

Kickboxing champ contemplates future

By Jim Hughes
staff writer

By all rights, Kerry Roop should be sitting on top of the world. After all, he is the Professional Kickboxing Association's world champion in the light heavyweight division.

The PKA title, however, doesn't carry comparable esteem as the World Boxing Council's nor the World Boxing Association's crown. So, while light-weight boxing champions Michael Spinks (WBA) and Dwight Braxton (WBC) earn six-figure salaries in championship defenses, Roop has to be content with the little — if any — glamour and recognition that has followed since he covered the championship.

Roop, who won the title June 14 when he was awarded a fourth-round disqualification victory over then-champ Dan Macaruso, is faced with an incessant dilemma: what to do with his future.

He must — by decree from the PKA — defend his title against a rated fighter within six months of the time when he captured the title. Roop's concern, though, is whether to continue to fight in return of puny paydays, or devote full time to his Nature's Way Martial Arts academy in Rochester.

"I'm really not sure what lies ahead," said Roop, still breathing heavily from an afternoon run. "I feel the best place for me is teaching my students. The money's just not there (in kickboxing), so I don't know if it's worth my time to continue to train and take away time from the school."

IF ROOP was leaning toward retirement from the ring, a recent offer from PKA president Don Quinone has quickly changed his mind. Quinone contacted Roop last week and informed him of a possible title defense in Italy at the end of this year. The fight, if signed, sealed and delivered, would take place in November against the European light-heavyweight champ.

"If that comes through," Roop said, "I would not pass it up. I certainly would not pass up a fight overseas."

And, if that fight does become official, it may make Roop's decision to either retire or continue fighting that much tougher.

"It's hard to say if I'd retire after that fight. It could get me more exposure, more money or some endorsements, you never know. It might make it worth my while. But right now, the fight isn't making me anything."

"It's a tough decision. I really don't know what to do. If I made the same kind of money they make in boxing it'd be easier, but it just isn't there."

Roop, who will stage a kickboxing show at the Premier Center in Sterling Heights Monday night, said his time may be more valuable teaching, training and instructing than performing himself.

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— Kerry Roop
kickboxing champion

"THERE'S JUST NOT enough money in kickboxing, and I'm not getting any younger," said Roop, who will turn 32 next month. "If I was a few years younger it may be worth it. But I may be better off training and managing my kids to championships."

Roop will feature six of his professionals Monday night, on a card that is scheduled to be taped by the Entertainment Sports Programming Network (ESPN). The main event will feature welterweight Rudy Hatfield of Westland against three-time champion Ernie Hart. Hart is the No. 1 contender, and Hatfield is rated No. 9.

Other Roop kickboxers on the card include super middleweight Albert Moore of Sterling Heights, super lightweight Paul Johnston of Rochester, welterweight Eddie McGrey of Detroit, welterweight Jessie Amaraus of Dayton Plains, and super welterweight Rodney Hooks of Detroit.

The fights will be in the same place where Roop won the championship in June and carried by the same network to title tilt. Roop, who said he watched ESPN's taped telecast of the fight at a local bar, was pleased when he watched himself, yet disappointed in the coverage.

"I was a little upset when I watched it, because they left the audience hanging there. They never announced who won the fight," Roop said.

Roop was awarded the decision when champion Macaruso failed to throw the required number of kicks in three of the first four rounds. After the fight, Macaruso protested the decision.

"The former champ protested, but it was settled the same night," Roop said.

AS FOR THE actual fight, Roop said, "I saw what I did, and I did just what I wanted to do. I wanted to put pressure on him. I had a plan, and I stuck with it."

"I knew he wasn't that good of a kicker. By the end of the first round, I had it figured. I knew I could pressure him so much he'd forget about the kicks, even though I knew that would mean he'd have to throw more punches since he was trying to knock me out."

"I knew I was going to get hit more, which isn't the smartest thing to do, but

I did what I had to do. It was a gamble. A big gamble."

Although winning the championship has not brought worldwide fame and fortune to Roop, he has been surprised at some responses.

"I was at the Hearn's fight (middleweight Thomas Hearn's against Jeff McCracken) Sunday, and a lot of people said 'Congratulations' to me, and I didn't expect that," Roop said.

Roop also said that, since winning the championship, the enrollment at his school has increased.

"Winning the championship certainly has helped the school," Roop said. "People want to be trained by the world champion."

Roop will wait for confirmation of the November fight in Italy, and, in the meantime, work with students and train for an exhibition bout Sept. 11 against retired middleweight champ Bill "Superfoot" Wallace.



Kerry Roop (right) fights Dan Macaruso for light-heavyweight kick boxing championship of the world.

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