

IN HER CORNER

BY ROBERT MONROE • Photo by Daynin Dashefsky

How do you qualify to be a cornerman for women's fights? Well, aside from knowing how to use the standard tools, like an ice bag and swab, you must have other skills, some of which you'd never guess. Fortunately, after working for numerous women fighters over the years in boxing, I've learned the art of working the women's corner.

What Are the Differences?

The differences are obvious immediately upon arriving at the arena, because you are issued a private dressing room. It doesn't matter that you're not the main event. You can't just throw the women in with a bunch of maniacal male fighters to prepare for their fight.

Along with going over the customary pre-fight rituals in the dressing room, like applying Vaseline to the fighter's face, you assume the role of hair stylist, working clumsily to secure your fighter's hair. Braids, hair ties, tape ... the options, fortunately, are plentiful. The end result will hopefully keep your fighter's hair staying in place and not flailing away every time your fighter is struck, making the strikes look much worse than they really are.

I've never worked a women's fight in which I didn't end up making adjustments to my fighter's hair after doing the usual corner work between rounds—like placing the ice pack on the back of the neck and swabbing a bloody nose. In fact, I have worked numerous fights for women's reigning World Champion boxer Jackie Chavez, and I swear on one occasion I must have had half a roll of athletic tape in her hair before the fight was over.

What do you do when one of your fighter's chest-protector cups falls out during the middle of the round? Believe me, it's a little different than just washing off a mouthpiece and putting it back in the

fighter's mouth. At the point something like this happens you realize—quite suddenly—that every single eye in the arena is upon you, wanting to see how you are going to handle this challenge. Believe me. It has happened ... more than once.

Stefanac vs. Salazar

On June 3, I was fortunate enough to be part of a ground-breaking bout. I worked as the cutman for Lana Stefanac, the 2006 Pan Am Brazilian jiu-jitsu gold medalist, when she faced off against world champion boxer Martha Salazar in one of the first women's MMA bouts sanctioned in California.

As we were called to the cage, I was finishing the last touch-ups of Vaseline over and under the eyes and took one last look at that tape in her hair before we made our way to the cage. I said my customary prayer before making the walk to the cage.

In the case of Stefanac's fight, not much was needed to be done, as she applied a guillotine choke on Salazar in the first round. My prayers were answered, and there was no need to make any adjustments at all. Not even to the hair.

A Different World

As we walked back to the dressing room, I thought that it was no different than a man's fight ... until our fighter made a beeline to the opponent's dressing room to apologize for hurting her leg when she threw that leg kick.

I guess it was a little different than a man's fight after all. ☺

Get in Touch

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ROBERT'S RESUME

Following is a glance at Robert Monroe's combat arts resume.

- More than 10 years experience in both amateur and pro boxing and kickboxing
- Cutman for USA Muay Thai team vs. Canada (2003)
- Worked with Miguel Diaz, "Stitch" Duran and Freddy Roach
- Previously trained IFBA superbantamweight women's champion Jackie Chavez



Lana Stefanac