



On February 27th, 2013 the sport of Muaythai lost possibly the greatest Western influence ever seen when **Ramon 'the Diamond' Dekkers** passed

away. For nearly every non-Thai Muaythai fighter, Ramon Dekkers was their inspiration, motivation and possibly the reason that many stepped foot in a Thai Boxing gym in the first place. Ramon Dekkers is to Muaythai what Mohammed Ali is to Boxing.

Born in 1969 in a small rural community in Holland called Breda, Ramon started Judo at the age of 12, but quickly moved to Boxing before he met his trainer, **Cor Hemmers**, only a year later when he visited his gym and, from that moment, Ramon and Muaythai Kickboxing were united. Ramon trained every day with his mother also spending everyday in the gym

Late February brought some shocking news from a small town in Holland as **Ramon Dekkers** - a MuayThai and Kickboxing legend - died whilst training on his bike. **Lorne Castle** remembers the man and his influence on future fighters...

to see him which led to her and Cor falling in love and getting married - Ramon then had his trainer as his family, which proved to be a very strong link. Ramon's first fight was at 16 years of age and, over the next 20 years, he amassed nearly 200 fights with 175 wins which included an incredible 90 KOs. Ramon became a living legend - not only in his home country, but also in Thailand - during his fight career he became the first Western fighter to continually take on the Thais in Thailand, in their own stadiums and beat them by their own rules. Ramon was an

aggressive Kickboxer who fought by Thai rules and Kickboxing rules - he was a born fighter who in his own words, "loved to fight." He fought any fighter under any rules and gained eight world titles between 60kg and 65kg in both Thai and Kickboxing.

Ramon quickly gained attention due to his KO power and results - meaning that he earned his first title shot at 18 years of age when he won the **MTBN Dutch Championship** by high kick knockout. But, it was his 1990 fight with



Lumpini champion, **Nongkee Pahuyuth** that catapulted him onto the world stage when he defeated him to take the **IKF World Title** - and not just a close points defeat, but a win that included two knockdowns. Ramon then became the first Western fighter to be invited East - with the Thais paying for him to come over to take on their champions in their stadiums - Ramon was a challenge they deemed worthy and wanted to beat. In August 1991, Dekkers had his first big fight in Thailand and made the cover of the Thai boxing newspapers when he beat **Superlek Sorn-esan**. One headline labelled the foreign 'invader' as the *'Turbine From Hell'* which eventually stuck as a fight nickname.

During his fight career Ramon fought some iconic battles with Thai champions - his battle with **Coban** is often voted one of the best Muaythai fights ever - they met in the ring four times with each gaining two victories in hard fights. Ramon gained legendary status with a points win over **Saenthiennoi Sor Rungroj**, the 'Deadly Kiss', who is regarded as one of the sport's best-ever knee-strikers.

Ramon was unique in that he fought the Thais using his style - he was very focused in his training and never once tried to copy the Thais in order to beat them - but simply sharpened his weapons his own ways through repetitive pad and sparring drills. He then took this style to their top stadiums and beat them by their rules. Ramon never did the Rammay and he never copied Thai training methods, even when in Thailand training before big show fights. He had his own style - Dekkers Style.

Ramon added the **WPKL World Title** to his accolades in 1996 following a points decision over **Hassan Kassrioui** in Amsterdam. And, in the following year Ramon and **Rayen Simson** shared a cinematic moment when they both

knocked each other down with left hooks. Ramon finished off his career with a couple of K1 matches - but both were plagued by injury after his 20 years of hard battles in the ring. In 2005 Ramon faced **Genki Sudo** in his first and last MMA match which he lost by heel hook on his injured right ankle. This fight was followed shortly afterward

competing at the event and spent time with Ramon over those few days. In speaking with him, it was clear that this award genuinely touched him. Ramon was a very humble guy who stated this as the greatest achievement and one that made all his 25 years of fighting worth it. Yet he was still shy when given the microphone to make a



RAMON DEKKERS REMEMBERED

with a K1 match against American **Dwayne Ludwig** which again, saw injury play a part. Ramon tore a shoulder muscle only a week prior, yet still managed to win on points after knocking down Ludwig in every round.

