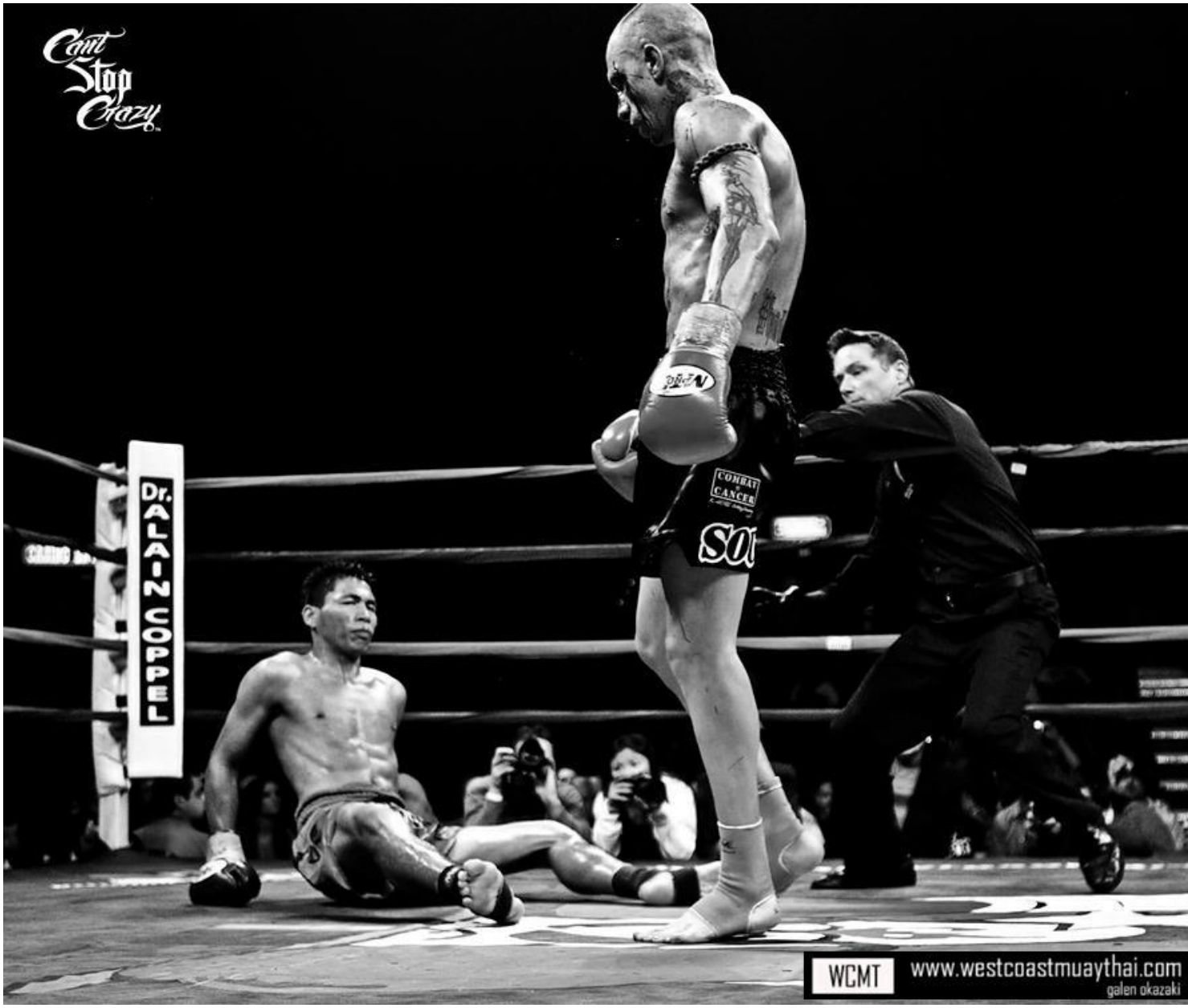

If you follow Muay Thai in America, you know the name Kevin Ross. Hell, if you follow Muay Thai in general, you know Kevin Ross. Ross is one of the few American fighters over the past few years to really move outside of his comfort zone and go to Thailand and fight some of the best in the world. He has long been considered one of the best Thai fighters to come out of the US by fans and is set to make his return to the ring this Saturday night at Lion Fight 8 live on AXS TV.

