

Knockout success for Edmonton trainer and her champ

World featherweight title match set for Friday

BY JAMIE HALL, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM JUNE 19, 2012



Shara Vigeant is a personal trainer in Edmonton whose clients include a host of male MMA fighters and, more recently, female featherweight boxing champion Jelena Mrdjenovich, who will be defending her title in a bout June 22.

Photograph by: Shaughn Butts, Edmonton Journal S

EDMONTON -- Together, Shara Vigeant and Jelena Mrdjenovich pack a powerful one-two punch.

Since Vigeant became her strength and conditioning coach last fall, Mrdjenovich has delivered back-to-back knockouts for the first time in her 10-year professional boxing career. And in very convincing style.

Her most recent opponent, Ontario's Lindsay Garbatt, hit the canvas twice in the first few seconds of their March title fight, and never made it past the first round. Mrdjenovich's previous opponent, Winnipeg's Olivia Gerula, made it to the ninth round before dropping like a stone during their tilt in Edmonton, the victim of a left hook Mrdjenovich delivered with lethal precision.

Her goal is to give spectators an instant replay on Friday when she steps into the ring at the Shaw Conference Centre to defend her world featherweight champion title against opponent Belinda Laurente.

"Those were highlight knockouts for me," says Mrdjenovich, recalling her most recent bouts. "I'm a lot stronger and more explosive since I started working with Shara."

It's been a singular experience for Vigeant as well, certainly from a professional standpoint.

“It’s huge,” she says. “This is my first world champ, ever.”

It’s also another first of sorts. While Vigeant is accustomed to working with high-performance athletes, the majority of them are men — fighters, to be exact. A certified personal trainer, she owns her own business on Edmonton’s south side and has earned a reputation as a tough-as-nails coach who pushes her clients to their limits, and just a little beyond.

“I like to collect man tears,” she says, laughing.

There’s no arguing with her results, though. Or her popularity. Her client base includes a host of MMA fighters who train in Edmonton, which is considered a hotbed for the ever-growing sport of mixed martial arts. Some of them, including Tim Hague, Mitch Clarke and Nick Penner, have earned contracts with the much vaunted UFC. Based in Las Vegas, the Ultimate Fighting Championship is the world’s largest promotional organization of the sport.

With a record of 27 wins — 14 of them knockouts — eight losses and one draw, Mrdjenovich has enjoyed a boxing career that has had more ups than downs. Her trainer Milan Lubovac has been in her corner the entire time, both literally and figuratively.

“Milan is my backbone,” she says simply.

Still, last year was a roller-coaster ride, and, after losing four out of five fights, she decided to add another weapon to her arsenal. Enter Vigeant, whose expertise Mrdjenovich sought on the recommendation of top Canadian MMA prospect Sheldon Westcott, another of Vigeant’s clients.

Until Mrdjenovich walked through the door, Vigeant had never trained a boxer, female or male. A fan of the sport, and Mrdjenovich, she jumped at the chance.

“I saw right away that she had the mindset of a champion, and champions don’t stop,” says Vigeant. “They do what it takes to get the work done. She’s more stubborn than anyone I’ve ever seen. She won’t quit. She’ll always do what I tell her to do; she might hate me for it and roll her eyes and get mad at me, but she’ll do it. And she’s happy at the end of the session, and we’re buddies again.”

Vigeant’s secret weapon is a technique created by her mentor, conditioning specialist Scott Abel. Called metabolic enhancement training, it’s an intense workout that combines speed, power and strength training. The idea, she says, is to make sure fighters have the same power and strength at the end of the fight as they do at the beginning.

And Vigeant says while there are many differences between MMA and boxing they have one crucial thing in common — delivering power from the hips.

“My job is to make sure Jelena’s explosive in the hips when she fights, and that she’s as strong in the ninth round as she is in the first,” she explains. “The plan is to make sure she has crazy-knockout power.”

So far, so good.



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