

Yvonne Tara Caples

Professional Boxer and Educator

IFBA Jr. Flyweight World Champion, Yvonne Tara Caples, born on June 14, 1972, in Pune, India thrives on challenges whether it is in the boxing ring against a tough opponent or in the classroom, helping a student understand. Growing up, Yvonne's mother and father, Buddy and Rekha Caples played a big role in making her the person she is today. Yvonne's mother was an all-around athlete who competed in pentathlons in college, later taking up racquetball and tennis. Yvonne recalls "I remember growing up my mother always competed with men. She didn't just want to be the best female athlete out on the court. She wanted to be the best athlete period. She has always been my inspiration and a strong woman I could look up to." Yvonne's father always pushed Yvonne to be the best she could be and inspired her by example. Yvonne remarks, "My father is a perfect example of what hard work and determination can get you. He started with nothing and made a beautiful life for himself and his family."

It was this strong foundation that led Yvonne to attend the University of California, Berkeley, one of the most prestigious schools in the country and to pursue a career in one of the most demanding sports, boxing. Prior to moving to Berkeley, Yvonne had competed in the sports of volleyball, running, basketball, softball, racquetball and triathlons. Always looking for a new way to challenge herself, Yvonne accompanied a friend to King's boxing gym in Oakland. She recalls feeling a bit intimidated by the male dominated gym, but also intrigued and fascinated by the graceful moves and powerful punches of the boxers she observed.

After her first workout at the gym, Yvonne was hooked. She remembers “After my first time at the gym I knew I had found the ultimate physical and mental challenge for myself. I thought to myself ‘If I can do this, I can do anything’.” Fortunately for her, UC Berkeley had a boxing program as well where she met her first serious trainer, Will Thomas, who she called Mr. Thomas. “Mr. Thomas taught me the science and craft of boxing. He used to make me study old fight tapes of all the great fighters from the past like, Sugar Ray Robinson, Kid Gavilan, Muhammad Ali, and Salvador Sanchez. He made me a student of the sport.” Yvonne graduated from UC Berkeley in December of 1994, a year and a half after she had started boxing with a Bachelor of Arts in English. Six months later, she went back to school to get her teaching credential.

It wasn't until June 1996 that Yvonne got her first opportunity to compete. Despite the fact that women's amateur boxing was legalized in 1993, finding opponents to fight proved extremely difficult and frustrating for Yvonne. Unfortunately, a week before her first fight, she had a falling out with Mr. Thomas and ended up driving 8 hours to Los Angeles with only a friend and her brother for support. Yvonne remembers the excitement and anxiety of her first fight. “I was so happy that I was finally getting the opportunity to compete, but I was also terrified that I would forget everything I had learned.” In the end, Yvonne's hard training made the difference in a tough fight against top amateur Linda Carillo as she won her first fight. Although finding fights was always difficult, Yvonne went on to compile an amateur record of 13-4 over a span of three years fighting the likes of Patty Martinez, Jolene Blackshear and Marilyn Salcido. She ended her amateur career by winning the 1999 National Golden Gloves Tournament.

Not only was 1996 the start of Yvonne's amateur career, it also marked the beginning of her career as a teacher. Yvonne's first assignment was teaching Opportunity at Portola Middle School in El Cerrito, California. Opportunity is a program for

student's who have gotten kicked out of regular school due to behavior problems. This tough group of students, most of whom were boys, challenged the inexperienced "Ms. Caples" right away. Yvonne decided to take them all to the gym and let them spar with her as a way to gain respect. She took 4 students a day to the gym until she had sparred with all of her students. Not only did she gain their respect, but she also found a way to motivate the students and began taking her students regularly to the gym. She stayed at Portola Middle School for two years and then transferred to Richmond High School in Richmond, California. Yvonne also began coaching and working to develop a women's boxing team at UC Berkeley. She coached several women who competed in National Collegiate Boxing Association tournaments.

During the summer of 1999, Yvonne had the opportunity to train for a month at her then manager Greg Hannley's training camp, Prince Ranch where she trained with Laura Serrano, Marischa Sjauw, Hannah Fox, and Brenda Burnside. "It was a blast and the stay convinced me to move to Las Vegas. It was great to be around a group of woman who were as committed to boxing as I was and who understood the frustrations of being a woman in this sport."