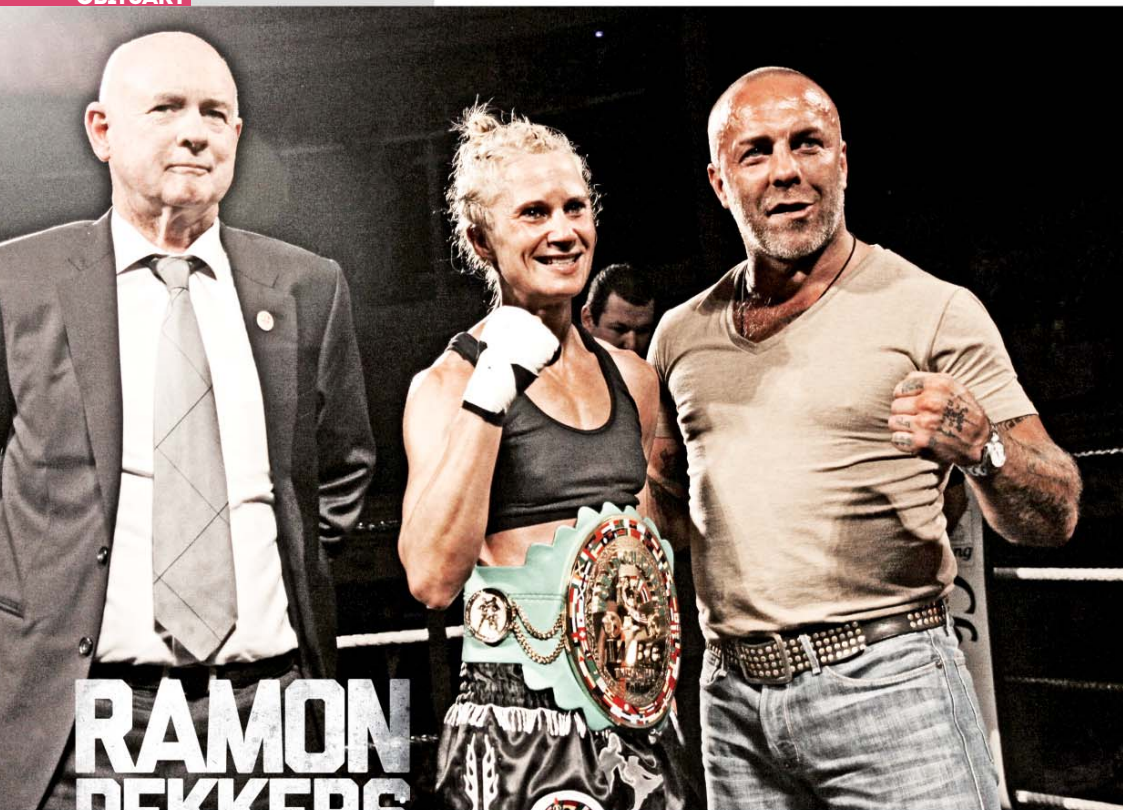
AWARDS & RECOGNITION

Ramon was respected and admired, not only by the Thai people, but also the government - so much so that he became the first non-Thai to be awarded **Muaythai Fighter of the Year** in Thailand on September 15th 1990 by the Prime minister, **General Chatichai Choonavan**. This was followed up on the King of Thailand's 85th birthday last year with Ramon being announced as Royal Ambassador for all foreign Muaythai fighters by the Princess, **Ubolratana Rajakanya**. I, personally, was lucky enough to be part of a UK team

speech... Even to that day, Ramon enjoyed Muaythai for his own personal reasons - not to be centre stage.

RAMON IN PERSON

I was lucky enough to spend some great time with Ramon and also to interview with Ramon's close friend and student - UK fighter, **Lee Coleville**, who spent last Christmas and New Year in Thailand with Ramon. Lee was one of Ramon's few close friends outside of Muaythai and also one of his only students that Ramon trained for fights. Ramon was a shy and humble person in everyday life, yet a fierce warrior when the gloves came on. That is what made him so likeable to everyone he met. Even fifteen years after he last fought in Thailand, he was still being recognised on every street and he always had time for his



RAMON DEKKERS REMEMBERED

fans. Ramon enjoyed going out for a drink and was a very fun person to be around - Lee spent some crazy nights out in Pattaya with him - as well as hard days in the gym.

On spending time together over lunch when Ramon was guest of honour at our 2012 WBC world title event, Ramon enjoyed talking about his life since fighting. The years of combat had left injuries on his ankles that meant he could not run, so he was telling me about his enjoyment of long distance cycling - he had even shown Lee his own designed outfit to keep him warm as Holland was too cold in the winter. He also told Lee about how his biological father was a keen long distance cyclist.

Ramon loved travelling the world doing seminars and had a special passion for Thailand and South America - he loved the sun and

heat. He had also moved into a coaching role - with him drilling Lee on the pads like Cors used to drill him. Lee Coleville puts his knockout power purely down to his training with Ramon - training that he is determined to continue in his name.

In his passing Ramon leaves a legacy to be continued - he was able to show that a Westerner could compete and win against the Thais under their own rules using his own style. Lee Coleville was his pride since retiring from fighting - it was clear that Ramon was very proud of Lee when meeting them both. Ramon would now spend time designing drills specifically for Lee to work with and, according to Ramon's wife, he would be excited when he thought of a new one. Ramon's family say they see a similar personality in Lee as Ramon had - humble yet dedicated and powerful and upon speaking with Lee, it is clear that now he has one goal - as Ramon did; simply to fight hard and well for

his own reason and who knows how far that will take him. To encourage this forward movement, **Muaythai World Series** will commemorate Ramon with an annual award for the best *Non Thai Muaythai Fighter* on their events - working with **Songchai** and the **WBC** who will also both have a *Dekkers Award*. It is hoped that one day a future champion will rise to become the next Dekkers, with their own unique style. ■

LORNE CASTLE

RAMON DEKKERS TITLES

- 1987 MTBN Dutch Featherweight champion
- 1988 EMTA European Featherweight champion
- 1988 NKBB European Super featherweight champion
- 1989 IMTA World Lightweight champion
- 1990 IMF World Light welterweight champion (2 title defences)
- 1992 WMTA World Light welterweight champion (1 title defence)
- 1995 WMTA World Welterweight champion
- 1996 WPKL World Super welterweight Champion (2 title defences)