Kevin is coming off of a pretty bad ACL injury that required surgery and months of rehabilitation that left him out of action for all of 2012, but that all ends this Saturday night as he squares off against Chris Kwiatkowski. LiverKick's Dave Walsh caught up with Kevin to discuss this fight, his rehabilitation and a whole lot more.

LK: *So obviously it has been a while since you've fought, what have you missed the most when it comes to fighting?*

KR: I mean, I've missed it all. Right after surgery I was in there on one leg punching the bag. I couldn't stay away, man, I'd start getting depressed, like this is what I love to do, you know? Like the number one passion in my life and to be away from it for any period of time is just impossible. Especially the fighting. The fighting is like the peak of the sport, you know, with what I love to do it is the very top of that. To be away for as long as I have been, it's been really hard. Even if it's a month or two, I want to be in the ring. It's been what, 15 months? It's been rough.

LK: *The ACL injury that you are recovering from could mean the end of a career for some fighters, but you seem to be healing up pretty well from it. What kind of obstacles did you have to overcome to heal up from the injury and the surgery?*

KR: There's a list! In the beginning one of the biggest hurdles I had to overcome was there was all of this scar tissue in my knee. We couldn't get to the actual rehabilitation until they could get all of that broken up so I could bend my knee back all the way. The first few weeks were some of the most painful things I've had to go through in my life, I was like punching holes in the wall, man. Every time I went in there to rehab they had to break up the scar tissue and like smash my leg back down trying to get it to bed all of the way back. That was one of the hardest things. You know, not knowing if I was going to be able to make it back.

There were some days when I really was like, "I don't know if I can do this anymore." I knew that I could walk right now, but didn't know if I could make it back. As soon as I was able to start training again I would look at all of the videos of my training that I did for my old fights, and was like damn dude, I don't know if I can do that again. While I'm happy to be healthy and all of that, at the same time you realize how hard the sport is. You forget all of the stuff that you have to do. The ups and downs and stuff, you get kind of mixed feelings about it, but they are all temporary things. This is what I love to do and that is what got me through.

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LK: *An ACL is a pretty serious injury, was there actually a while where you thought that you couldn't come back?*

KR: There wasn't really a time where I was like, "I can't do this." Eh, you know, there were these moments where it popped into my head like, "this is just too hard." Not for any extended period of time, though. There were moments where I doubted that I'd be able to do this at a high level again, sure. I knew I could get back to fighting, fighting sure, but where I was before? That was a big one. You know, not knowing how long it would actually take. You know, for me, I want to be like the fastest healer ever, faster than anyone else has ever done it. Yet at the same time, not over do it and re-injure myself. Find that balance between the two. It always felt like everyone was telling me how amazing it was how fast I was healing, but one little misstep or one day where I didn't improve it made me think what if this took like two-three years. That was real difficult, man.

Any little thing and you'd wonder if it was re-injured. It's not like you can see inside of your knee, you know? And like I'd think back to when I originally got injured. All of the doctors told me that I was fine and there was nothing wrong with it. So I functioned on it and trained on it for four weeks while it was completely torn. Any time I had something happen, or a pain in my knee, it would cross my mind that my knee was blown out again and I was thinking, "how could I go through this again?" I don't know if I could, man.

Come back from that twice? That'd be rough.

LK: *Chris Kwiatkowski is a tough guy and like you, had kind of a late start in muay thai but hasn't seen the same deal of success. There is kind of this whole East Coast Muay Thai scene and West Coast Muay Thai scene and he is one of the East Coast guys and you one of the*

West Coast guys. Did you have a hand in picking who you fought?

