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THE BRAINS AND THE BRAWN



A look at the fascinating hybrid sport of Chessboxing

Chessboxing: A battle of brains and muscle

Fighters compete in both chess and boxing. Photo: London Chessboxing



By **MATT PERRY**

Chessboxing is a hybrid sport that combines two traditional pastimes, chess and boxing.

The competitors fight in alternating rounds between both chess and boxing until a victor is decided.

The fighters start off with a three-minute chess round and, once time is up, they put their chess-brain to the side of the rings and prepare to box.

There are three main ways in which the competitors win: one is

by achieving a checkmate in the chess rounds, the second, by knocking out their opponent whilst boxing, and third, by running out of time to complete their moves whilst playing chess.

The set time period allocated to the competitors in which to make their moves in the chess rounds prevents them from stalling unfairly in the hope that they will be more physically dominant in the boxing.

Chessboxing started in Germany but soon

expanded worldwide and, by 2011, had followers all over Europe and started to gain ground in Asia and America.

Since 2015, the majority of events have been presented by London Chessboxing, with shows at both Scala, Kings Cross and The Dome, Tuffnell Park.

Each fighter has their own chess rating, a system used in chess to calculate the strength of a player based on their past performances.

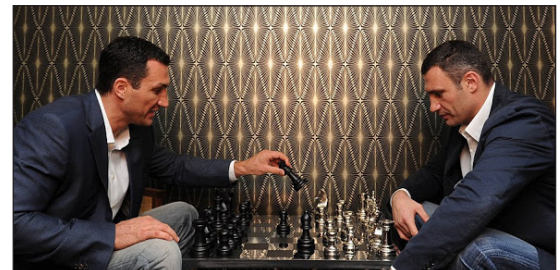
Grandmasters in the

board game normally have a score between 2500 and 2700.

Some can identify many similarities between chess and boxing, such as avid chess player and former world heavyweight boxing champion Wladimir Klitschko.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Klitschko said: "It's an exciting game because it's a war with an army."

"It's a lot of coordination, a lot of endurance, you have to be really agile in everything you do."



From Germany to the UK: The man who brought Chessboxing to Britain

By **MATT PERRY**

With the posture and size of a boxer, but the presence and rimmed glasses of a stereotypical nerd, Tim Woolgar epitomises everything you would expect from someone in this profession.

Woolgar, the boss at London Chessboxing, was responsible for bringing this hybrid sport to the United Kingdom after witnessing an event out in Germany.

The organiser said: "I heard about it several

years ago and went to a chessboxing event in Germany.

"I was fascinated as it was two subjects that I am really interested in, so I brought it over to the UK and started doing shows here."

The first ever chessboxing event took place in Berlin in 2003 before spreading into The Netherlands and eventually becoming an event with its own world championships in 2005.

When talking about

the hybrid sport, Woolgar highlighted one key connection between chess and boxing.

Woolgar said: "Chessboxing is a sport that combines two disciplines – chess and boxing."

"You start out by playing chess for three minutes before carefully taking the board out of the ring and putting on your boxing gloves – you have to have a strong mental head to compete."

With growing concerns brought on by the COV-

ID-19 virus, Woolgar still maintained high hopes that the show would be a sell-out event.

Woolgar said: "We're sold out but it is particularly weird times at the moment so it will be interesting to see what the turnout is like tonight."

"Since we started, we did our first show in August 2008 and now have done four or five shows a year ever since, so hopefully, for those who turn up tonight, it will be an entertaining watch."



'I'm going to give him such a hard time, he'll be dreading getting back in the ring'

The Prince of Persia hopes to win his first chessboxing title

By **MATT PERRY**

Shayan "The Prince of Persia" Zarein Dolab knows that his chess rating may not be up to scratch with his opponent, but that won't stop him from winning the battle of the mind games.

Dolab, who will be competing against Roger "Cannonball" Baxter for the British middleweight title in Tuffnell Park, has said that he plans to give his opponent a tough time.

Dolab said: "My strategy is to play it slow as he will be fully focused on the game and will be at his peak mental performance."

"Then, when we get into the ring after the first chess round, I'm going to give him such a hard time that when he's back to the chess, he's dreading to get back in the ring with me to box again"

Baxter, whose chess rating is 2000, on paper has a better record than Dolab whose own record is 1800.

Dolab knows that this could play to his disadvantage going into the fight with the Irishman, in what is only his second



contest in the sport.

"It's a big moment for me, it's my second fight in the ring.

"The problem is, with the chess rounds, once you make a mistake you're behind for the rest of the game, so if the other person plays at a normal level you know that you will

most likely lose.

