

## Mia St. John Boxes Out Boxing

Written by Jesse K. Cox  
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Mia St. John can sell boxing. She can – and does – sell just about anything. For the 38-year-old former women's world featherweight champion, she's more than a boxer, she's "a personality."

Within the first few seconds of our conversation she's plugging products. Everything from her "Million Dollar Fitness" DVD to a rapid weight-loss cream – all, of course, available on her Web site. Peddling products also requires public appearances, of which she's made plenty.

Somewhere between the public appearances and endorsements, we both acknowledged she actually had a bout coming up against 16-1 Jelena Mrdjenovich on June 6 at the Shaw Center in Edmonton, Alberta. That's been the life for St. John since she arrived in professional women's boxing in 1997.

"It's always a distraction, but that's something I've heard to go with because for 10 years I've had to," she said. "I'm more of a personality. I have to fit that in."

Those on the scene knew her, but the general American population didn't have a clue until she graced the November 1999 Playboy cover. Hell, up to that point, middle America probably didn't realize there was such a thing as women's full-contact sport that didn't involve Jell-O or mud.

"Women's boxing has its highs and lows," St. John said. "We got a lot of publicity, then it kind of hit a slump. Then we came back out of it with the famous daughter (Laila Ali), then we went back into a slump. Then we came out with 'Million Dollar Baby.'"

"Right now, it's still pretty much a novelty act."

The failure to bring women's boxing to the Beijing Olympics is proof of that, she said.

"We signed the petition and I talked to the media there," St. John said. "We thought they were going to accept it. I think it's still very much a man's sport. It's still a man's world and still very difficult for a woman."

I'd like to say my first introduction to women's boxing was covering Layla McCarter's title fight in Ignacio, Colo., a few years ago. Professionally, it was. But St. John's layout in that famous magazine brought women's boxing to my attention.

Yes, I'm a pig.

The magazine couldn't truly give St. John the credibility she needed in the ring, despite her Tae Kwon Do world championship background. Her critics soon realized a beautiful face wasn't St. John's only asset. She went 12 rounds with Christy Martin when the general consensus was she'd be lucky to last six.

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St. John is in a different point in her life now. Facing the 23-year-old Mrdjenovich may be her last foray into the ring, she said, even if it wasn't a fight she wanted. Not that she, even after 51 career fights, doesn't have the ability to keep it up. Her outlook on the sport has become jaded, she admitted.

"I've seen it all," she said. "I've been with Don King, Bob Arum and Dan Goossen. ... We need a national commission; someone fighting for our rights."

Senator John McCain, tally another vote toward your 2008 presidential race.

It's true, St. John doesn't have a lot of love for promoters and commissions, alike. So much so she's willing to support a ban altogether if reform doesn't come quickly.

"I love the game," she said. "[Because of] the people surrounding it, the environment, when I walk into a boxing gym, I walk into a dark cloud and I feel ill inside.

"At this point, it's almost like I know that I have to get out. I know it's what's best for me mentally."

The endorsements, DVDs and upcoming television show aren't bad incentives, either.

### BELOW THE BELT

Every fight Roy Jones Jr. has trained for since 1996 involved a title shot for somebody.

But there's a lackluster sense to his upcoming belt bout with Prince Badi Ajamu, mostly because he's the challenger for a continental (WBO NABO) championship in Boise, Id. Roy Jones is challenging for a North American title at this point in his career?

I understand this is how bigger, better opportunities come through. I'll go so far to say that Jones will likely pummel this Ajamu, whose record doesn't exhibit any significant opponents. If Jones wins, he will have assured yet another title shot.

The ominous flipside is a loss could be the end for RJ in the ring. All of that idle time in retirement leaves a huge window for him to start rapping again.

And nobody wants that. Nobody.