

## Road For Touted Amateur Gets Bumpy

Written by Raymond Markarian  
Wednesday, 26 December 2007 19:00

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Amateur boxing is the greatest form of tutorial for young fighters. In recent history, men like Mike Tyson, Oscar de la Hoya, Shane Mosley, and Floyd Mayweather all paid their dues by grinding out impressive amateur careers. Those fighters continued their success from the amateurs and became stars in the pros.

Amateur boxing is like grade school for fighters. The successful ones are taught at a young age by the most capable trainers to prepare them for the real world. Once the amateurs graduate to the pros and become champions, everybody wins. The boxers get the glory, popularity, and riches, while the trainers obtain the greatest form of achievement without a price tag: personal satisfaction.

But here is the question.....

What happens when a fighter goes pro and does not perform to the level of expectations? Or better yet, what happens when an impressive amateur turns pro and hits a bump in the road during his first pro fight? Who suffers, and what are the consequences?

As an amateur boxer, Stan Martyniuk was as remarkable as can be. "Stan the Man" acquired 32 amateur championships in less than seven years. Now, the 22 year old Russian stands at 5'10" tall and fights around the 130 pound weight limit.

Martyniuk has built a marketing empire around his amateur success. StanMartyniuk.com is live and running and "Stan the Man" t-shirts are being printed as we speak.

He comes from a strong family intertwined in boxing history. Martyniuk's father, uncle, and grandfather all chased the dream of becoming great boxers with relative success. His uncle and grandfather fought professionally in the former Soviet Union. But now in America, Slava Martyniuk, (Stan's father) raised his son to learn boxing in Sacramento, Ca.

Looking for an edge to Stan's continuous mastery of the sweet science, Slava Martyniuk asked his former trainer Mateen Saifudeen to coach his son. Mateen Saifudeen happily accepted.

There is the good news...

Mateen Saifudeen (formerly known as Steve Hernandez) is the head trainer and owner of the highly regarded Mateen's Boxing Gym in Sacramento, Ca. Mateen's Boxing Club ("Where Champions are made") has a bold slogan and the trainer lives by his word.

"My reputation speaks for itself. My record as a trainer is unblemished. I breed champions. If you are looking to breed a champion everything has to be consistent. But I also know that boxing is a business. I have been in this game for a long time. But it is like I always tell my guys.

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Boxing is the same game just different players.”

That sounds good enough....

After three years under Mateen’s tutelage, “Stan the Man” made his mark. The news was not only good, it was great. With every Stan Martyniuk amateur victory there grew a larger dream of glory and a clearer vision of professional championship gold. Mateen was happy. Stan’s father Slava was happy, and more importantly Stan “Stan the Man” Martyniuk was happy.

Now the transition to the pros....

Life as a professional boxer is not always easy. Michael Robinson, the acclaimed manager for Stan Martyniuk and Mateen makes a very clear point, “Boxing is not a hard sport to get into. Any one with half a brain could go pro. Boxing is the easiest sport to be a professional but the hardest to make it.”

Just to give an idea of how frightening Stan Martyniuk was before his first pro fight, Michael Robinson told a story of a fight that never happened. “In September 2007, we were scheduled to fight a boxer named Ronald Hurley in Reno, Nevada. Hurley took one look at Stan Martyniuk and decided not show up to the weigh in. The guy actually attempted to back out of the fight and was on the way back home. We had to postpone Stan’s first pro fight for a month.”

Robinson continued by saying, “When a fighter has a great amateur career like Stan, a mystic begins to build around him. Stan’s following became to be pretty big before his first pro fight.”

That eventful first fight came on October 19, 2007 when Stan Martyniuk faced Gerardo Robles in a four round bout. Michael Robinson, Stan, and Mateen were consistent with their assessment of Martyniuk’s opponent before the fight. Robinson said. “We chose a non-risk hand-picked opponent for Stan Martyniuk’s first pro fight. I mean the opponent was 2-7 and a perennial loser.”

Mateen called the opponent “a bum,” and Stan said that the fighter “was not supposed to be that good.”