"At least with the boxing you know that one hit can take them out."

The Chessboxer acknowledges the heavy toll that the boxing may have on his performance on the chess board.

The Prince also pointed out how the physical side

of the sport can also lead to distraction.

Dolab said: "If you get a bit of pain it is a distraction, and in chess, any distraction makes you more likely to make a mistake.

"You can be thinking about a certain sequence in the chess game and then remember that you have

a headache, or your nose hurts, then you look at the board again and forget what you were doing.

"All the while, the time that you have to complete your moves is running down so you may be in a better position but end up losing anyway, it is tough."

The Northern Powerhouse looks to channel his nerves on Chessboxing debut in London



By **MATT PERRY**

Despite the nerves of his first fight, David "The Northern Powerhouse" Jarmany is hoping to use that energy for his benefit as he competes against Cameron "Hurt Locker" Little.

With some competitors not turning up to fight, self-isolating amid fears of COVID-19, Jarmany also expressed how that was the least of

his worries.

Jokingly, Jarmany said: "I'm the Northern Powerhouse, so the virus won't affect me"

"It's good, there is a little bit of nerves but you have to channel that into energy for when you get on stage and then into the boxing ring.

"A lot of people come into this and they are originally chess players

who then decide to get into boxing rather than vice versa, like Little, it's very difficult to do it the other way around."

"Being concussed or taking a heavy blow can affect you massively, if you get hit in the boxing you are not going to be able to focus so no matter how good you are at chess, it kind of goes out the window."

No slacking from Mak as he sends the 'Tax Man' Mayfield packing

By MATT PERRY

Brian "No Slack" Mak was able to withhold heavy hits from Dan "The Tax Man" Mayfield and win his first chessboxing fight in London.

In an often scrappy affair, Mak defeated Mayfield when the latter ran out of time to complete his chess moves in the seventh round, despite knocking Mak down several times throughout.

The two opponents had to be split apart many times during the fight in what was the most ferocious competition of the evening.

Mak took an early advantage in the first round, resulting with the saxophone-performing fighter maintaining more



Mak and Mayfield throw arms. Photo: London Chessboxing

time on the clock than his heavy-hitting opponent. guns blazing during the boxing rounds, knocking the fourth round as well multiple times.

In response to this, Mak down in not only The chess rounds saw both competitors keep a

steady mind-set, knocking off their opponents' pawns on top of bishops, castles and knights.

The bout became heated further in the sixth round amid Mak losing his temper, resulting in the chessboxer jabbing Mayfield at the back.

The sixth round continued fiercely with each boxer unable to hit the finishing blow, leaving the fight to be decided in the seventh and final chess round of the contest.

With the victory, Mak won his first ever chessboxing match in front of the sold-out arena in Tuffnell Park whereas, in contrast, Mayfield lost only his second competition in the hybrid sport.

Meet the Chessboxing competitors...

	<p>Brian "No Slack" Mack Weight - 72kg Height - 177cm Age - 26 Chess rating - 1600 Special - Extreme Fitness</p>	VS	<p>Dan "Tax Man" Mayfield Weight - 77kg Height - 190cm Age - 24 Chess rating - 1700 Special - Death and Taxes</p>	
	<p>Cameron "Hurt Locker" Little Weight - 104kg Height - 190cm Age - 27 Chess rating - 1790 Special- Bomb Disposal</p>	VS	<p>David "Northern powerhouse" Jarman Weight - 97kg Height - 188cm Age - 34 Chess rating - 2267 Special - Rhino Neck</p>	
	<p>Gerard "Ripper" Reilly Weight - 67kg Height - 176cm Age - 30 Chess rating - 1784 Special - Attrition</p>	VS	<p>John "The Brick" Wood Weight - 68kg Height - 178cm Age - 62 Chess - 1100 Special - Swinging Gate Hook</p>	
	<p>Roger "Cannonball" Baxter Weight - 75kg Height - 181cm Age - 30 Chess rating - 2000 Special - Being Ginger</p>	VS	<p>Shayan "Prince of Persia" Dolab Weight - 75kg Height - 170cm Age - 29 Chess rating - 1800 Special - Sovereign Power</p>	

Cannonball dethrones the Prince to win title

By **MATT PERRY**

Roger “Cannonball” Baxter defeated Shayan “The Prince of Persia” Zarein Dolab for the British middleweight title in Tuffnell park on Saturday night.

Baxter won after Dolab was forced into defeat after running out of time to complete his chess moves in the ninth round.

Baxter said: “It feels great to win the title in front of an unreal crowd tonight; you are what this sport is all about so thank you for coming to watch.”

