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RESIST

LAURA
SAPERSTEIN

FIGHTING FRANKLY



Laura Saperstein, the first female boxer signed by Frank Maloney, has her third professional fight at London's York Hall tonight. She told *Sport* why she ditched a £75,000-a-year career in law for the thrill of the fight...

FAST FACTS



Laura Saperstein

Born August 29 1971

Birthplace

Byron Bay, Australia

Lives London

Height 5ft 5ins

Division Lightweight

Nickname Boxergirl

Fights 2

Wins 2

Defeats 0

Next fight

April 18 v Kristine Shergold

(Bethnal Green)

I didn't convince Frank Maloney to sign me – Frank Maloney came to me. I had the shock of my life. I was in the gym, and there was a phone call. My coach said: 'Frank Maloney wants to sign you.'

I couldn't believe it. I had a few big-ticket dreams: win a world title; be the first female on the cover of *Boxing News*; get one of the major promoters to put women on their shows. But I couldn't believe it had come at that point, so early in my career. Maloney's wife told me it was because she'd seen me on GMTV with Lorraine Kelly and told him: 'We've got to have her'.

Maloney claims he gave in to what he calls 'petticoat power' – whether it was that, or just that he noticed how much publicity I was getting, I don't know. We did one interview together where he said: 'She's got me more publicity than Lennox Lewis ever did.' That was the reason he did it – it's a business thing, a marriage of convenience. That's the only way I can put it – he figures he's going to get something out of it, and I figure I am too.

Boxing wasn't a conscious choice – it just grabbed me, and I couldn't resist. I wouldn't say it snuck up on me, either; it was more like a bang. I just got really addicted to the punching, the gym and the disciplined lifestyle that it gives you. When my coach told me I could turn pro, I was dumbstruck – it was

the most outlandish thing he could say. Me, a pro boxer? Piss off. Then he asked how old I was and I told him 32. He said: 'Yeah, you are a bit old.' But it planted the seed in my mind.

Becoming a boxer for any woman is still considered fairly bizarre, even more so when you're older and already have what's considered a prestigious job. Boxing is traditionally seen as a way out of poverty – you don't see too many Eton boys out there on the boxing scene, do you?

But women go into the sport for totally different reasons. People thought I was pretty nuts when I left my job, and there are a few things I miss from my old life, like free taxis and business-class flights. I also miss working with some of the best minds in the country and getting to lock horns with them on a daily basis. That's one of the things I love about boxing, though – you're locking horns in a different way. It's a thinking person's sport, because it's so much about reading your opponent. When I was a lawyer, I loved pushing the envelope in terms of what I could do with my mind; now, it's all about doing the same with my physical side.

Do I remember the first time I got hit? Oh God, yes. I'd only been training for about a month and my coach got me sparring with this 6ft black guy who'd been training for years. I must have gone at him so hard that he got a bit of a shock, so he just whacked

me in the mouth with a straight right that put me on my arse. I was so shocked; all I wanted to do was burst into tears, but I got up and said: 'Right, let's finish the round.' Until then I hadn't had any fear, but it took a while to get my confidence back after that.

Getting hurt isn't my biggest fear – that's performance anxiety, people telling me I'm not really that good. And getting tired – that hurts, too. When you have to push your body through that barrier and then keep pushing, it really hurts. But getting punched? Nah, it doesn't bother me at all. Hand on my heart, I've never had a punch from a girl that's bothered me.

Laura Saperstein was talking to Sarah Shephard. For tickets to the fight, see www.laurasaperstein.com

A LOAD OF MALONEY

Frank Maloney, the promoter best known for managing Lennox Lewis during the 1990s, stunned everyone by signing Laura Saperstein to his stable of fighters. Why so? Well, here's what he has previously had to say on the subject of female fighters...

November 1998

"The only reason for women to be in the ring is as ring-card girls."

September 2006

"I don't do with it. Anyone who wants to watch women fight shouldn't be given the vote."

January 2008

"I don't believe women should box, but Laura was a business decision. And I'm a hypocrite."



WEBLINK www.laurasaperstein.com