

Kaliesha West Clashes With Ava Knight on Saturday

Written by David A. Avila

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Knight (r) lands on Gloria Salas.

WBO bantamweight champion Kaliesha “Wild, Wild” West defends her title on Saturday against Ava “The Lady of Boxing” Knight.

The long awaited rematch takes place at the Pico Rivera Sports Arena a venue, normally used for rodeos and other outdoor events. All of the other fights will be Muy Thai with the lone boxing match featuring the talented female bantamweight fighters.

West, a super quick 118-pounder with knockout power from Moreno Valley, Calif. knows all about the equally quick and powerful Knight of Oakland. They fought nearly three years ago with Knight winning a close decision.

Mirror images they are.

Though Knight beat West in their first encounter back in November 2008, a lot has changed for both prizefighters. On one side West has traveled the world from one hemisphere to another in search of fighting the best. On the other side Knight has been futilely looking for the same search but has not had the same luck.

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A lot has changed.

Knight finally stepped back in the boxing ring after a long stretch without a fight. This past January the Oakland-based boxer shook off the rust with a devastating first round knockout win over Coachella's tough Gloria Salas. You could see the rust come off each second the match lasted.

Now she returns to contest for West's bantamweight world title despite only one round in 22 months. No problem, she is very confident.

"Even though I haven't fought much, I've been in the gym for the whole time basically," Knight said.

Before fighting Salas, the boxer-puncher met with Mexico's Ana Maria Torres for the WBC junior bantamweight world title. Knight lost by decision but fought with a bad back that required months of rest following the fight. During that time she also lost her former trainer. Things looked bad but a move from Chico to Oakland proved beneficial when she discovered a new trainer, Ben Bautista.

"Now I am trained by Ben Bautista who has not made it a point to change my style but to perfect the things that are good and correct mistakes," says Knight who can fight from 108 pounds to 126 pounds. "I have changed my style from just one way to fight, to many. Being in the ring with so many different sparring partners has led me to adjust very well to different styles, which in the end has made me switch things up when needed."

Fans aren't quite aware of Knight at the moment, but she has the athleticism and mentality to fight anybody in the world from 112 pounds to 126 pounds and win titles in all of those divisions.

Losing and putting on weight is not a problem for Knight.

"Eight pounds may be a big difference to many, but I have done it before. I've been down to as low as 108.5 and up to 118," said Knight. "Since the last fight in January I ate, of course a healthy and protein rich diet to build up to a healthy, strong 118."

West has a different physical build. Though a mere 5 feet, four-inches in height, she is a solid 118-pound fighter who can move up. In the last two years she's added more power to her blows and proved it with back-to-back knockout wins over Angel Gladney and Brazil's Vanessa Guimaraes.

The Moreno Valley boxer has always had speed. But in the past two years she's added one of the best left hooks anywhere that she turns into an uppercut in the blink of an eye. Other dimensions added are some riveting combinations that tie up opposition until she lowers the boom. When it comes, it comes suddenly.

West had 40 amateur fights before becoming a professional. For women that's a lot of amateur bouts and experience that has led her to winning the bantamweight world title. She was the first

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woman to win a world title at Staples Center in Los Angeles. Last year she was selected Fighter of the Year and this past month entered the Pound for Pound list of best female boxers in any weight division.

One big question mark remains for West, who was involved in a horrific car crash on the freeway. Can she still bring those physical tools to the fight on Saturday against Knight?

Knight has speed, power and determination that she's unleashed against all of her competition. Though not as well known as West, the Oakland prizefighter also has power in her fists that can turn the fight around in a split second. Rust is her only enemy in this contest against West.