

It's Showtime for Myekeni in the WBC...Or Is It?

Written by Scott Mallon

Tuesday, 06 June 2006 19:00

World Boxing Council (WBC) International flyweight champion Mhikiza "Showtime" Myekeni has been installed as the new number one contender for the WBC world title.

Earlier last month the WBC ordered Wonjongkam to face the South African fighter, but a report on FightNews.com claims Wonjongkam has elected to fight Mexican fighter Everardo "Zihua" Morales on June 10 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Thai, who has successfully defended his WBC title fourteen times, has not defended his title against a mandatory challenger in two and a half years. Although it was Morales manager, Fausto Garcio, who leaked word of Wonjongkam facing his charge, confirmation has yet to come from the WBC or Wonjongkam's camp as to exactly who will be challenging the champion.

Below is a press release from Branco Sports Productions, the promoter of Monelei Mhikiza "Showtime" Myekeni, which makes it clear they believe Myekeni will be challenging for the world title, not Morales. Should Wonjongkam elect to face Morales, according to WBC's guidelines, he could be stripped of his world title.

Myekeni is a worthy opponent who has an excellent shot at winning a fight with Wonjongkam.

When I see it the two in the ring, I'll believe it.

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Issued For and on Behalf of Branco Sports Productions by: **Trevor Cramer Communications**

Barely able to contain his delight at the exceptionally good news for the Branco Sports Productions (BSP) consortium, promoter Branco Milenkovic had to then absorb the news that, not only was their charge in front of the queue, but also confirmed as the mandatory challenger for the world title held by long-time champion Pongsaklek Wonjongkam of Thailand.

Milenkovic was sent a copy of the correspondence from WBC President Jose Sulaiman addressed to Pongsaklek's management regarding the initiation of free negotiations for # 1 contender Myekeni to face the defending champion.

As with all championship fights in the pipeline, the letter from the WBC did, however, make it abundantly clear that if free negotiations between the two parties are not concluded by Friday, June 16 th, 2006, the fight will go to a purse bid at the WBC Executive Offices in Mexico City.

"The WBC are very proud to sanction this mandatory title defence of a great champion from Thailand against our WBC International champion and great prospect from South Africa," the letter went on to say.

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BSP, headed up by the charismatic Branco, has come up trumps yet again, proving that they are masters of negotiation when clinching mega-fights for the boxers under their wing and August has already been penciled in as a possible date for the fight.

In the short space of just a week, Milenkovic has successfully negotiated no less than three legitimate world championship fights involving Gabula Vabaza for the Vacant IBF World Junior Featherweight crown, Hawk Makepula's involvement in the IBF World junior bantamweight final eliminator and now negotiations for Mykeni's crack at WBC World flyweight championship honours.

This deal according to the boxing experts, although we are still in the middle of the year, has put BSP as a front runner again for the "Promoter of the Year Award" – the achievement Branco and Jake have holding for the past two years!

"This is honestly great news for South African boxers to get such worldwide recognition from the leading organizations," said Milenkovic. "I cannot recall in the past where three local boxers have been nominated in such quick succession for legitimate championship challenges," added Milenkovic.

Mykeni will be one of very few South Africans in recent times to be afforded the "mandatory challenger" tag for a legitimate WBC world championship. That honour previously fell to Sugarboy Malinga, who successfully wrested Nigel Benn's super-middleweight title from the champion's grasp, while Mzonke Fana fought his way into the top contender's position last year, before challenging the legendary Marco Antonio Barerra for the junior lightweight crown.

Other South African who have challenged in the past for legitimate WBC world title glory, but on a voluntary basis, were Corrie Sanders, Dingaana Thobela, Giovanni Pretorius, Phillip Ndou and Morgan Ndumo.