After the intense training session, Yvonne began her pro career in September of 1999 with an impressive TKO victory over Natasha Wilburn at the Gold Strike Casino in Tunica, Mississippi. Three months later, Yvonne picked up her second professional win with a four round unanimous decision over Wendy Rodriguez in Sacramento, California.

Her next fight took place in Kenner, Louisiana on an all-woman's card that was aired on ESPN. Unfortunately, the experience of Kim Messer proved to be too much too soon for Yvonne who lost a six round decision.

In June of 2000, Yvonne made the move to Las Vegas, although no longer managed by Greg Hannley. She took a year off from teaching, hoping to get a jump start on her boxing career in Las Vegas and to begin her master's degree in sports coaching. In

August 2000, Yvonne fought her first ten round fight for the IBA intercontinental title, but lost a controversial decision to the promoter's wife, Lori Lord. This was followed by another loss to Elena Reid in Phoenix, Arizona in October. Of this fight, Yvonne says "I wasn't in very good shape for this fight and I had never fought another southpaw fighter before. It ended up being a war and the first fight where I felt like I got hurt. Elena hits hard!" She then bounced back two weeks later with a unanimous decision win over Nadine Salim in Palm Springs.

In January of 2001, Yvonne fought a rematch with Elena Reid that ended in a four round majority draw on a fight that was televised on Univision.

Yvonne's next fight turned out to be a special event for her. She not only won a four round unanimous decision over Robin Pinto, she was also voted best fighter by the crowd.

Yvonne did not get the opportunity to compete for another year, but was able to get back to her other passion of teaching and coaching when she started teaching at Coronado High School in August of 2001. She also started an after school boxing program for her students at the high school. The following spring she fought Para Draine and won a majority decision in Las Vegas in April and many of her students came to watch her fight. She, then, won a unanimous decision over Marilyn Salcido in Monterrey, California in July.

In August of 2002, Yvonne traveled to Germany to fight in her first World Title fight against German Superstar, Regina Halmich. Although, Regina had 30 more professional fights than Yvonne, she used her speed and skill to frustrate the experienced Halmich. The controversial decision given to Regina was booed by the German crowd. Yvonne says of the fight "I knew that I had to knock her out to win and I knew that I probably wouldn't be able to knock her out due to her vast experience, but I wanted to prove to myself that I was one of the best fighters in the division and this fight proved it."

Her next fight also ended in disappointment. In November 2002, she traveled to the other side of the world to Guam to fight for the WIBA intercontinental title against Anissa Zamarron. In the fourth round, Yvonne was accidentally head butted by Anissa and a large cut developed over her right eye. Unfortunately, the referee did not see the head butt. The fight was stopped at the end of the fifth round and although Yvonne was ahead on all of the judge's scorecards the decision was awarded to Anissa since the referee did not see the head butt.

In March 2003, Yvonne's next fight would take her to South Korea to face In-Young Lee where she lost another controversial 8 round decision.

Yvonne's hard work and dedication was finally rewarded on July 26, 2003 when she won the IFBA Jr. Flyweight world championship against Mary Duron in Costa Mesa, California. Having to fight not only Mary Duron but a crowd that was against her, Yvonne was able to dominate the fight winning every round on two of the judge's scorecards. "It was a dream come true. I just hope I can continue to fight well and defend my title against the best fighters in the division."

Yvonne fought 5 more fights in North Korea, Trinidad, California, Nevada and New York.

Yvonne's record is deceptive. She has fought 6 world champions and 1 intercontinental champion and often has had to fight women who outweighed her. She has usually had to fight in the hometowns of her opponents, but she still loves the sport. "For me, it's always been about the opportunity to fight. I think it's really unfortunate that you are not supposed to lose in boxing. In any other sport losing is a completely normal and expected part of the sport, but not in boxing. And now it's worse in the women's game than in the men's, people are more concerned about protecting their records than their integrity. I'm proud of my career as a boxer because it is based on hard fought decision against legitimate, tough opponents not some perfectly padded

record that involves exploiting a bunch of women that have no business being in a professional boxing ring.” Yvonne completed a master’s degree in Sports coaching and then completed a second Master’s degree in Technology Integration. Of her career in boxing and education, Yvonne has this to say “I am very fortunate to have two careers that I am very passionate about. I love boxing and I love my teaching and learning. It can be difficult pursuing both careers at times, but I wouldn’t change my life for anything in the world. I hope I can instill in my students that same drive to do whatever they are passionate about. I hope I am a living example of the idea that you can do anything you set your mind to.”