

The Sweeter Science



BY JOE SANTOLIQUITO

“ISLAND GIRL” WANTS HER MOMENT IN THE SUN

Sumya Anani hasn't appeared half-naked on the cover of a men's magazine or adorned the front of a national sports publication. She hasn't played a bit part in a bad remake of a science fiction movie, and she doesn't have a famous last name.

All she does is win, which Anani used to think was enough to carry her to the top of women's boxing. Yet when anyone mentions the women's game today, the names most frequently broached are Mia St. John, Christy Martin, Lucia Rijker, Laila Ali, and even Jacqui Frazier-Lyde.

One name regrettably omitted is Anani's. The situation makes the 30-year-old junior welterweight wonder what she has to do to get herself in that exclusive who's who club.

Anani, who resides in Kansas City, Missouri, certainly has the credentials to back her claim that she is among the best female fighters in the world. She owns a 19-1-1 (7) record, and has a few obscure titles to her name, but she also beat Martin, Andrea DeShong, and Liz Mueller, and has two victories over Dorá Webber. While many fighters, male and female, frequently boast about hollow accomplishments,

Anani can actually counter with true achievements. Nonetheless, anytime the possibility of a female superfight is discussed, Anani gets lost, or forgotten, in the mix.

“Here's the thing, I always thought all you needed was talent, but I guess it's not,” said Anani, who handed Martin her second pro defeat, in 1998. “I guess you have to have a big mouth, because I just would sit back and thought my talent would carry me to the top. To me, that's all you needed. I wouldn't say I'm frustrated, but I am a little

mystified and confused by the whole politics of boxing. It's not about the fighters and being the best. It's about posing nude in magazines, or getting your face out there.”

“The Island Girl” is making the right strides toward more exposure this year. She already defeated Britt Van Buskirk for the second time, once again avenging the only loss on her record, with a 10-round points victory on February 1 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. As this magazine was going to press, Anani had another big bout scheduled in June against England's Jane Couch, which was going to be televised on ESPN2's *Friday Night Fights*.

Continuing to fight is about the only recourse Anani can take against the stalemate with which she's faced. Meanwhile,



Anani wonders what she has to do to make a name for herself

Rijker and Martin still play a game of how-much-and-when for a fight that it seems will never happen.

"It seems like Lucia is trying to protect her undefeated record," said Anani, who augments her boxing earnings by teaching yoga at local health clubs. "I used to think about a year ago, that Christy Martin would fight Lucia, but I don't know if that fight will ever happen. They've been talking about that fight forever. I'll take both of them on. I think it's a possibility I could fight Lucia, but she might not want to fight me, because she's still waiting to fight Christy for big money.

"Lucia has nothing to prove by beating Martin, because she's already been beaten. By me. Everyone is focused on making the money, but me, I'm staying focused on the sport."

Midwest promoter Tony Holden, who together with retired referee Mills Lane formed Let's Get It On Promotions, has worked with Anani for the past couple of years. His goal is to get Anani on the undercards of superfights, following Don King's lead in his masterful marketing of Martin.

"Sumya's the hardest challenge I've ever had in promoting a fighter," Holden said. "I think she's the best female fighter on the planet. I even sat down with Emanuel Steward and Lucia to talk about getting the fight with Sumya together, but Sumya's in a real tough situation. These women want \$50,000 to \$100,000 to fight her, and that's money that just isn't there. It's really a shame how the marketplace is extremely low for these top-caliber female fighters."

So in the meantime, Anani is not about to pose for *Playboy*, like St. John, appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, like Martin, get offered an auxiliary part in a bad remake, as Rijker did in *Rollerball*, or suddenly be endowed with a surname like Ali or Frazier. She'll keep on fighting, and live by a motto that has helped her navigate through a very trying situation.