The fighters were promoted to the main event of the evening after the British championship main event was cancelled amid COVID-19 fears from one of the fighters.

From a chess perspective, the bout had been tight with both competitors maintaining a strong positional stance and not letting their opponent get near to the king.



Baxter’s hand is raised after defeating Dolab in the ninth round. Photo: London Chessboxing

It was clear that both fighters were tiring as the fight continued, Dolab accidentally knocked some of his own pawns over after taking heavy

blows the round before. But despite “The Prince of Persia” having a clear advantage with his boxing ability, with more jabs and hooks connecting,

Dolab was unable to hit Baxter and went into the ninth round knowing his chances were all but over. Dolab said: “It was

frustrating not to be able to hit the final blow, but thank you all for coming out tonight and we’ll be back fighting again at The Dome soon.”

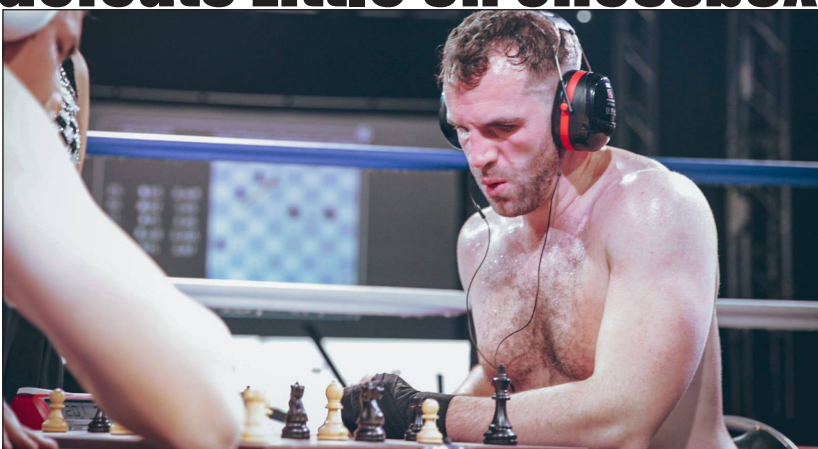
Jarmany defeats Little on chessboxing debut

By **MATT PERRY**

David Jarmany came back from a slow start in London to defeat Cameron Little in his Chessboxing debut in London on March 14 2020.

Jarmany won after Little ran out of time to finish his chess moves in the seventh round.

Jarmany said: “it was fortunate at the end, I feel like Cameron had the better of me in the boxing rounds, but I managed to keep a level-head.”



A focused Jarmany. Photo: London Chessboxing

Jarmany and Little started off slowly in the first round of chess, both

picking up pawns off of their opponent. Little, who has the

nickname “Hurt Locker” due to his past profession in a bomb disposal unit,

had the reach and height over Jarmany, delivering more jabs than his opponent.

Little said: “I thought I was ahead, it’s important to keep a good clear head and remember that the time is ticking down on top of everything else.”

The sixth and final round saw Little try to KO Jarmany, knowing that he was running out of time in the chess rounds, but was unable to hit a decisive jab on Jarmany.

A night to remember

By **MATT PERRY**

As I walked into the cramped arena of The Dome in Tufnell Park and witnessed the pre-production of the upcoming Chessboxing, I realised this was more than just a sporting event.

Many may seem curious to understand how Chess and Boxing, two pastimes at the complete opposite end of the hobby spectrum, can be entwined together to create an entertaining masterpiece – but this was what London Chessboxing managed to do.

The production side of the event was long and strenuous for its organisers, but it was clear that they wanted to create a sporting extravaganza.

The arena gradually filled up, despite the growing concerns of mass-gatherings due to COVID-19.

Perhaps surprisingly, the greatest chant coming from the ecstatic crowd all evening was that of

“Chess, Chess, Chess.”

As the fighters each took their turn to approach the ring in their respected matches, each brought out an entrance as lavish as the other.

Jon ‘The Brick’ Woods, the oldest fighter of the night, came out to Pink Floyd, whilst throwing foam bricks into the thrilled crowd, whereas Brian ‘No Slack’ Mak decided to enchant the audience with his own rendition on the sax of Gerry Rafferty’s Baker Street.

As the night continued, the crowd maintained their adrenaline, with beer spilling and fists pumping as they switched their eyes between the action in the ring and the representation of the chess board on the big screen behind the fighters.

The crowd were in awe of a sport that many never knew even existed, but one that they would now not be able to forget any time soon.



Mak performs with his saxophone.

Photo: London Chessboxing

‘I had never heard of it, but I won’t forget it’

By **MATT PERRY**

Chess and boxing fans alike were left in awe at the London Chessboxing event at The Dome on Saturday evening.

