

## *Winner by points - women's boxing*

The fascination of boxing! One day I found out that it was also true for me: boxing was fascinating and not only when looking on, but also and above all, when boxing myself. This fact alone is not unusual, but I am a young woman, aged 28, and what is more, one that is studying theology of all subjects and who wishes to become a vicar.

But it is not the motto of "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", stipulated by the Old Testament that attracts me to boxing. Although even Jesus treated his opponents very drastically, for instance, when he whipped the moneychangers out of the temple, there was a typically female reason for me to indulge in this "manly sport". At nightfall I was scared and looking for ways to feel safer.

### *A fair boxing duel reminds me of a debate*

Which sport was suited best for defending myself? Boxing appeared to me especially suitable. And why? Sometimes I wear high-heeled shoes, so how does one run away when attacked? And occasionally I wear narrow skirts, so how does one kick somebody like a karate fighter or a kick boxer? But when fighting with my fists, I would always be ready. So I looked for a boxing club and asked them whether I could join the training. Although the coach grinned a little, he let me join them. After I had started with the training, my fear in the dark disappeared. Not because I know now how to defend myself, but rather as I realise that attacks on women are relatively rare. What remained was my love for boxing. I enjoyed boxing so much that I looked for a boxing school to take regular boxing lessons. In Konny Mittermaier in Stuttgart I found a coach who taught me a lot.

The longer I have been boxing, the better I get to know this sport. This fair kind of coming to terms with each other reminds me of a dialogue. I have discovered the bluntness of attacking and, at the same time, the pleasure of escaping, of feinting. The demands were attractive: I liked the courage to approach an opponent. I got to know my aggressions, to make use of them and simultaneously to master them. The fight in the ring is drastic and tough, but never violent.

Most important for me was to discover that I liked to fight, that I liked to test my strength and my skill against others. I have changed, become more self-aware. It is not boxing which has caused that change, but rather the change is an expression of it. Also my body began to change, and I liked it all the better. My muscles turned long and slim, while the proportions remained natural. I was amazed at what I was able to do, because never before had I dared to practise such a demanding sport. I began to feel strong, and this feeling was nice and made me feel good.

But I began to notice that the men and boys training with me were improving more quickly, because they took part in competitions. They were systematically trained for these, they learnt more techniques and their sparring was more demanding. In competitions, they had to face an unknown opponent who they had to adapt to and in doing so they also learnt a lot. In the club I was the only woman and thus there was no opportunity to compare myself with opponents of the same standard. I realised one thing, if I want to box seriously, I have to box other females at tournaments, but there were no competitions for women at that time...

That is why I decided to fight to introduce them. On 6 February 1994 I applied to the German Amateur Boxing Federation to adopt women's boxing as an official competitive sport. I had assumed that it would not be possible to implement this motion on my own, which is why I contacted the media: first, to show that there were enough women with the same ambitions, and secondly, to convince women boxers that it was worthwhile having competitions. Thirdly, I wanted to popularise boxing as a sport for women.

### *The majority of my friends accept my boxing*

The public response was unexpectedly wide and positive. Since I have made the motion and established first contact with the media, I have given numerous interviews for newspapers and journals, for the radio and for TV. A young woman wishing to box, with good looks and even studying theology, this was some change to those many boring talkshows; so it did not take long until I was better known in Germany than many other male boxers. But while they had already fought in the ring for a long time, I was still fighting to enter it. The day, when I was declared the winner, was 27th May 1995. After almost 16 months of fighting, the German Amateur Boxing Federation allowed women's boxing.

Those friends and acquaintances, who in general respected what I did, also accepted my boxing. Except for two cases: I lost both a male and female friend, neither of whom could accept it. What they seemed to dislike most was that I didn't do it for self-defence but for pleasure. Losing them however could not make me refrain from boxing, and today I must say: I don't regret a thing!

Of course, I do not rate boxing higher than my friends, but I just like those friends who respect me. Differences in opinions are obviously no obstacle, but occasional opposition does not make me give up women's boxing. I have heard many strange things which made me laugh a lot with my sports friends. It is said for example that men opt for a sport like boxing because it is a purely male preserve. And it would disturb their training if they had to respect me. Moreover, if I felt attracted by boxers, some would only suspect I wanted take up with them...

The truth is that most of the men do not mind women boxers in their clubs, and they do not want to remain exclusive. Obviously a woman changes the climate of a training group, but certainly not for the worse. Admittedly, constant consideration may be disturbing. In the long run no athlete likes a kind a shadow boxing without being allowed to enter competition. And there are special rules for women. But actually nobody had any problems in making some concessions for me during the training. Obviously, this is expected of the advanced boxer vis-à-vis the beginner, as of a heavyweight when facing a lightweight. Meanwhile I realise that many men even like to spar with me; especially as I am now boxing better than a male beginner of about the same weight. And obviously, one enjoys sparring with people one likes!

### *A male "black eye" is no more beautiful either*

As far as love is concerned, I can assure you that boxing is no obstacle to it. As is common knowledge, men do not only exist in clubs, but also outside. And what about a "black eye" on a woman, what does she look like with it? Those who argue like this, seem to be convinced that women have to look beautiful. But does a "black eye" do more harm to a woman than to a man?

