

Shadow Boxers

Katya Bankowsky

INTRODUCTION

In A Nutshell

This 1999 documentary by filmmaker and boxer Katya Bankowsky takes an in-depth look at the world of women's boxing as it follows professional fighters like Lucia Rijker.

Favorite Quote

"It's nice. It's nice to see what can I do. What I'm worth, you know. How far can I go." [Lucia Rijker, professional boxer]

Introduction

The 1995 inaugural Golden Gloves competition for women marked a major milestone in boxing history. | In a sport once dominated by men, women were for the first time able to participate in boxing at the professional level. |

In this 1999 documentary film, boxer and director Katya Bankowsky, who participated in the Golden Gloves, chronicles the athletes' training as they prepare for the tournament. |

Bankowsky highlights the determination, glamor, and grueling training of these elite female boxers, in particular Dutch boxing star and actress Lucia Rijker.

INSIGHTS

Women's boxing has some charismatic characters (#glamor, #ringside)

Men's boxing boasts superstar greats like Muhammad Ali, but women's boxing also has its fair share of personalities. | Junior Flyweight Champion Jill Matthews grew up as a gymnast and began boxing primarily as a way to stay in shape. | As her career began to progress, Matthews saw boxing as a way to pick up where she left off with gymnastics, competing with the goal of success. |

Matthews began to take her boxing seriously with the 1995 Golden Gloves competition. She was drawn to the world of professional boxing by its some of its glamorous aspects, such as championship titles and the performance aspect of being in the ring. | In one interview after a

fight, Matthews declared she was most excited to comb her hair and put makeup on, and that her husband was not intimidated by her career as a boxer. |

“When I’m fighting I think how dare she get in the ring with me? How dare she come up against me? Doesn’t she know the power? Doesn’t she know who I am? That’s exactly what I’m thinking.” [Jill Matthews, professional boxer] |

Boxer Tanya Dean described her struggles in the ring and the grueling training and focus required by the sport, which eventually pulled her away from her son. | Trainer Matt Jones described training women as especially exciting. | According to Jones, women take punches better than men, a testament to the strength, determination, and power of female boxers.

Boxer Lucia Rijker used meditation to her advantage (#meditation, #boxing)

“When I’m at my best is when my mind is empty; you can’t sabotage yourself or motivate yourself. I just want it clear.” [Lucia Rijker, professional boxer] |

Professional boxer and actress Lucia Rijker is known to this day for fervently practicing mindfulness and relaxation. | The boxing superstar, who hails from Amsterdam, was the first registered female professional boxer in Holland. | When not in the ring, Rijker, who is a Buddhist, used tools like acupuncture, meditation, and chanting to increase her mindfulness and stay at the top of her game. | Rijker reported viewing these therapies as helpful to her boxing career and believing allowed her to remain clear-headed, giving her an advantage over her opponents. | The more grounded she was, the easier it was for Rijker to plan out her next step and remain focused on her strategy — boxing, after all, is always about one’s next move. |

Rijker’s goal of conquering the boxing scene in America was a motivating force behind her training and long-lasting career. | In the world of boxing, athletes can easily become addicted to the publicity, money, and fame that comes along with the sport. Rijker understood that this addiction to boxing could lead to injury or even death. | Rijker’s contemplative approach to boxing and the tools her Buddhist practice provided her helped keep her safe, sane, and successful.

Women’s boxing has always been around (#boxing, #womensboxing)

While the first Golden Gloves competition for women began in 1995, women have long been drawn to the sport of boxing. | Whether as a simple workout or as a more in-depth study, boxing is no longer seen as a sport reserved for men. | The 1995 Golden Gloves tournament not only showed solidarity and support for female boxers, but it did so on a global stage. |

“We’re at a point where... the large promoters are taking notice of the women, however there’s always been women in boxing as far as I can remember. At least going back to the 1930s, but they were so few in number it wasn’t a major event.” [Bruce Silverglade, owner of Gleason’s Gym]

Barbara Buttrick, a boxer in the 1950s and founder of the Women’s International Boxing Federation, or WIBF, described having to travel long distances to find other women interested in the sport. | Like Buttrick, Lucia Rijker was a major player in moving women’s boxing to the stage that it is today. | Rijker made a compelling argument to promoters to say that women’s boxing should provide athletes with the same opportunities that had long been available to men. | The faith Rijker instilled in promoters led to changes in the sport that eventually made her and her professional female boxing colleagues into household names.

CONCLUSION

Boxing had long been a male dominated sport, but the 1995 Golden Gloves competition broke this system. | Boxing figures like Lucia Rijker were instrumental in a boxing revolution that finally gave women a chance to compete on an international stage.