

Korean-Born Fighter Learns About MSG

Written by Robert Mladinich
Monday, 10 March 2008 19:00

Featherweight Jae-Sung Lee of Hanam City, Korea, a suburb of Seoul, looks more like a university engineering student than a boxer. But don't let the 24-year-old Lee's boyish appearance fool you.

He was respected enough as a boxer in Korea to be brought over to Queens, New York, to progress his career to the next level. On Saturday, March 15th, as part of the internationally flavored "A Fistful of Shamrocks" show at Madison Square Garden's WaMu Theater, he will put his 8-1 (5 KOS) record on the line against undefeated Jules Blackwell, 7-0-1 (2 KOS), of Philadelphia.

Headlining the card, which is being promoted by Celtic Gloves Promotions, will be the hottest junior middleweight in New York.

James Moore, 14-0 (10 KOS), is a native of County Wicklow, Ireland, who fights out of Queens. A veteran of 314 amateur fights, he is the former captain of the Irish national amateur team that included John Duddy and Andy Lee.

He will square off against the seasoned veteran J.C. Candelo, 27-9-4 (18 KOS), of Colombia in the 10 round main event.

Candelo has only been stopped once, by Kassim Ouma, and has gone the distance with such champions and top contenders as Winky Wright, Verno Philips and Alex Bunema.

In the co-feature, the hard-punching and always aggressive junior middleweight Pawel "Raging Bull" Wolak, 19-0 (13 KOS), will take on Dupre "Total Package" Strickland, 18-2-1 (7 KOS), of Shreveport, Louisiana.

In Strickland's last fight, in May 2007, he went the 10 round distance with John Duddy.

Lee views fighting at MSG as just another step in the right direction for the unconventional career he has chosen.

"I started boxing as a hobby, because I was so skinny," said Lee through his interpreter and host, Pearl Kim, the proprietor of the K2 Boxing Club, which is located in the shadows of Shea Stadium in Corona, Queens.

"Once I got into it, I realized this is what I wanted to do with my life."

Lee, who served two years of duty in the Korean army, has no amateur experience to speak of. However, once he turned pro, in January 2004, he says he just "kept winning and winning."

In fact he didn't lose until February 2008, when he dropped a four-round decision to veteran

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Jesus Salvador Perez, who was 24-17-3 (14 KOS), in Dover, Delaware. Up until then, all of his fights had taken place in either Korea or the Philippines.

Kim said that the loss to the much more experienced Perez was an aberration, and says that she and Lee's sponsors are anticipating an exceptional performance from him against Blackwell.

"All he thinks about is fighting right now," said Kim. "Jae knows how important this fight is. He is training very hard, for at least five hours a day."

In the past few weeks Lee has sparred with seasoned professionals Harrison Cuello and Jose Reyes, and trainers Rene Pellot and Oscar Suarez have liked what they have seen.

"Jae has shown the potential that he did in Korea, when he won eight professional fights without a loss," said Kim. "He doesn't feel any pressure or fear about being here in the United States. He is very calm in the ring. None of the pressure affects him."

When asked directly if he was aware of the historical significance related to fighting at MSG, Lee said he was not. Until recently he had no idea that MSG was even known as the Mecca of Boxing.

His only frame of reference to the storied venue was the fact that Rain, a popular Korean musical band, had once performed there.

That he was fighting an undefeated opponent in the most popular venue on the planet in the city that is universally viewed as the Capital of the World, was lost on him until reporters started bringing it up in the past few weeks. He is still unaffected by all of the hoopla.

"All I think about is the fight, and then becoming a champion," said Lee, whose parents operate a small karaoke business in Seoul. "My mind is totally on boxing right now."

He is aware of Korean boxers Duk Koo Kim, who died from injuries sustained in a 1982 bout with WBA lightweight champion Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini, and flyweight Choi Yo-sam, who died in January 2008 of ring injuries sustained a few days earlier in a WBO Intercontinental title winning effort against Indonesia's Heri Amol.

As tragic as those deaths were, however, Lee said they had no impact on his decision to become or stay a boxer even though other career options have been available to him.

"Everybody knows about them," said Lee. "They chose to do with their lives the same thing I have chosen to do with my life. We all know the danger when we choose such a dangerous job. Their deaths did not affect my choice, and I train hard to lessen the danger of me getting hurt."

Whether or not Lee will remain in America once he stops fighting is yet to be decided. But one thing is certain. Like scores of immigrants and visitors before him, he is determined to leave an indelible impression on all whom he comes in contact with for as long as he is here.

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“He is young and passionate, and he now realizes it is honorable to fight at MSG,” said Kim. “The preparation is going very well. Jae wants to prove something in America, to himself and to others.”

“A Fistful of Shamrocks” will also feature popular lightweight Oisin Fagan, 20-5 (15 KOS), of Oklahoma City via Dublin; super middleweight Simon “Slick Fighting Irish” O’Donnell, 5-1 (2 KOS) of County Galway, Ireland; London junior welterweight Steve O’Meara, who will be making his pro debut; bantamweight Khabir Suleymanov, 2-0 (1 KO), of Ukraine; featherweight Joe Rosa, 1-2-1, of Puerto Rico; welterweight Luis Ruiz, 2-0, of Puebla, Mexico; welterweight Martin Wright, 4-0-1, of Brooklyn; and middleweight Bryant Pappas, 5-0 (5 KOS), a hard-punching Yonkers, New York, police officer.

A junior middleweight female bout will match the popular Cristy “Code Red” Nickel, 7-5 (4 KOS), of New York, vs. Oliva Fonseca, 1-1-2 (1 KO) of Philadelphia.

Nickel, who counts Katie Couric among her A-list of clients, was recently named one of the top personal trainers in New York by Allure magazine.

In addition to boxing, live Irish music will be performed by the band “Big Girl’s Blouse.”

Door open at 6:30 P.M. and the fights will begin at 7:00 P.M. Tickets, which range from \$400 to \$50, can be purchased through Ticketmaster at 866-448-7849 or by calling Celtic Gloves at 917-559-8467 or Gleason’s Gym at 718-797-2872.

For sponsorship and advertising opportunities, contact Mike O’Sullivan at 516-242-0428

Check out Celtic Gloves Promotions on the web at: www.celticgloves.com