In fact, such a "shiner" wears off quickly and is often not half as bad as it looks. Due to the strict rules, the risk of getting hurt is not any greater than when playing football or handball, or driving a car or cycling. And even if it really hurts, sometimes a small injury may be a useful experience.

It was often really touching how the opponents of women boxing cared for my boy-friend, although he did not exist at that time. Sure, now he might be embarrassed to go out with me when I display a "black eye". Obviously, he hates to imagine somebody might suspect him of having beaten me. Fortunately, such a situation is rather an exception, and if my face should really show the marks of a boxing contest, I, being a woman, am experienced enough to cover up this blemish cosmetically. The eye shadow just looks a little more lilac than usual. And if it can't be helped: the man I love has to accept it!

### *Many wrong ideas about the dangers of boxing*

It is not only the customary ideal of feminine beauty that nourishes the doubts about women boxing. As is known, female anatomy differs from the male. So it is small wonder that the question most frequently asked in discussion is whether I am not afraid of blows to the breast. Admittedly, I had some fear in the beginning, but it was not so strong that it could have prevented me from boxing. I knew how it could be helped. I used a breast protector, a kind of bra consisting of two padded plastic cups fastened with elastic strings. Women-fencers have long used them.

When I had already boxed for some months, I was a guest at a talkshow on the German Sports channel, in which the chairwoman of the Women's Sports Section of the German Sports Doctors' Association also took part. She made it clear that there was no scientific evidence for the theory that blows to the breast may cause cancer. They would cause haematomas or hardenings, which were benign, however, and would wear off. To my surprise, she even thought that my breast protector, which I had brought with me, was superfluous, and also in other TV shows later on, doctors spoke out in the same fashion: no danger of cancer! I have been boxing without a breast protector ever since.

I have felt much better ever since, because such an armour can become rather embarrassing. If it slips and its hard edges press against the connective tissue of the ribs, it may even cause more harm than benefit. What I found most annoying is that it prevents a reasonable defence, as for instance a double cover requires to hold one's arms half beside, half in front of the body and closely pressed to it. This is impossible when wearing a breast protector which is in the exact place the arms should be. But as I said before: I have done without it for one year already. In the meantime I have learnt that the breast is completely unimportant as a hitting surface for my opponents, as it is no KO point.

Let's stay with these intimate questions of a boxing woman, as the opponents seem to be most interested in them. The vicious remark that boxing is no pregnancy gymnastics made me ask my gynaecologist, what could happen if I was hit by a low blow. She explained to me that thanks to the feminine anatomy I was much better protected than a man would be. The deep position of the uterus in the pelvis, the hip bones and the bladder lying in front of it and acting like a water cushion, constitute an effective natural protection. Even in case of a pregnancy, nothing could happen during the first ten to twelve weeks, because only thereafter the uterus moves upward.

And what about the sports value of women boxing, which is sometimes used as an argument against it? Admittedly, we are only just beginning to develop. There are relatively few female boxers in the world, and it is only since recently that we have been permitted to compete against each other. But men, too, started out at one point, and other female disciplines have long proved, what is possible if you permit the "weaker sex" to join. Proof is furnished by football just as by weight lifting or track and field disciplines such as steeplechase or hammer throwing. The ladies are advancing everywhere, and how their performances improve by leaps and bounds is remarkable. Who can still remember today that 15 years ago the marathon did not figure in the programme of international championships. And what is the situation today?

*As early as in 1904 women boxed at the St. Louis' exhibition*

As may be gathered from old photos, women boxed as early as at the beginning of this century. They are said to have appeared in the fringe programme of the 1904 Olympic Games. Whether this was only meant to be an amusement for sensation-seeking men, I cannot say. Even today, almost one hundred years later, the number of female boxers is very, very low on a world-wide scale. In the USA and England, however, there are said to be over 400 women boxers, and one of their pioneers was even introduced to the Hall of Fame: Barbara Buttrick, President of the Women's International Boxing Federation (WIBF), was awarded that honour, as she was the first female boxer, whose fight was broadcast in 1954 and whose photo was published in Nat Fleischer's "The Ring" three years later. But these are sentimental memories.

Women's boxing is a young and dynamic sport, and we do realise that it will be a long way to gain Olympic qualification. The reasons for this are many, and they have something to do with educational patterns. A girl

simply should not fight, whereas a "real" boy may decide a quarrel by the fist. This is continued in sports: most men gather first boxing experience already when they are boys. In contrast to that, I do not know a single case, in which a girl of an equal age was ever allowed to do the same. Moreover, it remains rather an exception that coaches are enthusiastic about women's boxing. But who looks into that matter seriously, will soon notice that women are no less ready to fight and just as ambitious as men are.

*The rules now adopted should not be as strict*

The media have treated us amazingly benevolently so far. We have not only been criticised, but in many cases also praised. They have described women's boxing as aesthetical, a tactically and technically clean sport of which we can rightly be proud. We take pleasure in stating that the International Amateur Boxing Association has dealt with our sport with great seriousness. This will help us immensely to advance at a world-wide level.

However, I find that the rules now adopted are interpreted too strictly. I agree with other women boxers that one could rightly believe that we are capable of doing a little more. After the women have been given the green light, it will surely only be a matter of time until this step will pay off and lead to a new quality. The verdict of this bout can only be: The winner on points - women's boxing.