In Pongsaklek, the South African challenger faces, undoubtedly, the stiffest challenge of his professional ring career. The tough, ultra-experienced Thai has defended his world title no less than 14 times and his record makes for very impressive reading (63 fights, 61 wins – 31 ko's – 2 losses). Pongsaklek does have a remote SA-connection on his ring record. Back in 1997, he easily disposed of the late Mzukisi Sikali in one round.

Marketing Director and co-promoter of BSP, Baby Jake Matlala, was understandably delighted to learn of the latest turn of events." Branco has done great work with Mykeni's career in no time," said Matlala.

That much is clear, when one considers that Mykeni has taken just 11 months, and three fights, to become a mandatory challenger for a world crown." Although Pongsaklek is very experienced, he is definitely more of a boxer than a puncher, with a 50 % ratio of victories inside the distance," Matlala pointed out.

Mykeni underlined his skill on the 31st of March with a clinical performance against the tough, unbeaten Filipino Benedict Suico, who he easily out-pointed over 12 rounds and suitably

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impressed WBC International Chairman Mauro Betti from Italy, who was at ringside.

Although Pongsaklek has never defended his title outside of his native Thailand, Milenkovic and Matlala are hoping to make the champion an offer he "can't refuse" and will also canvass the national broadcaster SABC to get behind what will be a first-ever for SABC, a WBC World Championship fight featuring a South African boxer.

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One possible explanation for the press release on Fight News is Wonjongkam may indeed choose to fight Morales on June 10th – before the June 16th deadline imposed by the WBC. A win over Morales would give Wonjongkam his fifteenth straight title defense in the flyweight division, breaking Miguel Canto's previous record of fourteen. Wonjongkam stated last year he would retire in three to four years however while unlikely, it's entirely possible he'll give up the title or retire once he's set the record for title defenses.

Wonjongkam and his camp seem more interested in breaking Canto's record than the quality of their opposition. For some reason they believe breaking the record means automatic inclusion into the WBC Hall of Fame (which it probably does). I've got news for them – they ought to be more concerned with the quality of opposition and what the fans and journalists think instead of focusing on breaking records and getting into the WBC's Hall of Fame (of all places).

As the majority of fights in Thailand where Wonjongkam fights are free, not many of the fans are complaining. HBO and Showtime aren't complaining because they don't cover any of his fights. Nor are they shown on PPV – boxing is never shown on PPV in Thailand. No one willing to tell the Emperor (Wonjongkam) he's not wearing any clothes.

One Thai insider who shall remain nameless gave me a surprise when he stated, "Pongsaklek Wonjongkam has just been lucky. He just came along at the right time and he's only faced one or two quality opponents." Several journalists here in Thailand also feel Wonjongkam has outlasted his welcome as champion; he needs to fight someone, anyone, who is recognized as a worthy challenger by more than just the WBC.

Wonjongkam may believe he's fighting legitimate contenders but his last truly decent contender was Hussein Hussein two and a half years ago. Ironically, Hussein was the last mandatory challenger Wonjongkam faced also. The excuse has been put forth that "his promoter calls the shots and Wonjongkam just fights who is put in front of him." I'll buy this at the beginning of this career but not now.

Mark Sales, Daigo Nakahiro, Daisuke Naito, Trash Nakanuma, Gilberto Keb Bass, Randy Mangubat, Isidro Balabat – with the exception of Daisuke Naito, none of these fighters belongs anywhere near the top ten of the flyweight division and yet in the last two years, these are the list of Wonjongkam's opponents.

There are far too many quality challengers in the division – Arce (supposedly moving up), Parra, Darchinyan, Narvaez, Pacheco, Kelly, Maldonado, Burgos - for Wonjongkam to face Everardo

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Morales (27-10-4, 19 KOs). Morales is currently ranked tenth by the WBC. He moved from nineteenth to tenth after losing two of his last three fights.

Is this a worthy challenger?

If Wonjongkam does face Myekeni, he may face his most serious test in years – but Myekeni is not someone who is going to get boxing fans excited. Maybe that just doesn't matter to him...