

Veteran fighter back in the trenches

Written by Deon Potgieter

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Former IBO middleweight world champion Mpush Makambi continues to soldier on as he makes the second defense of his South African middleweight title on October 15.

A freedom fighter in the early 1980's Makambi was shot in combat and spent the latter part of the decade in the US recovering from his wounds. It was in the land of the free that Makambi made a return to professional boxing in 1991, having had 3 pro fights in his home country before opting for a more dangerous occupation than boxing. Returning home Makambi went on to win the South African junior middleweight title and defended successfully six times. Following a string of good performances including a win over a very talented Johnson Tshuma, whose own career was cut short by a debilitating illness, Makambi was tipped to be a future world champion.

A devastating fourth round knockout at the hands of brawler and crowd favorite Giovanni Pretorius hinted otherwise, however, and locals started losing interest in the fighter who has never been known for his people skills. In September 1998, Makambi caused something of an upset by stopping Adrian Dodson in 11 rounds to win the vacant IBO middleweight world title. The victory unleashed something special in this proud fighter and he almost instantly transformed into a new man.

It was as if he had a world champion hiding inside him all the time and was just waiting for someone to let it out. He stopped Dodson in 8 rounds in a rematch to retain the title and then continued his winning ways with a second round stoppage over Ensley Bingham. In the fourth defense of his crown he stopped Steve Foster in two. All these world title fights took place in the UK.

He returned to South Africa to be acclaimed boxer of the year for 2000. Praises were heaped on him as being one of the most improved boxers to grace local rings and a true example as to what could be achieved if one pursued something with a passion Unfortunately that's where his fairytale transformation ended.

Following a number of big fights falling through and an inactive and frustrating 9 months, Makambi lost his title to Raymond Joval over 12 rounds. A first round knockout of then SA middleweight champion, Anthony van Niekerk in a non-title bout opened the door for a rematch with Joval. With one judge scoring the fight a draw, Makambi lost by the narrowest of margins in the champion's home country.

Another year passed with Makambi unable to land a fight and then in 2002 he was stopped in 7 rounds by Brian Magee in an IBO super middleweight title clash. He claimed the SA middleweight title in 2003 with a controversial 7th round stoppage over Anthony van Niekerk and has had 2 fights since.

At 37, Makambi (26- 8-3 17 KO) is 15 years older than Peter Mashamaite (9 -3-1 4 KO), the

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man looking to take his title come fight night. A loss would be catastrophic, but Makambi has pulled himself out of the trenches before and if he can reclaim that spark which disappeared the day he lost his world title, then who knows, he could even land one last big one before calling it a day.