



KING IN THE RING

Lisa “The Black Widow” King Teaches the Finer Points of Championship Muay Thai

by Edward Pollard • Photography by Rick Hustead

If you tuned in to *Fight Girls* on the Oxygen channel late last year, you know Lisa King. The Las Vegas-based martial artist, who trains under the legendary *muay Thai* instructor known as Master Toddy, was the only American finalist to win her match against a female fighting phenom from Thailand.

As King was ramping up for a rematch with her vanquished foe—scheduled to take place March 17, 2007, in Vegas, *Black Belt* tracked her down and persuad-

ed her to part with some of her secrets. The following are her best strategies for waging a winning fight campaign.

Establishing a Timetable

“Ideally, your training should begin 12 weeks before the fight,” she says. “You should really buckle down on everything with eight weeks to go.”

If your daily schedule permits, aim to train three hours a day, six days a week. “I go to the gym and do an hour of pad

Deceptive and Deadly

It would seem logical to present a strong, even fierce, image to your opponent, but Lisa King insists that the opposite is often the way to go—at least, in her case. “People assume that because I have a custom-made outfit, my hair and nails are done, and I go in just as girly as a person could be, that they have nothing to worry about,” she says. “If I go into the ring looking like a girl, they think I’m going to fight like a girl.”

As her fight record of 6-1-1 demonstrates, any adversary who jumps to such conclusions quickly learns otherwise. —E.P.





Lisa King faces Anthony Brown (1). Brown throws a right jab, and King blocks it downward with her left hand (2). She steps forward and executes a left elbow to the jaw (3), after which she slams a left uppercut elbow into his chin (4). King follows up with a right elbow uppercut (5) and a spinning right elbow to the head (6).

work and two hours of sparring and bag work," King says. "I also run about three miles a day, six days a week." Your mileage may vary.

An integral component of King's routine is visualization. "I certainly don't want to get into the ring with anybody and get dominated," she says. "I've got

a picture of my opponent, and I imagine her training for our fight." Even if you don't know who your adversary will be, you can embed an image of a worthy foe in your mind and work from there, she adds.

If you compete at a level that allows you to know who your opponent will be, you might be able to obtain video footage of him before your bout. If that's impossible—and if time permits—consider sending a coach or training partner to watch your opponent in action. With that knowledge, you can tweak your training to take advantage of his fighting style. "The best trainers don't say, 'Just work on the bag,'" King says. "It's always, 'Work on body shots because your opponent's going to drop their hands.'"

Expecting the Unexpected

Even the most focused training can't prevent surprises from cropping up. King knows that very well. On two occasions, she showed up for fights, only to discover that her opponents were southpaws. Each time, it took her the whole first round to adapt. "You always go into a fight not knowing what to expect, to a certain degree," she says.

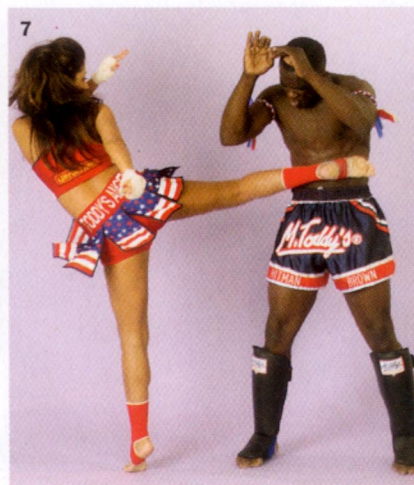
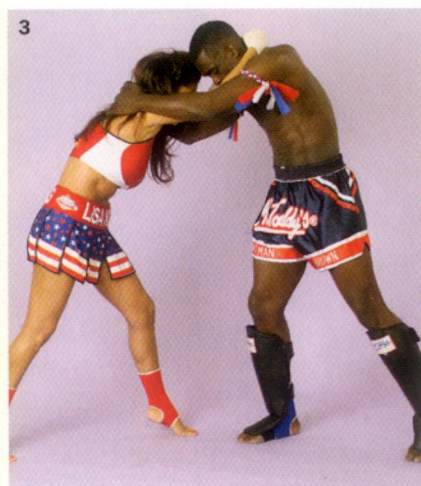
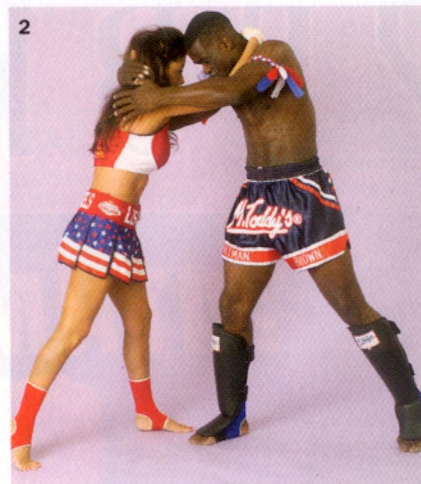
Part of the logic behind that philosophy is that the actions you take in the ring can elicit from your opponent behavior and tactics that have never been observed. You could actually frighten him out of his strategy and into an unpredictable survival mode, King says.

