

FIGHTING THE BALANCE

Bunya Anand takes an unusual, championship-winning approach to women's boxing

by Grace Hood

**For love
of the
game
Women's
boxing finds
its audience**

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As shown by the popularity of *Million Dollar Baby*, interest in women's boxing has grown in recent years. For Ken Weiss, president of Rock & Sock Productions, a company that promotes women's boxing matches, business couldn't be better. Weiss's company used to promote both men's and women's matches together, but he says he started to notice something intriguing about the audience reaction to women's boxing matches.

"The audience responded in a much more enthusiastic, excited way than they did to any of the men's fights on the card—including the main event. That's with not having a clue who either of these women are," he says.

Weiss switched the focus of his promotion company one year ago to women's matches. In addition to promoting 2,000- to 3,000-seat matches across the country, his company launched a TV series, *A Ring of Their Own*, which is aired on Comcast and Dish Network. The series was so successful that it went from monthly to weekly installments, says Weiss.

"We're looking at a sport that's significantly grown in television, significantly grown in the size of the audiences that come to see it," he says.

"It's significant in the sense that audiences of the shows like it enough to come back. Every venue we've worked at has come back and asked us to do another show."

Weiss says that both men and women are drawn to the sport because it's so action-packed and entertaining.

"It's not a cat fight, it's a serious sport. Big, tough guys coming to boxing shows, looking at a woman half their size know that the woman could beat them up. That's a good thing," he says. "It's sort of fun."

Weiss says that the two-minute rounds in women's boxing make the sport more interesting than men's boxing, which has three-minute rounds.

"They don't have as much time to strategize. They have to go in and be there every minute of the fight," he says. "The action goes from the moment the bell rings to the moment that the bell ends."

This stands in contrast to men's boxing, which allow boxers more time for less-than-exciting boxing moves such as "the waltz."

What makes women's boxing unique from other professional women's sports, says Weiss, is that the boxers involved are driven purely by their interest in the sport.

"Women go into boxing not for the money or the glory," he says. "They go into it because they love the sport. They want to win."

Weiss says he sees a promising future for the sport. Many are hopeful that the Olympic Commission will soon accept women's boxing as a competitive sport, despite the fact that it still remains illegal in some countries.

And while other women's professional sports like the WNBA were met with lukewarm support, Weiss says that other women's sports have thrived commercially.

"If you go back to women's tennis, there was a time when the clothing they wore was under scrutiny. But if you look at it now, women's tennis is arguably more popular than men's. The LPGA clearly is on par with men's. When the LPGA does their big championships on TV, people also watch," he says.

And while there are lingering perceptions among some who think that the sport falls into the same category as female mud wrestling, Weiss says the group is a small one.

"I think by having continuous TV coverage it will show people who may tune in for other reasons that they're very good and entertaining to watch," he says. "The women don't disappoint." 