

MURDOCH KEEPS WORLD TITLE HOPES ALIVE IN CHINA

By Matt Daniels

Australian fighters Paul Murdoch and Juanne Dowling had mixed fortunes on a recent trip to Guangzhou, China.

In the main event, Paul Murdoch climbed from the canvas to keep his world title aspirations alive with a fourth round technical knockout win over hard-hitting Fijian, Sakeasi Dakua. In front of 9,000 fans, Murdoch successfully defended his Pan Asian Boxing Association light heavyweight title and improved his record to 23 wins, five losses and one draw from 29 fights. The victory extended the Victorian boxer's winning streak to seven but more importantly cemented a top 10 World Boxing Association light heavyweight ranking.

For the first time since November 2000, the 31-year-old had to rise from the canvas after being floored by a powerful left hand halfway through the opening round.



"He just came out blazing and I went with him and he caught me with a left hand that put me down," Murdoch said.

"It got worse in the second because he cut me over the right eye but my fitness must have been pretty good because I recovered quickly."

Murdoch gained control of the fight in the third round after sending Dakua crashing to the canvas. He needed only one more round to finish the job and retain the title he recaptured in 2001.

In the other major bout, Dowling, the current Australian super middleweight champion, was demolished by Peter Kariuki Ngateri in round one of the scheduled 12-round Pan Asian Boxing Association super middleweight title fight.

It was his third straight defeat after losing to Sakio Bika and Anthony Mundine.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT: NADER TO FIGHT ON

By Stephen Plummer

It's been a pretty ordinary time for Australian boxing these past few months. Danny Green, Paul Briggs, Anthony Mundine and, shock of all shocks, Kostya Tszyu have all come up short in world title fights. Attracting much less attention yet no less disappointing was the news from Europe that Nader Hamdan had lost a close points verdict for the less prestigious WBF super middleweight championship.

Hamdan's loss came at the hands of unheralded Croatian Stjepan Bozic 17-1 (10) on June 4. The bout at Zagreb's Dom Sportova attracted a big media contingent as it announced the return of professional boxing to Croatia and highlighted the WBF's continued expansion into Europe.

The bout was Hamdan's third loss in his last five fights taking his record to 38-4. He has now been unsuccessful in his major bouts at super middleweight having been stopped by hot German prospect Arthur Abraham and losing on points to slick Canadian Otis Grant. His other loss came at the hands of masterful Sam Soliman, Hamdan's first bout outside of junior middleweight where he had built an imposing record and climbed to number two in the world.

In the Bozic fight all three judges scored it 115-112 in favour of the local but the Aussies were far from happy.

"It was a good fight. It's always difficult to win overseas but I thought I won and I thought I deserved to win. I can't walk away after that, I'm definitely not retiring," Hamdan said.

Compounding the difficulty of winning on the road was that Hamdan hit the canvas in the eighth round. It was ruled a knock down

but Hamdan said it was clearly a slip.

"I don't make excuses, if I lose I admit it. I lost to Sam Soliman and Otis Grant, both of them were simply too good on the night. The Abraham fight was very close and it was an ordinary stoppage so late in the last round but I know I didn't lose this one. The referee after the fight watched a replay and apologised to me for ruling it a knock down. I said, 'Thanks, but it's a bit late now.' His corner even apologised and one of the judges said he knew it was a slip but as the referee ruled it a knockdown he had no option and ruled it a 10-8 round which in the end was telling. In close fights you need things to go your way. He was the aggressor and a gentleman after the fight but I landed more punches and I suppose that's boxing, you just have to take it on the chin," he said.

Trainer Mick Akkaway said it was a good hard fight that Hamdan dominated through the middle rounds and he hurt Bozic on several occasions but he agreed Hamdan won.

"Neither gave an inch right till the end but Nader carried a shoulder injury into the fight that affected him from the fifth round but he still dominated for long periods and should have got the decision," Akkaway said.

"Nader had him in trouble a couple of times and he was breathing heavily under the pressure Nader applied but the shoulder really hampered him and then the ruling on the knock down, but that's boxing," he said.

Such is the severity of Hamdan's shoulder injury that he says he will be forced out for a couple of months and it may need an operation although he said retirement was more likely



than a stint on the surgeon's table.

"I want a rematch and the WBF have said that's a possibility. If that doesn't happen then I'll employ a dietician and get down to middleweight and pursue the WBF championship in that division," Hamdan said.

"I've always wanted Nader at middleweight," Akkaway said. "He gives away too much size at super middleweight and lacks the power there. In the middleweights he will have more size and be able to hurt them more and finish over the top of them. With a good diet and discipline he can do it but the priority now is to get his left shoulder right."

Hamdan said he was suffering from a condition known as impinged tendons and that he had little cartilage left in the shoulder to the point it was almost bone on bone.

"Bozic was bigger than me and I really want a rematch but if that doesn't happen then it's the middleweights for me and I don't care, I'll go anywhere in the world to fight for and defend a title. The WBF is taking off in Europe and I'd love to be part of it and I'm prepared to take on anyone anywhere to get that world title," Hamdan said.