Consequently, King advocates making sure your training sessions include the element of surprise, even though it can get frustrating. "I had a trainer that wasn't into pad work; we would just neck-wrestle endlessly," she says. "He's a pretty big guy—at 165 pounds—and he would swing me around the ring like a rag doll. When I got to Thailand for the fight, my opponent grabbed me in a clinch and twisted me and twisted me. But because my trainer had prepared me for that, it was no big deal."

Cultivating Trust

King's aforementioned experience underscores the need for trust and communication between you and your trainer.

Kickboxer Lisa King and her opponent square off (1). As the opponent approaches and clinches, King makes sure her arms are on the inside of his (2). She then positions her lower body for maximum power (3) and drives her right knee into the man's stomach (4). She immediately launches a left knee to the stomach (5), after which she shoves him away (6) and finishes with a right roundhouse to the body (7).



They form a necessary link that often spells the difference between victory and defeat.

"When you get into the ring, the only person you want to hear is your corner person," King says. "You want it to be a familiar voice that knows what you're

good at and where your openings are. There's a reason people say, 'Trust your cornerman.' It's like having an extra set of eyes."

Building Yourself

Training isn't entirely about combat-

ing the other person's strengths; you must also develop your own techniques and tactics. "Five fighters of the same height and weight will have different skills," King says. "One may have really fast hands; another might be able to turn over his hip, do damage and hit you in the right spot every time. A good trainer will tweak what you're good at and turn your weaknesses into advantages."

It's essential to go into a fight mentally strong and confident because those attributes account for 70 percent of victory, King says. "As long as you've put your best foot forward in training, you won't be completely dominated. If something goes wrong, it's because you didn't do what you needed to do, but you should never go into the fight counting your doubts."

Although technique and stamina are certainly necessary to avoid running out of gas, believing in yourself is paramount.

"You have to *not* want to lose," she says. "People that question themselves the most usually do."

When it comes to techniques, King says it's OK to have a strength—hers is kicking—but know that a protracted bout can take the freshness out of your body.

"I'm known for my high kicks, but if my opponent and I go toe-to-toe for the whole match, I'll probably be out of air," she says. "At that point, I'll be swinging instead of kicking."

To ensure that doesn't happen, develop backup weapons. The elbow strike,

a familiar fixture in muay Thai bouts, is one of her favorites. "I absolutely love elbows, which are something not many people train to do properly," she says. "In a clinch, you can turn your hand toward your body and let your elbows fly. An elbow to the head makes them back off and think twice before clinching again."

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Avoiding Injury

Wear and tear on your body is often viewed as the cost of doing business in the muay Thai world, but it need not be that way, King says. She takes pains to maintain her health and keep her body injury-free.

"Everybody knows that getting enough sleep is important, but reality is a different story," she says. "When you have children, a job and your training, you have to juggle everything while trying not to overstress yourself."

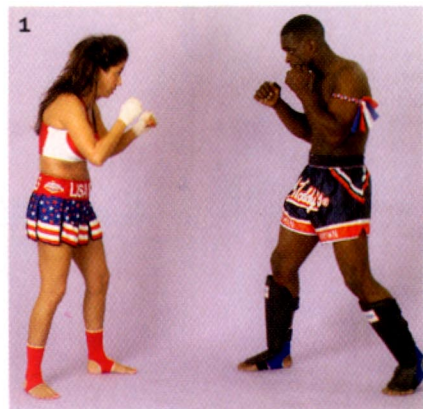
King claims that stress is the major factor in the incidence of injury. "When you're stressed and you're neck-wrestling or punching, you can pull a muscle, which might require a week or two to recuperate from," she says. "That's why I get massaged as often as possible—even as little as 20 minutes at a time—to get the toxins out of my body. I also drink lots of water and eat right—those are musts."

The other major risk comes from your training partner. If he hits too hard during your workouts, don't train with him, she advises. Find someone else. "Some people think it's OK to go as hard as possible before a fight, but you can't risk getting hurt," she says. "A shin-on-shin bone bruise in training might leave you unable to use your leg in a match."

Facing the Unknown

Nicknamed "The Black Widow," King thrives on the energy of live events and advises aspiring fighters to learn how to do the same. "Go into your fights excited that there's a crowd, excited that you don't know what's going to happen and that you get to test yourself against another person's skills and reactions. One of your biggest fears may be the unknown, but it can also be one of your biggest enjoyments in the ring."

