

TSS Prospect Watch: Matt Korobov

Written by Rick Folstad

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There's a movie here. We just don't know the ending yet.

Right now, they're getting Matt Korobov ready for that next step, the leap from amateur stardom to hot pro prospect, a big jump some amateurs don't clear.

They call him Matt in this country, but that's just part of the Americanization of Korobov, a Russian who was separated from his parents when he was 13, caused by his country's economic collapse. Back home, he's still known as Matvey.

Whether it's Matt or Matvey, those of you attending the fights or buying the pay-per-view package coming out of Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas on Saturday night might want to see what the talk is all about. The two-time world amateur middleweight champ will show you a little of what he has in his scheduled four-round pro debut against Mario Evangelista (1-1-1, 1 KO) of Mazatlan, Mexico.

It's part of the "Final Impact" pay-per-view broadcast headlined by undefeated super-welterweight Julio Cesar Chavez, Jr. in a rematch with Matt Vanda; and an IBF flyweight title fight between champ Nonito Donaire and No. 1 contender Moruti Mthlane of South Africa.

For Korobov, 25, it's a start toward becoming a world champion again, this time as a pro.

"He's a great kid with terrific talent," said Cameron Dunkin, who manages Korobov along with Matt's father, George Korobov. "He's really something. I followed him through the internet and then went to the (world championships in November 2007) in Chicago to watch him fight. After watching him for about three minutes, I had to get up and walk around and get something to drink because my heart was racing. He's that good."

Korobov was the top-rated amateur middleweight in the world before a disappointing 10-7 decision loss at the Beijing Olympics to Bakhtyar Artayev of Kazakhstan, the 2004 Olympic welterweight champion. But even after losing, Korobov was still considered the top prospect coming out of the amateur ranks.

Promoted by Top Rank, he's being taught the pro style by Dan Birmingham of St. Petersburg, Fla., twice voted trainer of the year by the Boxing Writers Association of America.

Birmingham, who has worked with both Winky Wright and Jeff Lacy, said Korobov is very disciplined in everything he does and is focused on what he wants.

"I don't think anything is going to stop him," Birmingham said. "He boxes with great rhythm. His amateur trainer did a beautiful job with him, along with his father. He's a real easy guy to work with."

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With an amateur record of 310-11, Dunkin said Korobov's loss in the Olympics was his first loss in five years.

"Dan was shocked the first time he saw him (in the ring), he looked so good," Dunkin said. "And Matt is so humble, so polite and so disciplined. They're crazy about him. He's a very, very complete fighter. I don't think I've ever seen a fighter more ready for the pros."

Asked if 321 amateur fights might make it tough for Korobov to adjust to the pro style, Birmingham didn't hesitate.

"Not at all," he said. "Besides being an all-around great fighter, he's very quick, he's got great balance and he's very accurate with his punches. He has a strong chin and a big will."

Born in a small town in northern Russia called Orotukan, Korobov and his family moved to Moscow before his folks fled the country in 1998, moving to Lantana, Fla.. His brother Alex moved to Orlando while Matt stayed in Russia with his amateur boxing coach.

Though there were many phone calls over the years, Matt's parents didn't see their son again for more than 10 years, or until they were finally reunited last year at the world championships in Chicago.

A southpaw who is described as being very quick and fast, Dunkin said he's also very strong for a middleweight. And he's in tremendous condition.

"He's a very smart fighter," Dunkin said. "He can lead and he can counter. Dan said the only thing he was weak on was fighting inside. But that's from fighting as an amateur. Dan has been working on that, sliding over and working the body and things like that. Just pro stuff."