

Ann Marie Saccurato: "An Honest Fighter"

By Bernie McCoy

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Some boxers inherit fame, others have it thrust upon them. Ann Marie Saccurato is not the beneficiary of either happenstance. She has neither a famous athlete/parent nor does she bask in the synthetic halo of show business publicity. What Ann Marie Saccurato does have is well-honed skills in the boxing ring, hard earned in the amateur and professional ranks. The type of fame Ann Marie Saccurato has gained, thus far, is endowed, intramurally, in gyms throughout the sport, where boxing is spoken by those who not only know, but thoroughly understand, the sport. Ann Marie Saccurato is that unique breed of boxer known, usually with a great deal of respect, as an "honest fighter"; she not only knows how to box, she knows how to work, and work hard, at a difficult trade.

Ann Marie Saccurato is but one of the many examples of the current depth of talent in the sport of Women's boxing. There has never been, in the history of this sport, as many athletes who have come up "through the ranks" and learned the sport exactly the right way. They have learned to box in gyms across the land and in amateur programs ranging from the Golden Gloves to the national team. Largely gone from the sport is the past infusion of fighters from the ranks of toughwomen contests and other such ersatz training grounds. Today's female boxers are boxers in the truest and best sense of the word.

Ann Marie Saccurato has an 11-1-2 record and has been fighting, professionally, for four years. Not only is she a veteran of the professional ring, but she experienced but a brief period of the usual "training wheels" phase of a professional fighter's life. Saccurato began taking competitive fights almost from the beginning of her career. In her third fight (Dec ' 02), she was in with a tough "Philly" fighter, Daria Hill, winning a close, four round majority decision. "That was my ' Rocky ' moment," Ann Marie recalls, "Daria was a tough as they come and she hit me as hard as I've ever been hit in the ring. But, through the haze, I thought, ' Everyone close to me is out there in the seats watching ' I've got to turn this around and I did, but it sure wasn't easy. I still see Daria once in a while and we share some good memories of that night." Most fighters, at that stage of a career, would have opted for a "soft touch" in their next bout. Saccurato climbed in the ring with a world class fighter, Eliza Olson, and in her fourth professional bout (Mar ' 03), came away with a four round draw. Look up the "game plan" for "honest fighters" and taking fights with the likes Eliza Olson is in there, right near the top.

"It's my life," Saccurato told me last week when I sat down with her at the Souler Gym in downtown White Plains, NY. "I work hard in the gym," she continued, "and I go full speed all the time because if you let up, that's time you never get back. I'll never be happy with where my skills and conditioning are because I know there is so much to learn about this sport." I asked if she had a fight coming up and Saccurato gave a non-committal shrug that said, "I'm waiting" and then a straight forward look that said, "And I'm ready". " A fight for a title in April ' fell out, ' " Saccurato recounts. "I'm hoping to get another title opportunity soon, or at least (a bout) that puts me in line for a title shot. I haven't gotten in as much sparring, recently, as I would have liked and I don't get down to Gleasons (in downtown Brooklyn, a three hour round trip from White Plains) as much as I'd prefer, but hey, I'm ready when the opportunity comes."

Asked about a "wish list" of opponents, Saccurato is quick with an answer, "I'd love to get another fight with Eliza Olson or a return bout with Belinda Laracuenta (a six round split decision loss last August, the lone blemish on Saccurato's record). I learned so much in that fight. Belinda is a very good fighter and very quick. I had a great experience that night, it was a good fight and a terrific learning experience. A bout with Holly Holm would be great, and, oh, there are so many others, all good fighters all good bouts. All I need, right now, is the opportunity."

And the matchmaker that gives Saccurato that opportunity will have a great start on a very good fight card. The Ann Marie Saccurato "package" is much more than long hours and hard work in the gym. She's a fighter who doesn't "leave her fight in the gym," she brings the entire package to the ring on fight night. "I enter the ring to take care of business first and, hopefully, put on a good show of skill, class and heart. I have a good time in the ring and I want that to show through to the crowd as well. I may be all business, but I love to bring energy and excitement as well."

The "taking care of business" look is, initially, on display as Saccurato heads for the ring. In these days of fog shrouded, confetti storm entrances, Ann Marie Saccurato strides purposefully towards the ring ("Oh, I bounce, a bit," she notes) without any needless embellishments. Asked if she had picked that up from any other fighter (a young Mike Tyson had much the same "no frills" look approaching the ring), Ann Marie replied, "No, that's just me, it comes naturally." Her best bout? Saccurato is definite, "My first bout with Victoria Cisneros (Feb ' 04), that was a good one. I was in a great zone, my movement, my hand speed, everything worked that night (Saccurato won all six rounds on all three cards.)

The sport of Women's boxing has a myriad of problems, ranging from the lack of meaningful television exposure, to the reluctance of top fighters in the sport to fight each other, to the benign neglect shown by the mainstream media towards the sport and the fighters. What the sport does not lack is an abundance of talent. Start with the bold face names, recognizable even to the mainstream media and progress to fighters such as Ann Marie Saccurato. If, and when, that media takes the time and effort to go beyond the bold face names, boxers such as Saccurato will receive the type of recognition that good fighters, "honest" fighters, deserve.

Those female boxers aren't hard to find; they're in places like the Souler Gym in White Plains and countless, identical gyms around the country. They work hard and keep that "I'm ready" look firmly affixed as they spar and pound the heavy bag. They already have the respect of those who know boxing from the inside and, if given the opportunity, fighters like Ann Marie Saccurato will gain the respect of those who watch the sport from the outside. The "insiders" know them as "honest fighters", there probably should be a much better name for them.