

## South Africa Boxing: And The Winner Is

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I was filled with mixed emotions on Friday night when the WBC # 2 junior lightweight contender Mzonke Fana was voted South Africa's Boxer of the Year for 2004. He also won Fight of the Year for a sensational bout against Randy Suico in an official WBC world title eliminator. While I am happy for Fana, it is a sad reflection on the state of boxing in South Africa that a fighter who in the past would have been considered mediocre is now seen as the best we have to offer.

Not taking anything away from Fana's achievements - and there is no doubting that he does possess fine boxing skills, as well as a big heart - he is by no means a world-beater. Negotiations are on for Fana to face Marco Antonio Barrera for the WBC title in April, and while I would love for him to shock the world and win this contest, we have a better chance of seeing George W. Bush winning a geography quiz.

This does not mean Fana should not receive the opportunity to fight for the world title. He has done everything, if not more, that a boxer is supposed to do to earn his shot and it would be a crime to deprive him of what could be the biggest night of his life. Even though I do not believe Fana will be able to stand up to Barrera, who I see as a living legend in the sport, one thing is for sure. He will be extremely well conditioned and prepared for the fight. He will also be going to win. So if Barrera decides to take the fight lightly . . . Who knows? Perhaps we could see a surprise after all.

I agree that the Fana-Suico bout deserved Fight of the Year, although if the correct verdict had been given in the Lehlo Ledawaba vs. Cassius Baloyi fight, there is no doubt it would have received that honour. It was another result of the bad judging seen that night.

Other main contenders for the Fighter of the Year award were Isaac "Angel" Hlatshwayo (whom I believe should have won for consistently improving his performances, as well as taking on and beating a higher level of opposition than any of the other nominees) and Silence Mabusa, a truly remarkable bantamweight who unfortunately continues to be matched against "who's that?" opposition.

Hlatshwayo faces Marty Robbins (who's that?) in Connecticut on February 4, apparently one of two warm-up fights before challenging Jose Luis Castillo for the WBC lightweight world title. Robbins is 35-year-old southpaw with a record of 19 wins, 15 KOs, (here's the good part) 24 losses and 1 draw.

Surprisingly enough, Hlatshwayo and Mabusa share the same promoter.