard and remain focused it was possible.

I set up clear goals for myself. I wanted to be a champion in South Africa, now that has been achieved, I am going all the way to the top, I want to be a world champion!

Who are your favourite boxing idols?

I love the young version of Floyd Mayweather Jr, Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearn, Roberto Duran, and Lennox Lewis.

How would you describe your style as a boxer?

Aggressive! I am aggressive but calculative. I stick to a game plan and when I hit, I hit hard.

I worked a lot with my dad, who improved me as a boxer. There are few areas of my game that I still want to sharpen up.

How was it like preparing for the fight with Bopape?

The hard part was the training camp! I was really excited from day one to fight Bopape. I worked extremely hard, lost a lot of weight and I was very skinny. I felt well prepared and fully conditioned ahead of the bout.

How did you find the fight?

It was always going to be very tough, and we prepared for that. I respect him, and every time I knocked him down, he was up again. I am just grateful I got an opportunity to fight with him.

What kind of music do you listen to?

I am always listening to 2Pac music while training or just chilling at home. He is my favourite.

I hear you are a good cook...



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Yeah, I can make a mean dish! I like dumplings and beef stew. My mum does all the cooking though mostly. Occasionally, I cook for her, and I hope to do the same with my future wife (adds laughing)

What is your favourite holiday destination?

I like going to Johannesburg mostly for shopping, but South Coast in Durban is still my favourite when I want to unwind.

Favourite book?

I am not really a fan of books; I watch boxing on my spare time! Even my girlfriend is used to it now, I have no time for series and Netflix!

If you had to invite seven (7) people to join you for dinner, who will it be?

My Dad, my mother (Neli), my two sisters, my brother and future wife, all family!

So, are you happy to join other Khumalo's in the spotlight?

Hahaha, yes, I am incredibly happy and hope to lift the Khumalo's even higher soon. We are the chosen ones!

So, do you still get time to watch your favourite Team with your schedule?

Yes, I am a huge fan of Orlando Pirates! I had time to watch the game against Mamelodi Sundowns, a day before my fight! It was sweet revenge after they humiliated us at Loftus Versfeld. I was keen to continue the celebrations by winning my fight, which made it a perfect weekend!

What is next for you?

ABU, that is for sure! Talks are underway with John Duran's camp as his Promoter reached out to my camp. We are waiting to see if it materializes. I am also looking forward defending my belt, with who ever challenges me.