

Since turning professional in 1997, following an impressive amateur career, there has been a lot of pressure on Rupert van Aswegan to become the next big thing in South African boxing. The main reason being that he is the nephew of former WBA heavyweight world champion, Gerrie Coetzee (33 W 6 L 1 D 20 KO's).

Van Aswegan boasts a similar style, hand speed and one punch knockout power to his famous uncle. Unfortunately, he also inherited the brittle bones in his hands. A number of hand operations have hampered his career up until now, but Van Aswegan (11 W 2 L 1 D 6 KO's) at last seems set to start making his own history. He'll be contesting the vacant SA super middleweight title later this year and a win there will put him firmly in the International hunting grounds.

The title was vacated by former WBC world title challenger Andre Thyse, who is now campaigning in the light heavyweight division. "I've suffered a lot of frustrating times" says Van Aswegan, "but I've got through it and now nobody will stop me from becoming all that I can be."

A superb all round athlete, Van Aswegan has always dreamed of following in Coetzee's footsteps and claiming a credible world title. "It's been both a blessing and a curse," says Van Aswegan "When I was younger everybody compared me to my uncle and I would be expected to be as good as he was right away. Because our styles are similar the comparisons are still made. I'm used to it now and can deal with it. I am my own man and I am forging my own future in boxing. I've realised that the only way I can get out of his shadow is for my achievements to surpass his. That drives me to work harder."

Coetzee, for all his natural talent and ability, was not fond of roadwork or training in general. This led to him often being described as the best 8 round fighter in the world. The bouts he lost were usually as a result of running out of steam in the latter rounds. A prime example of his stamina letting him down was when he challenged Mike Weaver for the WBA heavyweight title back in 1980. He had Weaver in all sorts of trouble throughout the bout and on the verge of a knockout in round 8, but was just too tired to finish him off. Although ahead on the scorecard going into round 13, Coetzee had nothing left in his tank and when Weaver caught him flush on the jaw, he didn't need much motivation to find a resting place on the canvas. To his credit, when he did eventually win the title with a 10 round knockout of Mike Dokes in Ohio in 1983, he was committed and fired up to do so.

Van Aswegan is a much more media friendly and approachable boxer than his uncle was, and he does have great skills. Like all boxers with a big punch, he sometimes relies too much on his stoppage power, but is open to instruction—something Coetzee wasn't.