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The Struggle Of Female Fighters

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The struggle of being a female athlete

By Anthony Kane

Fighting for passion, not money.

Growing up kids have high admirations. Some want to be the president, some want to be a fireman, some want to even be a superhero, however, one of the most commonly desired professions, is to be a professional athlete, according to a Forbes survey.

The path to become a professional athlete is a long and grueling one. 0.08% of high school athletes ever play at any professional level, according to the NCAA. Those odds are either slimmer for female athletes, considering there’s less professional organizations catering to female athletes.

Meanwhile some women are fortunate enough to obtain their goals of becoming a professional athlete, such as Sonya Lamonakis, the heavyweight International Boxing Organization champion and NY state heavyweight champion. However, unlike her male counterparts Lamonakis cannot support herself on boxing alone. She holds a day job as an 8th grade social studies teacher.

Lamonakis' male counterpart, Wladimir Klitschko, made millions throughout his fights, while Lamonakis claims she was paid $3,500 when she won her belt.

Balancing the full-time careers isn’t Lamonakis only challenge. Lamonakis feels female fighters are often scrutinized unfairly, despite putting in just as much work training and fighting within the same sport.

"I've struggled as an amateur fighter, where they would give the men so much better treatment than they gave us but I was on the same team USA boxing team," said Lamonakis. "We didn't get sneakers, we didn't get bags, we didn't get uniforms with prints on them, we got no sneakers, a pair of shorts and a shirt. So it has always been us against the wall pushing and pushing."

Why would I go pro?

With championship boxers still struggling to make ends meet, many females in the sport have no desire to even go pro.
"I have no desire to go pro, look at the top fighters in the sport and they still have to work a day job," said Erika Chamberland, a 23-year-old amateur boxer. "I'd rather continue to train in the sport I have grown so fond of and try to make it to the Olympics."

While female boxers are earning such low payouts, more female boxers are struggling to find reasoning to pursue professional boxing career.

Some Like Chamberland would prefer to continue to fight as an amateur and pursue the Olympic athlete. Professional fighters are prohibited from fighting in the Olympics.

The crossover between boxing and mixed martial arts.

While professional boxing for women seems to be declining sport, when one considers the drastic difference in money earned between men and women, unless you’re aiming for the Olympics, MMA is quickly growing into the lucrative profession. Rhonda Rousey is one of the biggest names in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the largest MMA league, despite being a woman. Rousey is estimated to be worth $15 million.

With MMA being such a lucrative option, compared to boxing, the sport has gained popularity with many female fighters.

Sarah Thomas is one of them. But being a resident of NY State, this has proved difficult for Thomas. Professional mixed martial arts is illegal in NY State; therefore this creates huge obstacles for individuals pursuing a career as a professional MMA fighter.

This has forced some fighters, like Thomas, to find a creative way around gaining the title of a professional MMA fighter.

In order to become a professional MMA fighter, it is required that you fight, and win, at least 2 sanctioned bouts. Which is difficult when you live in a state that the sport is outlawed.

Thomas has come to the realization that it may be easier for her to become a professional MMA fighter, by going pro as a boxer. If you are a professional in one sport, it’s illegal to ever fight as an amateur in another sport.