

Dmitriy Salita

Welterweight (26-0-1, 15 KOs)

Junior welterweight Dmitriy Salita is living the American Dream. Born in Odessa, Ukraine during the Cold War the 24 year-old moved to the United States at the age of nine with his parents and brother. They settled in Flatbush, Brooklyn where they faced an adjustment in their new land. "It was tough to get acclimated to the new culture," recalls Salita. "It was more difficult for my parents and brother than for me because they are older. We did not have a lot of money and it was difficult to get by at times."

Salita used sports to ease his transition into his new homeland. "When I was in the Ukraine, I was in a karate club," he notes. "After a few months in the United States, I joined a martial arts club. I began to win different tournaments. It helped me fit in to my new surroundings."

Soon, however, he began to focus on a different venue. "My brother Michael and I used to watch boxing on television," he says. "In fact we used to shadowbox in our house. He was the one who ultimately suggested I start fighting. I wanted to achieve greatness. Boxing gave me the confidence and the outlet to focus on this goal."

By the age of 13, Salita was training at the legendary Starrett City Boxing Club. It was a competitive environment. He trained with many future stars including heavyweight champion Shannon Briggs and former IBF junior welterweight champion Zab Judah.

His sessions with one particular fighter stand out. "I recall sparring with current light heavyweight Curtis Stevens," recalls Salita. "It was a great education to fight with him. He always pushed me to the limit. You could tell he was going to be good."

Starrett City pushed Salita to strive for excellence. "Since I was around so many talented fighters, it was do or die," he notes. "For awhile it was tough, but the competition motivated me and helped me survive during my first few hard years in the sport. Now, I am reaping the benefits."

Salita compiled an impressive amateur resume which includes a reported record of 59-5. In 2001, he won the prestigious New York State Golden Gloves at 139 pounds. He also won the Sugar Ray Robinson Award for best fighter in the tournament.

Salita carefully considered turning professional. "The Olympics were four years away," he recalls. "I determined that going to school while boxing on the side would not have been good for my career. I had many good offers. So I decided to turn pro at the age of 19 and signed with Top Rank Boxing."

Marty Rosengarten

His first pro fight was an important occasion in his career. "My debut was in Idaho," he says. "I had a good training camp. It was a whole different feeling. There was no more headgear and t-shirts. I recorded a first round knockout."

As Salita moved up the professional ranks, he came to grasp with both the ups and downs of the sport. One of the challenges is dealing with criticism from fans and media alike. "You will always have critics," Salita says. "Even the greats like Roy Jones, Jr. get criticized. It is part of human nature and par for the course." But he takes his critics in stride. "When I first came to Starrett City, I was a skinny, small babyfaced kid. If you had asked people during my first month whether I would succeed, most people would have said no. Proving people wrong always motivates me."

He also credits his faith for helping him handle trials and tribulations both in and out of the ring. "It makes no difference if you are a fighter, an ambulance driver or a lawyer," Salita says with conviction. "Religion helps make you a better person in any field. It helps me stay focused and allows me to understand both the good and the bad things which happen in life."

His support network is also vital to his success. "Fortunately I have two people that have stood by me during my career, my brother Michael and Jimmy O'Pharrow, the director of the Starrett City Boxing Club," he says. "They have always told me that I have the potential to be great. When you have good days in the gym, it is easy to believe it. When you do not, it is very important to have people behind you.

Michael and Jimmy are right there to keep me going during the tough times."

One fighter in particular served as a true inspiration. "If there is one fighter to emulate both inside and outside the ring, it is Oscar De La Hoya.

He was a great fighter and now he is a terrific businessman and entrepreneur outside the ring. He should be a role model for all fighters and is truly a hero of mine."

Salita's story of a young immigrant with championship dreams could reach its pinnacle in the near future. "I think that I am potentially the best junior welterweight in the world," he says. "I hope I will get my title shot as early as next year. Winning a world title is the ultimate accomplishment. For me, it would be the culmination of my American Dream."

— Ron Zaslou

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