Numerous attendees had been aware of the hybrid sport previously, but just as many were new to the event and were evidently astonished by what they witnessed.

One fan, Matthew Bernatek, 21, said: “I was actually forced to come

here today by a couple of mates and didn’t really know what to expect, I’m still not really sure what I saw tonight.

“I had never even heard of Chessboxing before a few days ago when we decided to buy tickets for the event, but it’s safe to say I definitely will not forget about it anytime soon.”

The fans in attendance became increasingly lively throughout the

evening with frequent chants of “Chess”, whilst consuming copious amounts of alcohol.

Perhaps surprisingly, many of the fans were more interested in the chess rounds in contrast to the universally popular sport of boxing.

Sam Walker, 24, said: “My friends and I are first and foremost here for the chess, we’re purists so the boxing is more of a side thing for us.

“This is my second event, I went a few years ago and it was a lot of fun.

“I know one of the fighters and it baffles me how they manage to get their mind ready to play chess and remember their moves whilst also having another bloke pummel them in their face.”

Despite these chess fanatics, avid followers of boxing were also in full attendance on the night,

shouting at the fighters and giving them advice throughout the bouts.

Many enjoyed the evening’s entertainment, but others were hoping for knockouts.

Duncan Fisher, 42, said: “It’s been good fun to watch whilst drinking but I was hoping for some good old fashioned KO’s, most of the fights have ended with time running out or checkmates.

'I assumed that it would just be another chess gimmick'

Grandmaster and former world champion Gawain Jones shares his opinion on the rise of chessboxing

By **MATT PERRY**

Former Chess champion Gawain Jones believed that chessboxing would be just a mere gimmick, but admits even he didn't see how popular the hybrid sport would become.

Jones, 32, became a Grandmaster in chess back in 2007 and since then has won the British Championships twice, the Commonwealth Championship once, and was even ranked number one in Britain briefly last year.

The Grandmaster said: "I've seen various chess hybrids over the years, I remember diving chess

and just assumed chessboxing would be another gimmick but it seems to have really inspired people.

"Perhaps the two disciplines work quite well together, after all they are both two individual duels."

Jones, who is currently ranked fourth in the UK in the chess rankings with a rating of 2670, doesn't see chessboxing as a sport that tarnishes the reputation of purist chess competitors.

"I think that anything that gets more people interested in chess is



Grandmaster Gawain Jones.

Photo: **Andreas Kontokanis**

a good thing.

"Saying that, I don't think I would want to get into a fight personally!

"From what I understand, it seems that con-

tests are mostly decided thought chess.

"Chess is a game where it is necessary to keep extremely focused, one lapse of concentration will

potentially cost you.

"In chessboxing, and the circumstances that they are playing under, competing punch drunk must be impossible."

Iepe Rubingh: A look at the creator of chessboxing

By **MATT PERRY**

Before he invented chessboxing, Iepe Rubingh was a performance artist known as "The Joker" and despite having the appearance of a poor man's Jurgen Klopp, the comparison to the crazy supervillain is perhaps a better description.

Rubingh, now 45, was inspired to create chessboxing when he saw two boxers fighting on a chessboard floor in a Serbian comic book.

In an interview with Tech Open Air, Rubingh



said: "I wasn't thinking of creating a sport, it was just something that happened.

"There was this comic I used to read where there was depiction of this weird sport called chessboxing."

The creator of chessboxing visualised the sport as a combination of elements that create the complete man, both the brute of a fighter, but also the brain of a

complete nerd.

Rubingh fought in the first fight almost 17 years ago and the Dutchman envisioned a big future for the hybrid sport.

In an interview with

ESPN, Rubingh said: "The future chessboxer will be a grandmaster and a professional boxer.

"Chessboxing could even solve the problem in the middle east, I want to hold a match between an Israeli and a Palestinian, and the winner will decide what happens in Israel."

Over 15 years later, it's safe to say that Rubingh's crazy predictions have not come true, but Rubingh was crazy enough to cement the hybrid's continuation in the world today.

We ask the public what they think the first time they hear chessboxing...

'Chessboxing looks mad. Boxing for boffins, it must be exhausting' - Steve Lillis, Freelance Journalist

'What the hell is chessboxing?' - Jamie Hodinott, Electrician

'Sounds like it would be played by people named Spencer who live in Camden and drink Goose IPA' - Jack Riggs, Recruitment Consultant

'Not sure chessboxing would be for me, it would be bad enough getting a good hiding from someone without them also proving to be much smarter than me.' - Chris Tomlisson, Twitter User



All photos courtesy of London Chessboxing.

