

Jamie Clampitt: Lose-Lose-Win

Written by Robert Mladinich
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In one of the most anticipated New England matchups in years, International Women's Boxing Federation (IBWF) lightweight champion Jaime "The Hurricane" Clampitt of Narragansett, Rhode Island, puts her belt on the line against IBWF featherweight titlist Missy "The Fury" Fiorentino of nearby Warwick in a ten-round clash at the Rhode Island Convention Center in Providence on Thursday, May 18.

Jimmy Burchfield, the president of Classic Entertainment and Sports (CES), which is promoting the bout, admits that he has never been much of a women's boxing fan but says that he is eagerly anticipating this fight as both a businessman and a fan.

"We have two world champions in one of the greatest female fights of all time," he said. "These two have won me over. They are two true warriors who everybody wants to see fight each other. This is going to be a rock 'em, sock 'em fight like in the old days when, regardless of records, fighters fought for neighborhood rights and nobody avoided anybody."

One person who wouldn't have minded the 29-year-old Clampitt, 16-3-1 (7 KOS), avoiding Fiorentino, 13-1 (6 KOS), is Clampitt's husband, Ted Panagiotis, who is also a matchmaker for CES. While he has tremendous faith in his wife's abilities, he thinks that this fight is a lose-lose situation for her.

"I admire her for accepting the challenge, but really don't think the fight will do a lot for Jaime," he said. "She has so much to lose and nothing to gain. If she beats Missy, everyone will say she beat a featherweight. If Missy loses, she can just say it was too big of a weight jump for her. My boss wanted to do the fight, the fans wanted the fight, and Jaime was all for it, so what could I do?"

Panagiotis met Clampitt, a native of Calgary, Canada, in early 2001, when he brought her to the Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut to fight the highly touted Liz Mueller. Mueller handed Clampitt her first loss in four fights, but Panagiotis was surprised what an indelible impression Clampitt had left on him, both personally and professionally.

"As a matchmaker I talk to fighters all the time, but I rarely keep in touch with them," said the 29-year-old Panagiotis, who is known to many industry insiders as Dr. TKO. "I found myself keeping in touch with Jaime without even thinking about it. At Christmas time, I remember thinking I had to call Jaime."

Had Panagiotis given it much thought, he would have believed that he just wanted to be her friend. He thought she was a very nice person, liked talking to her, and thought it was great that she was into boxing as much as he was.

They started dating in April 2002 when Clampitt defeated Kanicia Eley in Miami, Oklahoma. Panagiotis flew out there to watch the fight, sparks flew, and before long he was traveling

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regularly to visit her in Calgary. His parents thought he was crazy.

Before long, Clampitt moved to Rhode Island, signed a promotional contract with CES, and married Panagiotis on June 7, 2003, the same day as Arturo Gatti-Micky Ward III, and the anniversary of Vinny Pazienza-Greg Haugen II.

While there has been no shortage of professional ebbs and flows ever since, their love for each other has only grown immeasurably.

They have lived their life on a hamster wheel ever since. Besides Clampitt's demanding vocation, Panagiotis took over Gansett Juice, a Narragansett surf shop that his father Peter, a former professional surfer, owned for decades. He is also the national sales marketing manager for BiC Surf, a part-time matchmaker for CES, and, along with Clampitt, the co-owner of the Rhode Island Gym in Warwick, which used to be run by Vinny Paz.

Although he never fought competitively, he has trained since he was a teenager so he occasionally spars with his wife. "I can go a little bit, so I get drafted on occasion," he joked.

Besides boxing, Clampitt is a personal trainer at the gym, where she has an abundance of white and blue collar clients. To say life is hectic would be an understatement.

"The most challenging is the store," said Panagiotis. "You can work your butt off there and still have no money at the end. Making fights, especially for your wife, can also be very difficult."

Right now Panagiotis is immersed in his wife's quest to make fistic history. Still, he says, he is not all that enthusiastic about watching her in action, especially since she had hand surgery last December and is also often bothered by a bad back.

"I don't like when she fights at all," he admits. "If she gets hurt, even for a second, in a fight that I made, it doesn't feel good. When she fought [a rematch] with Eliza Olson [in December 2004], she broke her right hand in the third round. I didn't know it, so I kept screaming at her to throw the damn right hand. When I found out about the hand, I felt terrible."

In June 2004, Clampitt lost a 10-round decision to the lauded Jane Couch at Foxwoods. Just a few days earlier, her beloved trainer Robert "Tiny" Ricci had passed away. As Clampitt was walking to the ring, Panagiotis remembers thinking that she was in no condition to fight.

"I knew she wasn't ready, but she is too much of a fighter to stop," he said. "Jaime has a lot of heart and is very strong mentally. As much as I would like to see her quit, she has to do that when she's ready. I don't ever want to suggest it because I respect her determination too much."

As a youngster in her hometown, Clampitt was a renowned gymnast. Her mother Beverly was a professional figure skater and her father Cliff was a minor league hockey player.

When Clampitt realized that she went as far as she could in gymnastics, she opened the phone

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book to look for a new sport to compete in. Boxing was the first thing she came upon.

“If she had seen archery, she’d be shooting arrows right now,” joked Panagiotis, also a serious athlete who spent his formative years skateboarding and surfing.

“Jaime has come a long way in a short time,” said Panagiotis. “She is an extremely dedicated athlete, so it is easy to support her. This fight has created quite a buzz around here. I wouldn’t be surprised if we have a sellout. She is one of the most popular fighters in this area. She deserves all that he has attained, because she is such a hard worker and a good person.”

Other members of Burchfield’s stable include 2004 Olympian Jason “Big Six” Estrada, who will fight on the May 18 card against veteran Robert Wiggins, Peter Manfredo Jr. the runner-up in the first season of “The Contender” television series, featherweight Matt Remillard, Matt Godfrey, Joey Spina, and Gary Balletto, the latter of whom often works Clappitt’s corner.

Besides Estrada, also appearing on the May 18 show are junior welterweight Eddie Soto, middleweight Bobo Starnino, and 156-pound amateur sensation Demetrius Andrade, who just won his second National Golden Gloves title.

Tickets are priced at \$150 for limited VIP; \$100 for ringside; \$60 reserved, and \$30 for general admission. Call 401-724-2253 to order tickets or visit CES at www.cewsboxing.com.