The ultimate outcome was expected. Martyniuk defeated Robles. After the fight, Stan Martyniuk said, “I felt prepared coming into the fight because I had big support from my family and the people that were around me. I also trained with some of the best fighters out there, like Juan Manuel Marquez and Stevie Forbes so I knew I could compete at the highest level. I am a unique because I am tall for my weight and I sit down on my shots. I also have fast hand speed and I fight from the outside.

But, a lot of people came to the fight and I felt pressure. In the first round, I hurt my hand really bad on the guy’s head. We won by decision and we are going to try to build on that performance.”

Here is the problem...

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To the naked eye everyone should be happy but they aren't. With all due respect, everyone involved, including Stan, say that Martyniuk's performance in his pro debut, did not live up to expectations. Therefore a heated exchange occurred in Martyniuk's corner during the fight. Mateen said, "Stan's father was being loud and screaming in Russian during the fight, he got warned by the commission to stop."

Slava Martyniuk was yelling during the fight because the so called "perennial loser" was giving Stan Martyniuk, a fighter with unlimited potential, a run for his money. The fight ended with Martyniuk eking out a close decision.

Then things took a turn for the worse...

Stan's father and Mateen got into a war of words after the fight and have both decided to go their separate ways. An accomplished amateur like Stan Martyniuk needs the appropriate guidance. Besides from being trained properly, the people around him should be supportive. Not butting heads.

Unlimited potential and heavy expectations can only take you so far. Stan not only faced the pressure to perform in his first fight, he also had to live up to the vision his family, his trainer, and his manager put forth for him.

The irony is that Stan accomplished the ultimate goal. He won the fight. But he lost the structure that was built around him. Stan no longer has Mateen as his trainer because Mateen and Stan's father did not see eye to eye.

Most boxing fans believe that a victory brings happiness. But in this situation, Martyniuk's victory forced a break up. Why would a fighter part with his trainer after a win? Michael Robinson has his own assessment. "This situation is in a sad state of affairs. Do the Los Angeles Lakers fire Phil Jackson after a win? No they don't. The young man (Stan) still has life lessons to learn. Stan came into the pros with big expectations, huge expectations. The problem with boxing is that everyone has an opinion whenever money is involved. When it was about love, (in the amateurs) everything was good."

Robinson said, "Mateen chose not to work with Stan Martyniuk after the Robles fight. Mateen specifically told me that he was done working with these guys because he would never want to come between a father and his son."

Mateen agreed with Michael Robinson's assessment. "Let's get something clear. Nobody left Mateen. Mateen left them. Some trainers are motivated by greed but not Mateen. It was never about money for me because I never got paid. I just try to do right by these kids. I wish the best for Stan, but he should be old enough to make his own decisions."

Stan said, "Family comes first, when an unfortunate issue like this comes up I have to go with my father's decision. I think Mateen is a great trainer and I have no bad blood, but it was my father's decision to leave Mateen after my first pro fight."

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The good people in boxing do it for the love of the sport. To be honest, Stan Martyniuk, Michael Robinson, and Mateen Saifudeen seem like the good guys. But in this particular situation no one wins.

In the meantime, Mateen will go back to the drawing board and continue to train up and coming fighters. "Mateen Boxing Club is not about me, it is about the youth," he said. "Sacramento is about to hold the Golden Glove Championships in February, so that is exciting. "

And Stan "The Man" Martyniuk will continue his quest to become a great professional fighter. "I think I need about 5 or 6 more fights to be comfortable with the pro game," he said. "I hope to be world champion in three or four years."

Martyniuk fights again on January 17th in Sacramento, Ca. This time he has a new trainer. Stan's father Slava has taken command. According to the younger Martyniuk, training has never been better. Stan says, "Things have been good great with my father as my trainer. I am learning so many new things everyday."

Is this tragic or just another casualty to a sport that does not need more politically debilitating bad stories? The question could be answered in both ways. But the lesson has been learned.

Politics ruin boxing. Everyone is happy in the amateurs but once a fighter goes pro, and money is involved, people change. The tragedy is that a successful boxing relationship has been sidetracked. But more importantly, a promising boxer like Stan Martyniuk had to suffer a setback because those that were closest to him could not see eye to eye.

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\*photo by Markarian