

Exclusive Interview with Ramon Dekkers

Written by Luca De Franco
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Ramon Dekkers is one of the few fighters who deserves to be considered a living legend. He was born on September 4, 1969 in Breda (Holland) and gained this status by KOing all his opponents in Europe and accepting to fight in Thailand against the most dangerous Muay Thai artists. Thai promoters immediately recognized Ramon's talent and hired him to fight in the major stadiums against the very best.

I have a tape of Dekkers annihilating the formidable Coban in less than two minutes at Lumpinee: a flurry of punches and knees to the face, followed by a devastating right hook sent Coban to the mat for good. The 15,000 in attendance who cheered Coban while he was dancing ram muay grew silent in amazement Dekkers' incredible performance. According to the company which produced the video, this fight was seen by 50,000,000 people on Thai television. Even when Ramon lost, he gave 100% in the ring and that's why he got the respect of the Siamese people. Maybe the Thais don't know about Shannon Briggs, but they know everything about Ramon Dekkers. If you doubt it, then write an e-mail to our man in Bangkok Scott Mallon.

The Dutch sensation fought in Milan in the 1990s losing a spectacular match against French savate champion Francois Pennacchio. Nobody expected Pennacchio to last more than a few minutes, but the French found out that savate sweeps were effective against Dekkers and used them to build a victory on points. It has to be said that Dekkers often accepted two fights in the same week, even on different continents, and there's no doubt that this situation contributed to some of his losses. His official website, The Diamond, claims that he never waited for the right moment to accept a challenge; he doesn't blame the fighters who only agree to face champions when they are past their prime. Ramon just points out that he never made any problems about fighting everybody, everywhere. That's why he is a legend and was the first Westerner voted Fighter of the Year by the Thais.

When I got the news that Ramon Dekkers was coming to Italy for two days to teach in seminars, I called muay thay master Diego Calzolari and asked him to get the cell phone number of promoter Roberto Pallottini. Then I went to Rimini, on the Adriatic sea, to meet the sensational Dutch fighter. That's a reason for you readers to click only on The Sweet Science: we go where the action is, even if it means spending some money for train tickets and hotel rooms. Other websites just make a link to our articles or translate them. Anyway, Ramon Dekkers proved to be an expert in communication: he answered to all the questions getting straight to the point and gave me all his numbers for future interviews.

By the way, on his business card he put a photo with Mike Tyson and wrote: Legends of the ring. Nobody can argue with that statement. Like Tyson, the Dutch superstar used to terrify opponents with his reputation. Many of them were scared before entering the ring. Now, read what Ramon Dekkers has to say about his opponents, boxing, the other ring sports and his future plans.

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Ramon, introduce yourself to the readers of The Sweet Science.

I competed in 206 professional fights, in kickboxing and muay thai. I built a record of 186 wins, 18 losses 2 draws. I became Dutch and European champion. Later, I won the world title in all the alphabet organizations. There are so many sanctioning bodies that I cannot name them all. The first one coming to mind is the WPKL. I became champion in four weight divisions: 61, 63, 67 and 70 kilos (from 135 to 154 lbs).

You are famous for fighting twice in the same week. What's your secret?

I was young, in excellent shape and had no injuries. Besides, I often KOed my opponents real fast.

The point is that I never asked myself why I shouldn't fight often if I felt good. Once, I fought on Wednesday in Paris and on Saturday in Bangkok.

Who was your toughest opponent?

All the Thai fighters. The promoters always put me against the very best, so it was always one helluva fight.

Do you think that there still is a significant difference between Thais and Western fighters?

Not anymore, because today's Thai champions are not as good as their predecessors. Besides, Western fighters improved a lot. Japanese fighters are overrated: I met five of them and knocked them out. After six years of retirement, I fought again in Japan on July 20 2005. My opponent was an American: Duane Ludwig. Our match was billed as a superfight inside the World Max Championships Finals (which is the K-1 for middleweights) and that's why we fought under K-1 rules. I dominated him for the entire nine minutes and won on points. The attendance at Yokohama Arena was 17,720 people. The event was shown on the same day by Japanese tv network TBS and later in 64 countries. It was great to be there.

Who do you consider the best fighter today?

Me! I fought again last May 13, in Amsterdam, against a young lion named Joeri Mes. I lost on points, after 3 rounds of 3 minutes duration, with K-1 rules. The attendance at Amsterdam Arena was 17,500. My opponent trained very hard for me and was more motivated. I don't complain about the loss, but it was my last fight. Now, I'm retired for good.

Why did you never fight in the United States?

Because they never had any good opponents for me. American fighters like full contact kickboxing, the style which allows only kicks from the belt up. In Holland, kickboxing has low kicks. Many times, the promoter adds the knees making it similar to the K-1 Grand Prix. If you learn kickboxing in my country, you can fight in any other style too.

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Do you think that muay thai is the most complete fighting sport?

Yes and K-1 fights prove it. K-1 champions must be able to use low kicks, their knees and they KO everybody (including boxers). Muay thai champions can also use their elbows and hit with the knees in many more ways (also while jumping). Muay thai gives the fighter a complete knowledge of his body and how to turn it into a weapon.

How important are the punches for a muay thai fighter?

I always gave a lot of importance to my hands and I try to make it understood to my students. Boxing is essential to learn the proper way to throw a punch and to defend from it. Muay thai battles are so exciting because too often the fighters don't care about defense: that's a great way to get KOed.

Your future plans?

I want to develop champions. I opened a gym in Breda, about one hour from Amsterdam. I also enjoy traveling the world to teach in seminars.

Thanks for your time Ramon.

It's always a pleasure speaking about my sport.