For some fighters, deception plays



Lisa King studies her opponent and sees an opportunity to go on the offensive (1). She opens with a left jab (2), then executes a right jab (3), a left uppercut to the chin (4) and a right kick to the thigh (5).

a role in coping with the unknown, but King doesn't recommend it. "You can try to be tricky, but as long as you've got

steady eyes and you're concentrating on your opponent, it's not necessary," she says. "You'll be able to see what's com-



Muay Thai stylist Lisa King approaches her adversary (1). He attacks with a right jab, which King avoids by stepping to her right (2). She counters with a right kick to the inner thigh (3), then grabs his left shoulder and positions her legs for a knee thrust (4). King drives her left knee into his abdomen (5) and follows up with a left uppercut to the chin (6) and a right elbow to the face (7).

Grudge Match

On March 17, 2007, Lisa King will grant the wish of Nhum-Kang Sitmhalai, the Thai fighter she defeated in *Fight Girls*, and step into the ring for a rematch. "I'm absolutely certain that she's coming back with a vengeance," King says. "She's flying over here to do to me what I did to her on her home turf."

In preparation, King has started a program of strength building and core training. "She likes to grapple and [use her] knees, but she didn't have much defense when it came to boxing, so I'm fine-tuning those skills," King says. "I wasn't able to use my front kick because of the way she greased up her body, so this time my front kicks will go straight to her face. There will be a lot more elbows, too."

Win or lose, King will next appear in *Fight Girls 2*, scheduled to air on the Oxygen channel in the summer of 2007. She'll serve as a competitor and a trainer. —E.P.



Lisa King prepares to engage Anthony Brown (1). He initiates with a left punch, and she responds by stepping to her left and executing a kick to the inner thigh (2). She places her right foot in a position that facilitates her next technique (3), a spinning back kick to the solar plexus (4).

ing. People are creatures of habit, and if you watch their timing, you can see patterns. I may notice my opponent repeating a move and set her up so that when she tries to do it again, I'm a couple of seconds ahead. When she's in midkick, I counter, get her off-balance and attack."

Intelligent training is your key to keeping your opponent from seeing your patterns and predicting your moves, King says. "I'm the first one to get in trouble at the gym for doing things repetitively, but a good trainer will spot that and tell you to mix it up to avoid being predictable." ✕

About the author: Edward Pollard is Black Belt's managing editor. For more information about Lisa King, visit www.blackbeltmag.com.

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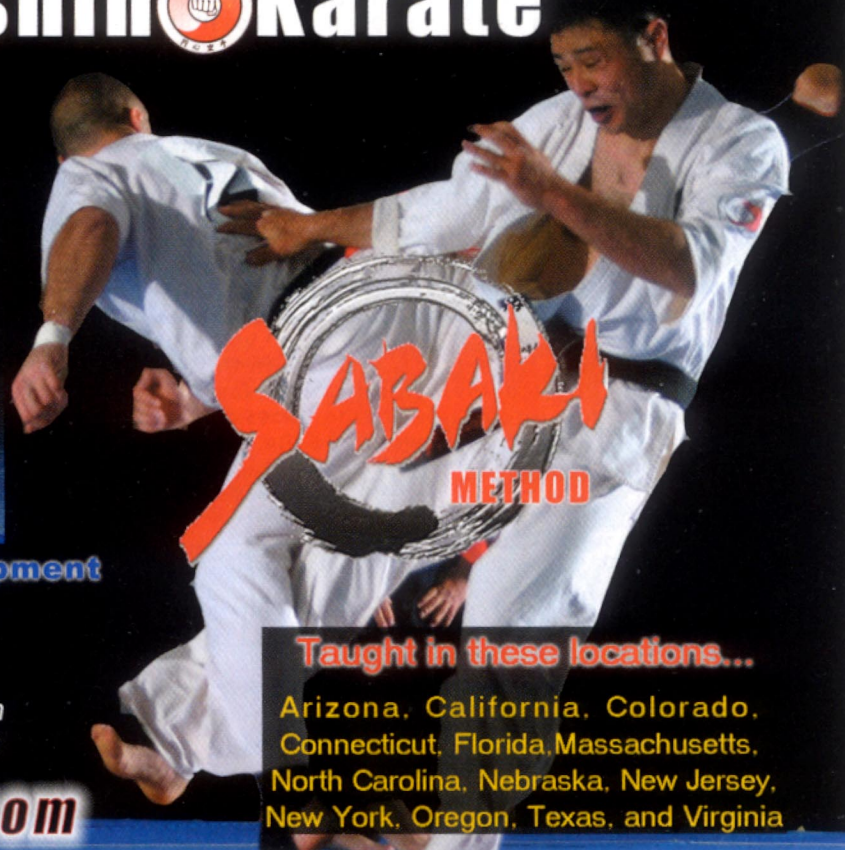
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