Super middleweight Asa Sandell, shown here with Randy Gordon, was well into her thirties when she left her home in Stockholm, Sweden, in May 2004 to live in the United States so she could become a professional boxer.

Boxing at the pro level has been prohibited by law in her native country for many years. Even though the 6'1" dynamo had been a five-time national and European champion, she felt an urgent need to take her love of the sweet science as far as she could.

After moving into a tiny room that she compares to a prison cell on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, she began training at the fabled Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn. Under the tutelage of Lennox Blackmoore, a native of Guyana who once challenged Aaron Pryor for the junior welterweight title, things have proceeded at a breakneck pace.

Within a month she fought in her pro debut, a third round TKO of Tabitha Rosario in Washington, D.C. A decision win, a draw, and another TKO victory soon followed.

After losing a close six-round decision to Laura Ramsey in October 2005, Sandell found herself across the ring from Laila Ali in Berlin this past December on the undercard of the heavyweight battle between Nicolay Valuev and John Ruiz.

From all accounts Sandell, whose record now stands at 3-2-1 (2 KOS), was more than holding her own against the heavily favored Ali, who was undefeated in 21 fights going into the bout.

Sandell regularly connected with her potent left hook, but the fight was stopped in the fifth round when Ali let loose a barrage of unanswered punches. Most of the more than 10,000 people in attendance believe that Sandell was more winded than hurt and the stoppage was booed loudly.

"I had always hoped to fight Laila at some point," said Sandell, who is promoted by Arnie "Tokyo" Rosenthal's Rock and Sock Promotions. "When the fight was offered to me, I just had to take it. I've never been so relaxed before a fight. I felt that I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. The people back home (in Sweden) thought I would be slaughtered. I think I was only elevated in their eyes."

The Swedish media scrutiny was intense, both before and after the fight. Sandell still believes that she could have beaten Ali, but was inhibited by the fact that she had only two weeks to train.

She was out of training and visiting her homeland when the fight became available. Even though she knew her lack of conditioning would be a hindrance, she realized it was the opportunity of a lifetime that could not be passed up.

“Laila is a tough girl, but she didn’t intimidate me at all,” said Sandell, who possess a college degree in journalism and writes several columns a month for a Swedish publication.

“I think I proved in the first few rounds that I could beat her. I got to show my boxing skills for a bigger audience. In the long run, the fight will only help me.”

The extremely articulate, intelligent and engaging Sandell, who speaks eloquent English, says that she is much “too emotionally strong” to believe that she let her country down.

“People consider me very atypical,” she said. “I have five years of university and was middle-aged when I decided to pursue my dream. Sweden is a very career-oriented country and I have not done what might have been planned for me. The media says that a lot of people find it inspiring that I’m that old and still going for my dream. I appreciate that.”

When she was younger, Sandell said that she had not fostered any dreams to pursue. She was a talented basketball player, but had no real affinity for that sport. She always loved boxing, but says that she initially did not have the courage to try it. Once she did, however, she said “boxing became my biggest passion ever.”

Asked why she is so committed to a sport that for all of the requisite sacrifice does not reward its female practitioners very well, Sandell’s answer was immediate and unequivocal.

“I need to be satisfied and this satisfies me,” she said. “Physically and mentally it is so challenging. You must take total responsibility for what you do. I love the challenge of being aggressive and being in control. Thankfully I’m not very materialistic. If I was, I would be in the wrong business.”

Asked if she was meek and mild-mannered before she took up boxing, she was somewhat circumspect. “I think I was always aggressive by nature, but never acted upon it for whatever reasons,” she explained.

“Boxing brought that out in me. I admit that it took time to admit to myself that I had aggression, competitiveness, and also, I guess, a bit of exhibitionist.”

On June 8 Sandell was a special guest of the NYPD’s Fighting Finest boxing team, which was competing against their Los Angeles counterparts for the benefit of Tuesday’s Children, a charity that helps the sons and daughters of those killed during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

After being introduced to the crowd, several people asked her to pose for photos with them or for her autograph. She was more than happy to oblige.

“It is nice to get support and affirmation, but my satisfaction from boxing comes from within,” she said. “Boxers are very special people who make sacrifices others can’t understand.

“I am glad I have made the decisions that I have,” she continued. “Not everyone can say they

are pursuing their dreams at my age—or any age. To be doing so makes me very happy and very proud.”