

Matt Remillard Beat the Devil

Written by Robert Mladinich
Tuesday, 22 November 2005 19:00

The way undefeated featherweight prospect Matt Remillard of Manchester, Connecticut, sees it, boxing found him – he didn't find it. In fact, it wasn't even his own decision to first walk through the door of the Manchester PAL when he was 13-years-old.

He had been sent there to perform community service by local police officer Anthony DeJulis, after committing one of many youthful indiscretions. DeJulis hoped that the angry Remillard could work out some of his anger on the heavy bags rather than on the heads of hapless victims on the street.

"Matt was definitely going down the wrong road when he first came here," said his trainer, Paul Cichon, who has run the PAL for many years. "On his first day here, he wanted to box. I wouldn't let him and purposely treated him as badly as I could.

"I made him carry spit buckets, clean the bathroom, and vacuum the floor. After two weeks, he asked if he could please box. When I heard the word 'please,' I thought that maybe the chip on his shoulder was knocked off a bit."

Cichon said it was obvious that the now 19-year-old Remillard, who is 6-0 (5 KOs) as a pro, was a gifted athlete but not a natural boxer. But the manic intensity that he brought to his training could not be ignored.

"Whether Matt realized it or not, he knew inside that this was his ticket," said Cichon. "He started showing up every day. I couldn't keep him out of the gym. It was obvious that he had found what he was looking for at the gym."

Thus, a transformation, and a well-worn cliché, was underway. A street-hardened youngster chose boxing over thuggery. "Paul kept telling me that I could fight in the ring and get a trophy, or I could fight in the street and get arrested," said Remillard.

Those sentiments became all too real in 2000, when two of Remillard's friends urged him to accompany them on a joy ride in a stolen car. He was chided when he told them that he would rather go to the gym. As he crashed his fists into the heavy bag, his friends crashed the car. One was rendered paraplegic, while the other later hanged himself in jail.

"I think about that at least once a day," said Remillard. "I think of how I used to bully people around and what my life would be like if I got into that car."

Remillard began traveling as an amateur, and eventually compiled a 115-25 record. However, he and Cichon are the first to admit that his slam-bang, nonstop punching style was better suited for the pro ranks.

Even though Remillard has not gone past four rounds as a pro, it is obvious that he continually

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builds momentum as his fights progress. He and Cichon have no doubts that, as his level of opposition improves, he will be an exceptional long-distance fighter.

Cichon contacted mangier Jackie Kallen after Remillard incurred a disappointing loss at the 2004 Ringside World Tournament in Kansas City. Remillard dejectedly told Cichon that he was disgusted with being forced to conform to the amateur style of boxing – and that he was ready to find success as a pro.

Cichon emailed Kallen, who was in Los Angeles working on “The Contender” television series. Within 30 minutes she responded. “Jackie was one of the few managers I never heard bad things about,” said Cichon, who is employed fulltime as a heavy equipment operator. “She had been through a lot in her life, but she had a very good reputation for doing right by her fighters.”

Remillard also signed a promotional contract with Jimmy Burchfield’s Rhode Island-based Classic Entertainment & Sports (CES), and he has become a major attraction in the New England area where all of his fights have taken place.

He is scheduled to fight next Wednesday, on a CES show at the Rhode Island Convention Center in downtown Providence. Although Remillard’s opponent is yet to be determined, other local boxers on the show are 2004 Olympian Jason “Big Six” Estrada, undefeated cruiserweight Matt “Too Smooth” Godfrey, exciting undefeated Puerto Rican prospect Eddie Soto, and 2000 Olympic Trials gold medalist “Steamin” Josh Beeman.

While Remillard loves fighting locally, he is looking forward to expanding his horizons in the years to come. To that end, he has already traveled to Los Angeles where he had the pleasure and the privilege of sparring with the renowned former multi-division champion Manny Pacquiao.

“I’ve been following Manny’s career for a long time,” said Remillard. “Just being in the same gym with him was an honor. I liked the way he worked, and he liked the way I worked. In a couple of years, I would love to be where he’s at with his career. He is a great role model.”

Although his past has been somewhat calamitous, Remillard seems to be a grounded and focused young man. He surrounds himself with positive people; namely Kallen, Burchfield, Cichon, former light heavyweight title challenger John “Iceman” Scully, whom he says “amps me up better than anyone before fights,” his father Mike, brother Ross, and his girlfriend Danielle Napolitano, to whom he is eternally grateful for appreciating the sacrifices he has to make as a boxer.

Kallen and Burchfield, he says, both have already established rich boxing legacies. Their expertise – combined with his work ethic and dogged determination – leads him to believe that it won’t be long before all of his pugilistic dreams come to fruition.

“I’ve put my heart and soul into boxing,” said Remillard. “It is more important to me than anything. If I wasn’t involved in boxing, I’d probably be dead or in jail. If I wasn’t in jail, I’d be headed for jail. Boxing gave me a life, a purpose. It means everything to me.”

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Tickets for the November 23 show are priced from \$30 to \$102. A limited amount of \$152 VIP tickets are also available. To purchase tickets, call CES at 401-724-2253 or log on to their website www.cesboxing.com