

Rothman a free agent and hungry for action

Written by Deon Potgieter

Tuesday, 13 December 2005 19:00

Sebastian Rothman, who put up a tremendous challenge against O'Neil Bell recently in a bid for the IBF cruiserweight world title, has cut ties with his promoter and trainer in hopes of staying active and getting another crack at the likes of Bell.

"I was very disappointed following my loss to Bell," says Rothman. "I was four minutes away from claiming the title and could taste victory going into the eleventh round. The next thing I knew I was doing a mattress advert in the middle of the ring."

Rothman was ahead on one of the judge's scorecards and even on the other two at the start of the eleventh round, even though the referee for some reason did not acknowledge the fact that the Israeli-born South African had knocked the champion down at the end of round four.

"Bell is certainly a tremendous puncher and hits harder than anybody else I've ever fought, but in the middle to late rounds the only thing he was doing was hitting me below the belt. In my next fight you may have to call me Miss Rothman," the fighter says. "Thank goodness I've already got two kids."

"I realized after the fight that I was not properly prepared for it," says Rothman, who is not one to make excuses. "I battled with the humidity and I was also too light going into the fight." Rothman tipped the scales at 194½ lbs, but was feasting on pizza the day before the weigh-in trying to add a few pounds. Rothman does build up a sweat quickly and has a tendency of dehydrating a lot faster than normal; another reason the humidity proved a problem.

On his split with his promoter Rodney Berman and trainer Harold Volbrecht, Rothman says it was a mutual decision. "We don't have the same vision for my future," says the likable boxer nicknamed The Soldier. "One of the biggest problems in my career is that I was not kept busy, so could never build up momentum. If you've got momentum it builds confidence. I never had that going against Bell and I certainly have not reached the heights I could have had I been given matches against better opposition earlier in my career."

Rothman did claim the WBU and the IBO cruiserweight world titles, but has always hungered to get in the ring with the big names. He's passionate about the sport and has a love for boxing, which is not noticeable in most other pugilists. "I wanted to challenge Osborne Maschimane for the South African heavyweight title. Having beaten the previous champion in a non-title fight, I figured it would be a good marketing exercise to win the title. There aren't any cruiserweights of note for me to fight so I'd move up for that one."

Herein lays a possible obstacle: Maschimane is also trained by Volbrecht and promoted by Berman. Ironically, it was not long ago that former WBO heavyweight world champion Corrie Sanders also parted ways with Berman and Volbrecht citing inactivity and that his best interests were not always looked after. One seems to recall that he was not fully prepared when climbing into the ring against Vitali Klitschko. "The split has been two years coming," says Rothman. "The

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Machimane fight wasn't a factor. I just think he should clean house at home before launching an international career.

"I figure I've still got a good two to three years left before I call it a day and don't want to waste it sitting around hoping I'll get a fight."

Asked whether he would be prepared to relocate to pursue the big names in the US or other shores, Rothman says "Yes, if I get the right offer and it was to advance my career I would be prepared to relocate. I have already received a few offers out of Europe, but I haven't signed with anybody as yet.

"Looking at Mormeck vs. Bell, I think Mormeck will outmuscle Bell and try and impose his physical presence on the fight," continues Rothman. "Mormeck is incredible strong and imposing, but having said that, if Bell lands he could stop him. Bell has a very deceiving punch. He fights off the back foot and looks very relaxed. You don't expect him to land with such authority, but he can punch. He's also an awkward fighter. Another thing people don't realize about Bell is that he has tremendous heart. When he's back is against the wall he can dig deep and do what he needs to do. He's got a lot of heart. I have a lot of respect for him."

Rothman makes no secret that he would love to get in the ring with the winner of the Mormeck-Bell unification. "The last unified cruiserweight champion was Evander Holyfield and he's one of my heroes. It would be a dream come true if I could contest that title. It's something I've dreamed of since I was a child. Fighting and beating the best boxers in the world."

And who would he want to win between Mormeck and Bell? "Well, seeing as though I came so close against Bell, I would want him to do well," says Rothman, the tone of his voice indicating that it may be a bridge to far for Bell. "But let's say I'll support whichever one would be prepared to defend against me. "

Rothman has a fine appreciation of boxing skill and adds that he thinks stylistically Steve Cunningham could defeat both Mormeck and Bell, his only problem being that he does not have a punch.

On what he'd do different if he had a rematch with Bell, Rothman replied, "Oh, I learned my lesson. There are a few things I'd do different and in the end I think I could knock him out with a jab. I'd also work his body more. Besides the low blows, he worked my body well and it did slow me down."

In other South African news Mzonke Fana returns to the ring on Friday night in his first fight since losing to Marco Antonio Barrera for the WBC junior lightweight world title eight months ago. He faces Filipino fighter Benjamin Sollano (10-5, 7 KOs) in front of his home crowd in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape. "I've come to terms with my loss against Barrera," says Fana. "Now I want to get back on the winning track and earn another shot at another credible world title."

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Mzonke Fana, 23-3 (9 KOs), showed some fine form in stopping Filipino Benjamin, 10-6 (7 KOs), Sollano in four rounds in Khayalitsha on Friday night in his first outing since losing to Marco Antonio Barrera eight months ago. The break has seemingly done the South African good as he looked composed and fired his blows with confidence and precision. Fana dominated throughout and dropped Solano with a solid right. Feeling like a cat whose milk was plucked away before he could drink it following his loss to Barrera, Fana is determined to prove that he is worth more. He has stated that he intends working his way back into contention for a "credible" world title and has no interest in contesting the titles of the smaller sanctioning bodies like the IBO, WBU, etc. Although this bout was in reality nothing more than a warmup for Fana, there is a change detectable in the man and the Barrera experience may well have served to mature him to another level. Fana is back and by the looks of it he intends to stay.