

Doghouse Boxing chats with Sumya Anani's trainer Barry Becker

By Martin Wade (May 3, 2004)



Sumya Anani & Barry Becker

Faith is the belief in the value, truth or trustworthiness of someone or something. Often the belief in something that appears far from materializing.

In the sport of boxing, often times the best and most worthy fighters are denied an opportunity to compete for a myriad of reasons. To list those reasons to knowledgeable boxing fans would be preaching to the "choir", yet the point of this piece is to shed light on one mans faith in his fighter. If it is difficult for talented male fighters, who are distinguished in boxing media and ranked highly by fans to get the fight they deserve then what must be the case for an elite female fighter?

On the eve of getting the call for Sumya Anani to replace Lucia Rijker (against the talented Lisa Holewyne) on the April 24th Staples Center card in Los Angeles, California I spoke with Barry Becker about women's boxing, his frustrations, and most of all his faith.

The conversation was enlightening, evangelical, and very humorous. It was a glimpse into the camp of the most feared woman in women's boxing. The following is our interview...

On an Anani/Rijker fight: Manny Steward say's she isn't quite ready yet. The thing is nobody is afraid of Lucia anymore. Lucia padded her record early on with a lot of last minute replacements. Now she's going after everyone Sumya already beat up.

MW: It's common for fighters to do that early on (padding) now she's doing it again? For what?

My point exactly! She just pulled out of this fight with Holewyne on the Klitschko card so were waiting by the phone, it's frustrating.

MW: Tell me about the call out of Rijker posted on several boxing websites.

In order for people to respect women's boxing the best have to fight one another. At this point I have the baddest woman in the world and no one wants to fight her. The two fights that would best serve women's boxing are Ali/Wolfe and Anani/Rijker, which are two great fights! We are at the point now where we would move up and take a fight with Ali because Lucia doesn't want to fight. At the Ali/Martin press conference Laila talked about how Sumya didn't get enough credit for beating Christy up, but to tell you the truth I think Ali is scared to fight Sumya. Ali wants to be in her comfort zone, if she would come down 6pounds Sumya could take her.

At this point in the conversation I brought up the weight discrepancy, How Laila felt it was more of a business decision to fight the "name" Christy Martin. I also joked that what the "Island Girl" needed was a Hall of Fame father to get the Ali fight. Becker agreed and we had a good laugh brainstorming possible candidates for a long lost daughter with a clubbing right hand.

MW: I read somewhere that Sumya stated that Martin didn't have the "consciousness" to advance the sport; she was just content to make her money. Sumya is often referred to as an Ambassador for women's boxing, is there some regret on passing on the king contract just based on the positive light your fighter can bring to the sport?

A little, Sumya is a great person and a little shy she just now started to promote herself. We are starting to get sponsors where we can afford to go to fights; by this time next year things will be much different. Sumya spends a lot of time online, doing interviews and getting her name out there.

At this point we discussed "marketing", Becker mentioned that Sumya's humility wouldn't allow her to identify herself as a four-time world champion in out of ring endeavors. We brainstormed a bit, talked about how in other sports with strong leagues that promote competition the best will ultimately be determined. I made the Tim Duncan analogy; though he does not fit the predominant hip-hop image you will be seeing him come playoff time. This analogy elicited the now trademark "Absolutely!" from Becker. We both speculated on the impact a United States Governing body would have on competition, especially in cases like Sumya's.

On the Christy Martin Fight and Don King: After Sumya beat Christy in 98' Don made an offer, but at the time we had our reservations. Sumya still wasn't sure of herself as a talent. Now she knows what she can do, she has a product now. It took 6 ½ years to get to this point, knowing she's the best in the world. At the time she just didn't think she could fulfill those expectations, now she's in the zone.