"I don't know," Anani said. "That's my answer to a lot of things in boxing." □

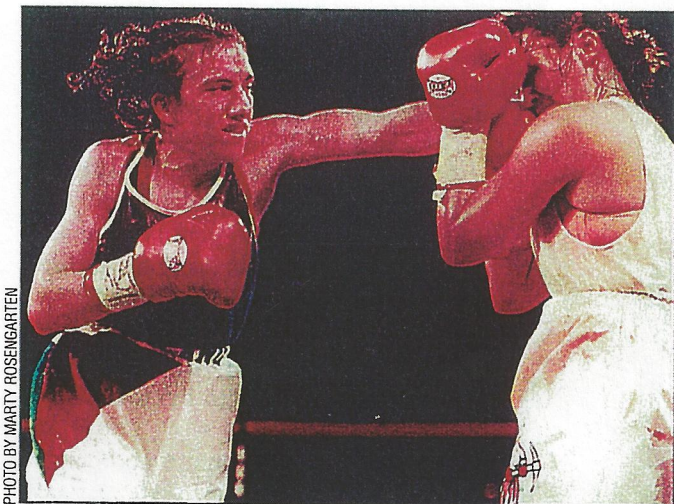
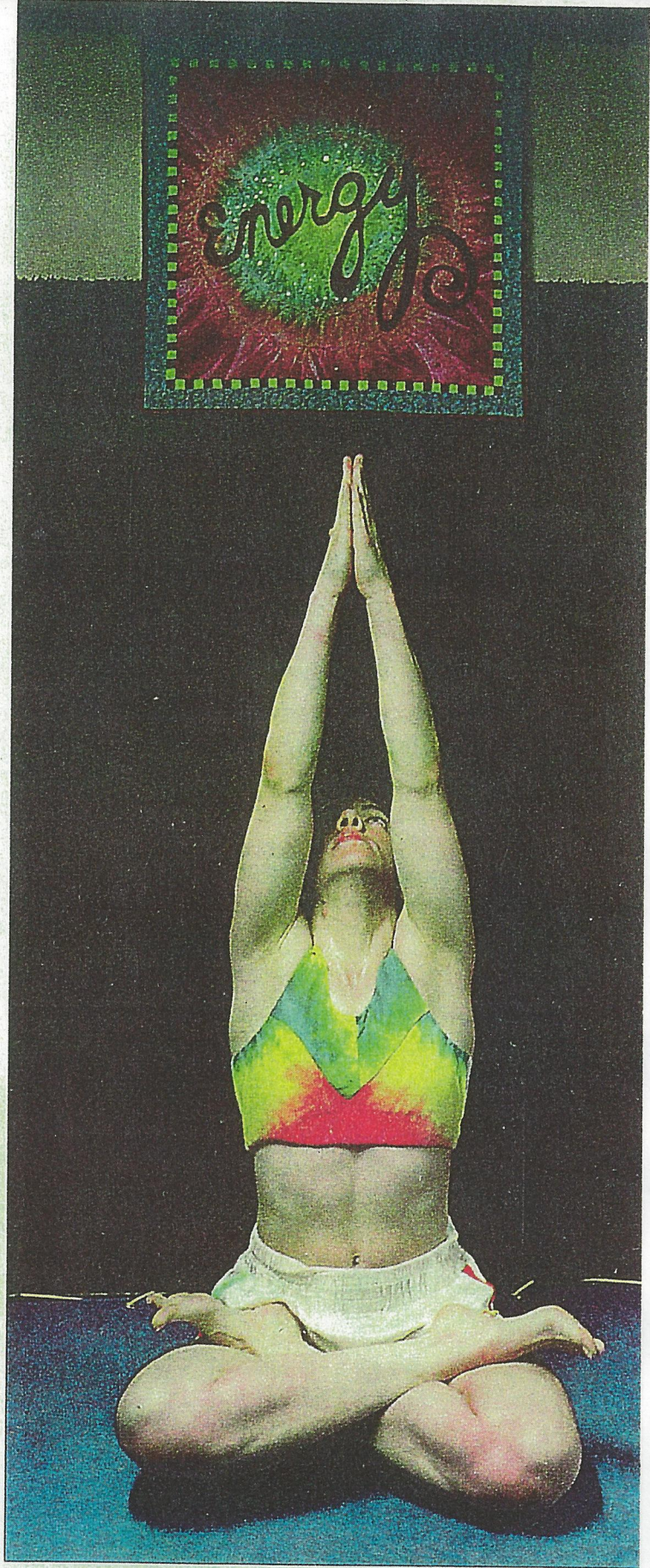


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Anani hands Martin a 10-round decision loss



Kansas City's Sumya Anani is the No. 1 boxer in the world light welterweight division. After a boxing workout she often practices yoga in her basement gym. Photo by John Sleezer.