

# *R* *The* *REX* *Factor*

Hong Kong boxing sensation Rex Tso takes time out from training to talk about how he got started, memorable fights and his new-found fame



Video







This spread: Hooded jacket  
with shirt by Versace  
Juste un Clou bracelet in  
18-carat pink gold with  
diamonds by Cartier





This photo: Knitted polo with cardigan and leggings, all by Versace; Ace trainers by Jimmy Choo



**B**oxing champion Rex Tso is considered to be one of the sport's brightest stars. Last March, on home turf in Hong Kong, he successfully defended his WBO International and WBO Asia titles against Japanese boxer Hirofumi Mukai.

#### **How did you get into boxing?**

My dad taught me how to box when I was five years old, and when I was 16 I joined the DEF boxing gym to train and help out as an assistant coach. Back then I viewed boxing as nothing more than a sport, and this made me lazy.

It wasn't until Jay Lau Chi Yuen, who is now my manager and the person who brought professional boxing to Hong Kong in 2011, asked me to participate in some amateur fights that I saw it as something I could do as a career. I fought in a few fights when I was 22 and 23 years old.

#### **When did you decide to go pro?**

I competed in my first professional boxing fight when I was 24 years old. As an amateur I was a lazy boxer, and I still had that attitude when I turned professional.

At the beginning, I didn't care if I won or lost. Boxing was something I did out of personal interest. When Jay asked me to turn professional, I kept on thinking to myself, 'What is a professional? And how can I be called a professional?'

Then I started to worry because my fitness was in poor shape and I hadn't been taking it seriously. When I was an amateur I'd won fights simply because I'm a smart boxer, and so I felt I didn't need to train properly. But when I turned professional I realised I needed to train harder.

My first professional fight was four rounds and I wasn't thinking about winning the fight. I was thinking

*“I try not to let the other boxer rest because I want to fight from the moment the bell rings”*

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about trying not to get knocked down in the first round.

But when I won the fight and the crowd stood up to clap and cheer my name, that was when I knew I had to train harder, improve my body and learn new boxing skills from my coach. It was then that I knew I wanted to take boxing seriously.

**How would you describe your boxing style?**

I would say I have an aggressive boxing style. I try not to let the other boxer rest because I want to fight from the moment the bell rings. Fights are scored every round so I try to win every round.

**Where did your nickname “The Wonder Kid” come from?**

Quite a lot of people think my coaching team gave me this nickname, but actually it was given to me by a Filipino referee. I had my second, third and fourth professional fights in the Philippines and all of my opponents were Filipinos. At the start of one of the fights, the crowd cheered the Filipino boxer as he made his way to the ring, and they booed and jeered at me. They even shouted that I should go home, which I only understood later when someone translated it for me.

The fight was four rounds, and I felt I was losing in the third round because my opponent’s boxing style was different to what I was used to. I had practiced with a right-handed, short boxer, but my opponent was left-



This page and bottom left: Jacket and knitted polo by Versace; Cartier Love bracelets in 18-carat pink gold, 18-carat white gold and 18-carat yellow gold, all by Cartier







handed and much taller. My coach told me that if I didn't knock him out in this round, I would lose the fight. Once the bell rang for the third round, I punched him as much as I could until he could no longer defend himself, forcing the referee to stop the fight. When I was announced as the winner, the crowd stood up and cheered me. The referee was surprised I was still smiling even though the crowd had hurled insults at me and it seemed like I would lose the fight after three rounds, so he gave me the nickname 'The Wonder Kid.'


#### **How do you prepare for a fight?**

I start preparing three months in advance. In the morning I do physical training, like fitness, running and weightlifting. I also focus on boxing techniques to build up muscle. The afternoon is reserved for boxing training.

I follow a balanced diet for the first two months. I eat a fistful of rice and meat, and I usually start to lose weight 10 days before a fight. Normally my weight is 130 lb, but in the build-up to a fight it drops to between 125 and 128 lb. Ten days before a fight it drops to 115 lb, and during this time I only eat vegetables. And 30 hours before a fight I don't drink or eat anything to make sure I make the weight class. I also run in a sweat suit to help me lose weight.

#### **What's been your toughest fight?**

During my last fight against Hirofumi Mukai I faced



a lot of situations that were new to me. In the second or third round, I was hit by a punch that made me lose hearing in my right ear for more than 10 seconds.

