Written by David A. Avila
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Melinda "La Maravilla" Cooper just might be one of a handful of female boxers that could be called the best in the world today. But few have seen her in action.

The petite sized Las Vegas-based prizefighter has gobbled up opposition with her superior speed, power and calmness inside the boxing ring.

Very few fans have seen her blistering attack style.

Cooper (21-0, 11 KOs) travels to Mexico City to face Fredee Gonzalez (5-6-1) on Saturday, Jan. 22 for a bantamweight showdown. It's her third straight trip to the boxing crazy country.

Though she would rather be fighting in front of local fans she's thankful to be fighting at all.

For five years she's averaged only one fight per year.

"I was off a long time. When I came back I had to really look into myself," said Cooper, 25, who is trained by James Pena. "It was really hard to get a fight."

It still is.

In person Cooper's personality is quite the opposite of her intimidating boxing persona. Words are well chosen, trust is not easily given, and smiles are few until a bond of recognition is established. Otherwise, it's adios buddy.

Those who know the pretty brunette say she has a great sense of humor and is extremely bright and articulate.

"She can be really funny," says Pena, who has trained her since age 11.

That all changes once she laces up the boxing gloves and steps inside the ropes.

"I don't like sparring with girls," says Cooper, who travels from gym to gym to perfect her craft. "Boys are better because they're quicker and hit harder."

It's only when she spars with much heavier girls that she loosens up the arsenal of laser sharp counters and thudding left hooks. Her footwork is precise and effortless as she moves in and out of position for attacks.

Cooper, a former flyweight world champion, has blazed a trail of fear as she racks up victory after victory. She has been practicing the art of boxing for nearly 15 years and remains undefeated after a total of 74 rounds and 21 pro bouts. All of those fights resulting in wins, 11 came via knockout.

Mexican fight fans are beginning to realize that Cooper is not a mere opponent, but a force who could knock off several of that country's stars if given the opportunity. Once again she'll be exhibiting her fighting style against a Mexican female prizefighter.

"They're tough girls," says Cooper, whose style is more boxer-puncher than pure boxer.

Last year Cooper signed to fight under Sampson Lewkowicz, whose company frequently runs international fight cards, including in Mexico. Thus, three consecutive bouts were arranged for the Las Vegas prizefighter.

Ironically, it's not lost on Cooper that though she fights in the universally recognized boxing capital of the world, the Las Vegas native has not been able to secure a bout in her own hometown.

"I'm not going to fight for $400 dollars," said Cooper, who added she makes that much in one night of bartending at a local casino. "I could break my face and it would cost more than that to fix."

Instead, Cooper will travel to other countries where she can at least fight for a reasonable purse while sharpening her skills for another world title bout in the near future.

California business woman Claudia Ollis, who arranged a title bout for current WBO bantamweight champion Kaliesha West, wants to assist in Cooper's pursuit of another world title. Recently another little-known talent, Ava Knight, was brought to Las Vegas by Ollis to help prepare each other for their pending bouts. Knight won her fight by knockout. Now it's Cooper's turn.

"She will win another world title," says Pena, who studies each opponent and relays his findings to Cooper. "When Melinda fights she has no fear."

Outside of boxing Cooper works day to day with an easy-going attitude and Mona Lisa like smile.

"I'm anxious to get in the ring and make big things happen this year," Cooper says.

Will this be the year of La Maravilla?

Comment on this article

Isaiah says:

My, my, my.... Temptation much? I get paid soon. It may not be big time boxer money, but it gets us by. Ms. Cooper. It is MS Cooper isn't it? I'm sure if I asked my old lady just right, if let's say, on my birthday, perphaps you would like to join the two of us on a night out. How about dinner and a few drinks? We can all 3 go back to the pad and just see where the night takes us..... No gloves needed. LOL!

Pete Egley Jr says:

That just doesn't look good for an experienced boxer like Cooper to be facing people with a mediocre record. I've seen Ada "Ace" Velez be discussed. I wonder why that fight cannot be made? I do like Cooper's attitude. I've seen only an interview with her, not one of her fights. She certainly exuded supreme confidence. C'mon, there's gotta be a fight out there. Look at McCarter. She tried like hell to get Melissa Hernandez in the ring. That didn't work so she's facing a boxer with a 5-15 record named Cimberly "Kim" Harris. Harris's record isn't pretty, but she's been in with very good fighters. Rock on, Layla. Another great article!

Joe says:

I still like the Baby Doll a bit more. And please bring Laila back.....