

## Roman Karmazin, A Pro's Pro

Written by Robert Mladinich  
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Former IBF junior middleweight champion Roman "Made in Hell" Karmazin, a native of the city of St. Petersburg in the former Soviet Union who now lives in Los Angeles, was saddened when he learned that two young New York City police officers had been gunned down in the line of duty in separate incidents in 2007.

Although the killings took place 3,000 miles away from Karmazin's adopted hometown, he took a special interest in the murders because both officers had been born and partly raised in the former Soviet Union.

Police Officer Ruslan (Rusel) Timoshenko, 23, was a native of Belarus whose parents had come to New York in 1993. A standout high school athlete, he joined the NYPD in January 2006 and was shot in the face during a car stop in Brooklyn in July 2007.

Auxiliary Police Officer (APO) Yevgeniy (Eugene) Marshalik, 19, had been a champion high school debater who was attending New York University with plans of becoming a prosecutor.

He and his partner, APO Nicholas Pekearo, 28, whose first novel, "The Wolfman," will be published by Tor Publishing in May 2008, were killed in Greenwich Village in March 2007.

They were chasing a crazed gunman who had just shot and killed a restaurant worker. As auxiliary officers, they were unarmed but in full uniform.

To someone fleeing the scene of a homicide, they would have looked exactly like sworn police officers. The uniforms are virtually the same, the only differences being the shape of the shield, arm patch and lack of a gun belt.

While they could have looked the other way and waited for the arrival of armed backup, they opted to chase the gunman. At one point they convinced him to drop a bag containing a handgun and 90 rounds of ammunition, but the man then produced a second gun and shot them both dead.

"When I heard about the killings, I said I have to do something," said the 35-year-old Karmazin, who will put his 36-2-1 (23 KOS) record on the line against tough journeyman Alex Bunema, 28-5-2 (14 KOS), a native of the Congo who fights out of Atlanta, Georgia, on the televised undercard of the Roy Jones Jr.-Felix Trinidad pay-per-view broadcast on Saturday, from Madison Square Garden in New York.

At stake will be the WBA Intercontinental Light Middleweight title.

"I'm an immigrant and they were immigrants, so when I got the chance to fight in New York I wanted to dedicate this fight to them," added Karmazin, whose hellacious nickname belies his nice guy demeanor.

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Speaking through his attorney Steven Bash, who also acts as his interpreter at a January 14 press junket at New York's Church Street Gym, Karmazin said that news of the killings spread quickly through the national Russian community. He was proud that his countrymen had chosen such noble professions, but terribly saddened by the circumstances of their deaths.

When Karmazin was just 12, his 21-year-old brother was killed in an auto accident. Because he was devastated by that tragic occurrence, Karmazin says he understands the turmoil that the families of the slain officers are enduring.

"I know what it is like to lose someone close to me," he said. "I would like to meet the families while I'm in New York and tell them how much I understand their loss. It is terrible when sons and daughters die before their parents.

"For me, it is even more painful when they are immigrants from one of the former republics like I am," he added. "No matter what republic we are from, we are still Russian and we have close bonds."

Karmazin, who is the father of four children, three of whom still live in his homeland, started boxing at the age of 14. Prior to that, he had been a gymnast.

"Being a boy, I needed something more physical," he said. "As soon as I started boxing, I loved it. I loved the camaraderie and the atmosphere. There is a good respect among fighters. Today, I beat you in the gym. Tomorrow, you beat me in the gym, but we still stay friends and have respect for each other and for what we do."

After a stellar amateur career, Karmazin turned pro in Russia in 1996. He fought throughout Europe for about eight years, before aligning himself with promoter Don King in 2004.

After defeating former world champion Keith Holmes by decision, he outpointed the heavily favored Kassim Ouma to garner the IBF junior middleweight crown in July 2005.

A year later, in his first defense in July 2006, he lost the crown by majority decision to Cory Spinks in Spinks's hometown of St. Louis.

Since then, he has scored two impressive knockouts, the last of which was a third round blowout of former champion Alejandro Garcia on the pay-per-view undercard of Fernando Vargas-Ricardo Mayorga in Los Angeles in November 2007.

Asked if there is pressure on him to score more aesthetically pleasing knockouts, especially after the beautiful savagery he displayed against Garcia, he was a bit circumspect.

"I always train hard and fight hard, so whatever is meant to happen will happen," he said. "It is nice to score knockouts, but I just try to win. If the knockout comes I am happy."

Karmazin was very close to his late trainer Igor Lebedev, who passed away not long ago. He is now trained by Freddie Roach, who he has much respect for but laments the fact that Roach is

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in such demand he doesn't get as much attention as he'd like.

Roach considers Karmazin a real pro's pro, and explains, "He just knows boxing. All I have to do with him is make a few adjustments. We have a language barrier, but he understands boxing terminology. He comes to the gym, works hard and goes home. He's solid in every area."

Karmazin concedes that Bunema is not an easy guy to fight, but he will do what he always does, which is to be offensive and not stop throwing punches. He realizes that if he beats Bunema, he is one step closer to winning back a world title, which is something he is very eager to do.

"I lost my title to Cory Spinks in a close decision, so I think I deserve another chance at a title," he said. "I would fight champions at either 154 or 160 pounds. I just want the opportunity to be a world champion again."

Karmazin is happy to get that chance at a venue as fabled as Madison Square Garden. Even while growing up in a cloistered country under communist rule, he came to believe early on that MSG was the true Mecca of boxing.

"It is a dream come true for me," he said. "I know the history of the Garden, it is where boxing started. This is the ultimate, a great opportunity. I feel like I will be part of history. That is very exciting for me."