I broke my nose one month before that fight, during a training session with a Filipino world champion. I was so worried that I wouldn't be able to fight and it was so painful that I cried. Mukai punched me in the nose during our fight, but thankfully the bone had healed.

**How did it feel to successfully defend your WBO International title and WBC Asia title and win the WBO Asia-Pacific belt in front of your home crowd when you beat Hirofumi Mukai?**

It was great that I didn't disappoint everyone, and I was lucky to fight and win even though I was hurt. I was worried that I hadn't trained enough because I had to take it easier after my injury.

The atmosphere at the stadium was so exciting. Even when I was in the dressing room I could hear the crowd cheering on the other boxers. And when it was my turn to fight, I felt energised when I heard the crowd cheer my name.

**You've fought twice on the undercard for Manny Pacquiao. How were those experiences?**

Manny Pacquiao's fights are always huge events. The fights were valuable experiences for me as they helped me get used to the pressure of fighting in front of a huge crowd. I was also grateful to watch Pacquiao and learn from him. He

This spread from left:  
Knitted cut-out pullover and pants by *Versus Versace*;  
Juste un Clou bracelet and ring in 18-carat white gold by *Cartier*;  
Suit with shirt and tie, all by *Dolce & Gabbana*;  
Drive de Cartier extra flat watch in 18-carat pink gold by *Cartier*



*“I used to be lazy, but now I can be someone who encourages others. Words can’t express how much this change means to me”*

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can fight under pressure and he shows that you have to enjoy the crowd, not be afraid of it.

He is very nice and willing to help other boxers. We have met before but my English is not that great so I just said ‘hello.’

**What do you hope to achieve as a boxer?**

I want to challenge the world champion one day. Before that I want to fight the best boxers so I can learn from them.

**How do you think boxing is viewed in Hong Kong culture?**

In the past, people had a negative view of boxing. When people thought of boxing, they would imagine gangsters, violence and fighting. They didn’t recognise it as a sport. Nowadays, people have taken the time to understand boxing and they realise it’s a sport because it requires skill. It isn’t just lawless fighting.

I think the change has come about due to more media exposure. I have spent the past two years competing in Macau, and the media exposure from my fights there has opened up boxing to a wider audience. So when we organise boxing competitions in Hong Kong, locals are now aware of the sport and the reaction and attention it receives is stronger. Once someone watches a boxing contest in person, they will have a better understanding of the techniques and skill involved.

**Would you say you’re a role model to young boxers?**

When I win a fight, people cheer for me and the focus is all on me. Some young boxers might

crave the attention instead of taking up boxing for the sake of the sport. When it comes to boxing, you don’t get into it because of the result. You have to first experience the process – go through training and fight in competitions – and then you can start thinking about winning and the pride that comes with that.

I think I am influencing people in a positive way. In the past, I was a very lazy person, but now I can be someone who encourages others. Words can’t express how much this change means to me.

**How are you handling your new-found fame?**

I still feel embarrassed. I’m still not used to the attention I get when I walk down the street, but every coin has two sides. When people on the street know who you are and ask for photographs, and suddenly a five-minute walk becomes much longer, you might think you’ve lost some of your freedom. But this is a negative way of thinking. I prefer to view it more positively. When more people recognise me it means that more people know about boxing, and that’s the kind of recognition that matters to me. Also, when people ask me for photographs, it means they don’t hate me, I think!

**What do you do in your free time to relax?**

Eat! I am happiest when I am eating because I have to lose so much weight to prepare for a fight. I don’t have a favourite food, but eating any type of food is a way to pamper myself.

**Which sporting figures do you look up to?**

I admire Manny Pacquiao. He is a legend in the boxing world. Every boxer knows about him because he is so successful.

**What will you do once you retire from boxing?**

I haven’t thought about retirement. When I started out as a professional boxer, I never thought about doing it long-term. Even after my first few fights, I didn’t know how long I would last as a boxer. But now, as long as I stay in good health, I plan to continue as long as I can. There is an age restriction for amateur boxers but not for professionals. I am checked before each fight to make sure I am in good health. When my body can no longer handle it, that will be when I call it quits. I know that plans change and something I want to do next year could change tomorrow, so I enjoy the moment while it lasts.

**Thank you. 🇬🇧**





This page: Tunic with pants and headphones, all by *Dolce & Gabbana*; Sneakers by *Giuseppe Zanotti Design*