

...and the private man

interview by Eva Pendzich

Pendzich: Is there a lot of pressure accompanying your professional debut and how does it compare to previous pressures?

de Wit: There is pressure and there will always be pressure where a fight is concerned. But there definitely is not as much pressure in my first pro fight as there was in the Olympic Games. That was a real pressure cooker. It was a two-week tournament and a lot was expected of you. I am older now and I have gained more confidence. I've been working on my balance, on my stance, and on my jab. I am more relaxed now than I previously was. A year from now I will be even better as I continue to learn.

Pendzich: How do you handle the pressure?

de Wit: It's part of the game. What you have to keep thinking is "I want to win." You have to remember that you bring on most of the pressure yourself. Relaxation is a big part of it.

Pendzich: How do you psych yourself up for a fight?

de Wit: By being cool. I have to be as cool as I can be. I just keep thinking "Be cool and be relaxed." If you are too tense you do not fight as well.

Pendzich: What goes through your mind during a fight?

de Wit: There is no time for thinking during a fight. You have to be able to shut out everything around you. It's a reaction sport and you have to be quick, so you cannot allow for any distractions. You've gone through all of the basics in the gym and during a fight you must be ready to immediately utilize what you have learned.

Pendzich: What difference is there between the amateur world and the professional world of boxing?

de Wit: The difference between amateur and pro is that there is a lot more time in pro boxing. You have to be able to go the rounds and make your punches count. In professional boxing it is important to be patient, to be smarter, to use more strategy. It takes a lot of hard work, a lot of rest and a lot of relaxation. I've found out what it feels like to be a Marine. It's up at 5:30 am, working out, eating, resting, etc. There isn't a heck of a lot to do in Burnet except train.

Pendzich: Have you varied your training routine?

de Wit: Yes, very much. I have gone back to my old style of training which involves running, skipping, hitting the bags and sparring. I haven't overdone it though. I feel really strong and I am ready. In fact, my strength has really increased. My brother, who is 6'6" tall and weighs 250 pounds, came at me to wrestle around. I just picked him up and ... yes, my strength has definitely increased.

Pendzich: Since you excelled in so many other sports (soccer, hockey, basketball, football), what made you finally decide on boxing?

de Wit: Those were all team sports, and I wanted to get out of team sports. I took up boxing because I have always liked contact sports. It's one-on-one and you depend only on yourself. I also think that there is a certain mystique which surrounds the sport of boxing. You have the ability to take care of yourself.

Pendzich: In your book (Willie de Wit: Lord of the Ring), you say "Boxers are romantic." What did you mean by this comment?

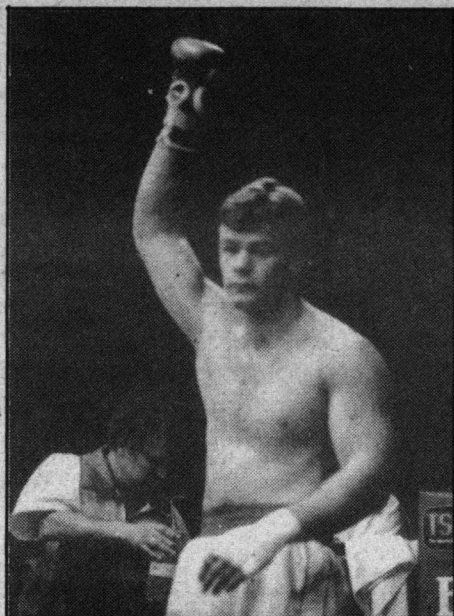


Photo Tim Kubash

de Wit: It's being tough, never giving up and being able to take care of yourself. It takes guts. As a kid, I admired boxers just because of those reasons. Little boys always want to emulate someone who is capable of looking after himself.

Pendzich: How do you feel about boxing commissions?

de Wit: I think that the Commission is a good thing because it will take the sleaziness away from the sport.

Pendzich: Who do you box for?

de Wit: Definitely for myself. There is just no way you can do it for anybody else. There is so much work involved in boxing that it has to be for you. I mean, there are the strenuous workouts, the pressures,

the pain, and the strict discipline. But you have to go through this if you want to be good. You have to be willing to put in the hours.

Pendzich: What does it feel like during a fight?

de Wit: Well, you have to have a high tolerance level for pain. I must have because it has never bothered me. If you can't handle it, you should be involved in another game.

Pendzich: But, doesn't it hurt?

de Wit: It's funny, I've been asked this question many times before and it has always been asked by girls, but no — it doesn't bother me to get hit, and no, it doesn't hurt me.

Pendzich: Are you concerned about being seriously injured either now, or in the long run?

de Wit: I think again that if you worry about that you have to find yourself another game. Life is full of gambles and, of course, the possibility is there. But I keep it in the back of my mind. There are risks involved in everything you do, so it is just something that I don't think about. You can't.

Pendzich: Would you agree with boxing being taught at high school or university levels.

de Wit: No, because there aren't many people around who are qualified to teach boxing. It can definitely be a very dangerous sport if the right person is not supervising.

Pendzich: How long would you like to box for professionally?

de Wit: Until I am 30 years old. I think that at that point it will be time for me to go on to a different part of my life.

Pendzich: What are your future goals?

de Wit: I don't really know yet, but I do know that I would like to go back to school.

Pendzich: If you went to the University of Alberta, would you play for the Bears?

de Wit: No, I don't think so. I'll be too old by then; but then again — who knows?

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