Written by Amanda Khouv Wednesday, 04 September 2013 14:55 - Last Updated Thursday, 05 September 2013 15:10



Credit to GLORY/Ben Pontier and Bart van Leersum

For the past few years, names like Buakaw Por Pramuk, Giorgio Petrosyan and Yodsaenklai Fairtex have been the talk of the kickboxing town, with British Muay Thai fighters like Jordan Watson and Iman Barlow also making massive waves in the stand-up circuit. The sport has undoubtedly been growing in recent years, evident through avenues like The Contender Asia and K-1 Max as well as the expansion of mixed martial arts and the increasing exposure of its exciting strikers like Anderson Silva and Mirko 'Cro Cop' Filipovic.

Despite winning his first WMC world title at 19 against the experienced Ying Yai, as well as defeating the legendary 'John' Wayne Parr – arguably the most popular Western Muay Thai fighter to grace the ring – back in 2006, the UK's Stephen Wakeling has remained relatively low key. In the last five years you can count the number of bouts he's had on one hand, and with a record of just over 40 professional fights, the Epsom-born Thai boxer hasn't had nearly half the amount of experience in the ring as most of his contemporaries.

Wakeling Looks to Make a Mark at Middleweight

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But the serious striking fans and fervent followers of Muay Thai and kickboxing have perhaps seen GLORY World Series' signing of 'The Surgeon' as one of the most thrilling. Finally, the opportunity for decent, exciting match-ups for the technical striker at a weight class packed with talent. So what is it exactly that, regardless of his played-down profile, makes Wakeling such a fan favourite?

Having started Muay Thai as a young boy under the tutelage of his father Mark and alongside his brother Michael (all of whom run Scorpions Thai Boxing Gym in Beckenham, South London together), most would've said Wakeling was destined to find success in the ring. But if asked if such talent can be instilled from birth, it's guaranteed they'd all disagree. 'It's hard work and determination to reach my goal that's got me here,' says Wakeling, whose drive shows through his fighting. The Scorpions fighter's skills come from a raw passion to win, perform well and put on a good show for the fans, and this isn't limited to his time in the ring. 'The journey for most good fighters begins in the gym, with training,' Wakeling adds, 'the moments when there's no one watching, no one to cheer you on but yourself and your coach – that's when you really have to dig deep.' The hours spent honing technique, crafting combinations and breaking through mental barriers to reach a point where improvement is inevitable. With all this perfected, the minutes spent between the ropes simply can't disappoint – win, lose or draw.

Having gone toe to toe with some of the world's best Thai boxers, it's September 28th 2013 that will present the biggest challenge of Wakeling's career so far. While that's a cliché used to promote many fights in their lead-ups, for Wakeling, it's real. The middleweight tournament which takes place at the Citizens Bank Arena in California next month will only be the second outing at 85kg for the previous 72.5kg and 76.1kg WBC world title winner. His first test of the tournament will be against the hometown hero, Joe Schilling; a battle that Schilling himself as well as the fans have been asking for for quite some time. Should Wakeling come out victorious, he hopes to then face the Russian Artem 'Lion' Levin in a rematch that is more than highly anticipated. Their first meeting on the Xplosion Fight Series in London last year caused quite a stir with its controversial decision, in which the judges deemed the five-round Muay Thai war a draw, much to the British audience's dispute. Wakeling plans to leave it pretty clear-cut this time, with expectations to fly home with the middleweight crown firmly in place and a spot at the top of the rankings, as well as confirm his title as the people's champion.

Follow Stephen Wakeling and Scorpions Gym on Twitter (@SteveTheSurgeon and @ScorpionsThai).

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