

Female Fighters of the Year

Written by David A. Avila

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The co-Fighters of the Year female pro boxers for 2009 are Kina Malpartida and Olivia Gerula. Ironically they both fight in the 130-pound weight division known as the junior lightweight or super featherweight division.

If you look at Gerula's record and base her talent you would be very surprised. With 10 losses on her resume and only 12 wins it would be easy to dismiss her as a journeywoman fighter. It would be a mistake because 2009 was her chance to prove that all those days in the gym paid off.

Beginning in March, the Canadian from Winnipeg would fly to Tokyo to beat Fujin Raika, then drive over to Edmonton to edge fellow countrywoman Jelena Mrdjenovich, and finally fly to Paris and beat Myriam Chomaz for the world title just last week.

Peru's Malpartida has a similar story. Beginning in March she beat hometown fighter Maureen Shea by knockout in Madison Square Garden and captured a world title, then flew to Lima, Peru and beat Brazil's Halana Dos Santos by knockout and several weeks ago defended against Great Britain's tough Lyndsey Scragg.

"This whole year has been amazing," Malpartida said.

Both Gerula and Malpartida had surprised the boxing world with their sudden turn around to win world titles in foreign and probably hostile ground. For that they deserve to be co-Fighters of the Year for 2009.

Others had a fine year too such as Germany's Susi Kentikian who defended her flyweight world titles three times. The little Armenian speed demon had three big wins including a convincing win over Elena "Baby Doll" Reid and two others. More importantly, she won because she is very good, not just because she fights primarily in Germany.

Ana Julaton who captured two world titles in the junior featherweight division is another fighter deserving attention. She beat Kelsey Jeffries for the IBA junior featherweight title in a hard-fought scrap against one of the best fighters in the last 10 years. Then she beat a determined Donna Biggers for the WBO version to grab yet another world title. She's looking for big fights now. She almost had a fight with Melissa Hernandez but the promoters scrapped it at the last minute. Then they tried to put it back together but it was too late. Julaton's trainer had already made other arrangements to fly to the Philippines. Most of the boxing people thought Julaton backed out but that was just rumor. The truth was it was the promoter's call and they didn't think enough of women's boxing to keep it.

Colombia's Lety Florez, Australia's Susie Ramadan, Russia's Natascha Ragosina and New Mexico's Holly Holm all had good years too. Holm was scheduled to fight Melissa Hernandez but problems over hand wrap supervision within a few hours of the fight forced a cancellation.

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Both fighters were considered among the top three fighters in the world pound for pound. Though Holm had a big size advantage, Hernandez's defensive abilities would have been fun to see. Holm has a great jab and good speed. It was going to be a dandy fight but instead the fight evaporated into thin air. Others worth mentioning are Mariana Juarez and Ana Maria Torres who are leading a push for women's boxing in their native country Mexico. It seems female prizefighting is in a big boom over there. Juarez fought and won five times in 2009 and is the interim WBC flyweight titleholder. Castillo is the WBC junior bantamweight titleholder and a true force in boxing. In Las Vegas there is Melinda Cooper and Layla McCarter who fought only once in the year but when they fight they are electric.

Air Award

Nicole Woods wins recognition for being the most willing to fight any where. The fighter out of Stone Mountain, Georgia fought five times with four taking place that were not in her home state. The boxer known as "Notorious" fought in Montivideo, Uruguay, Tunica, Miss., Edmonton, Canada, and La Pampa, Argentina. She won in Mississippi but lost decisions in other countries.

"Fighting in foreign countries is very difficult because you know going in that you have to have a knockout in order to win. The people are fairly nice but they try to run you around and send you through hell before the fight," said Woods by email. "I have learned from all of my experiences and next year I plan to try to fight in the US as much as possible."

Woods is a veteran who has the skills and the will to fight the best in any place and any time. She truly deserves respect.

A few others should be recognized such as Rhonda Luna who fought in Korea, Terri Lynn Cruz who knocked down the champion from Germany but still returned with a loss, and Terri Blair who fought thrice outside of her home state and got a draw in Zambia. There are others. The road for female prizefighters is not an easy task.

Star prospects and contenders

Every year a new group of fighters seem to suddenly arrive in the championship level and give female boxing a boost. They come from all over the world with aspirations of becoming world champions.

In the scarce heavyweight level Tanzee Daniel of Brooklyn, New York erupted into boxing with four wins. In Norway there is Cecilia Braekhus an undefeated welterweight along with Sweden's Anna Ingman and Hanna Gabriel of Costa Rica who are also undefeated welterweights. Other fighters who look like the real deal are Jennifer Barber and Kaliesha West of California, Adawirky Lopez of Florida, Amanda Serrano of New York, Yesica Marcos of Argentina and Ji-Hye Woo of Korea.

All these women show enough talent to one day be wearing a world title belt real soon.