KR: They asked me who I wanted to fight and I gave them a list of three or four guys who agreed to fight me, and when it came time to sign on the dotted line they were nowhere to be found and backed out. That was pretty hard for me. We had this guy for me and everything was great, then he backed out, then again another one backed out, then another one backed out. I did all of this work to come back and now no one wants to fight me? If there ever was going to be a time to want to fight me, now is that time. I can't believe that guys who said they wanted to fight me won't fight me now when I'm coming off an an injury.

So I was like, who am I going to fight? Am I going to have to go in there and fight some of the top guys again in my first fight back? I was like screw it, let's do it, but there were a few more options, Chris being one of him, along with a few others. So I said yeah him, any of these guys are cool, so they had some interest in fighting me and he just ended up being the guy that it ended up being. I had never heard of him, but other than that I definitely didn't know who he was.

LK: *A lot of fighters would look at your 2011 and just look at the numbers and say it wasn't a good year, I disagree. You fought some of the very best in the world and held your own and have been the great American hope for Muay Thai, is that a lot, if not too much pressure, or are you alright with it?*

KR: I've never kind of looked at myself as this whatever, posterboy, or whatever. I just want to be me and be the best me ever. I've always been someone that performs better under pressure. But yeah, I mean, if people want to look at me and say that's me, that will definietly inspire me to do much more. I've never felt that I'm that guy, but then again, I've never seen myself as perhaps other people do, like this great American Muay Thai fighter. I'm just me, just trying to do my best. I might be at a higher level than most of the others, but I'm just trying to do the same thing that a guy at his first smoker is trying to do, I'm just trying to fight the best that I can and do the best that I can in this sport. I just happened to get here. I'm just trying to do my best, be the best that I can.

Be the best role model that the sport that I can be, because I am in this position. It definitely weighs on my mind. I've never really looked at myself that way, but I realize that other people do and I consciously have to think about that and try even more so to do my best.

LK: *Lion Fight seems to be the most successful at promoting Muay Thai on a bigger level in the United States. I know we've all kind of talked about this before, but what do you see Muay Thai needing to get over that hump and become more popular.*

KR: It can definitely get bigger. I think that there is a strong need and want for it. I think one of the biggest things is that it hasn't been on TV and gotten that exposure. It's been on some local channels and that kind of stuff, but to get a good Muay Thai card on live TV that's a huge thing, a huge step in this sport. It's something that's been in the works for I don't know, 20 years, forever? The fact that Lion Fight is doing it and they are doing it right lately. They are building up the local fighters, building up the mid-level fighters, bringing in some international talent to top off the card, as opposed to making some mega ultra show where they blow all of their money and nobody sees it. It's like, people don't care about that. I mean, most people, most Americans, they don't even know these people, they'd rather go and see people from their hometown.

I don't know why you'd waste all of this money when all that people care about are the fighters that they know, so it finally seems like someone is doing it right. Lion Fights' last few cards have been great, the amateur cards have been great, the pro cards have been great, it's all at the right level. It's all about the matchups. I don't care if its the pro card or the amateur card, it's about putting the right fights on. You could have the two best fighters in the world, but if it's a bad matchup nobody wants to see it, they want to see the best fights. Just having a name isn't always the most important thing. Especially in Mauy Thai, they don't know any of these fighters, they want to see guys get beaten up and you know see good technique and a good solid fight, which is important. This is what Lion Fight is doing, especially this next card, it's stacked. It's stacked with great fights, whether it's on the amateur card or the undercard or the pro card. All of the fights are gonna be great and the fact that it's gonna be on TV? That's a great first step, man. I really hope and I believe that things will really start picking up from here or at least progress from here.

LK: *You recently signed to Glory, and I know we've talked about you possibly doing Kickboxing before, but how different do you think it'll be preparing for a Kickboxing fight instead of a Muay Thai fight?*

KR: It doesn't bother me man, like muay thai is my love, but my next love is fighting. I've fought in just Kickboxing rules before and I'm fine with it. My style is fine for it, anyway. I like to elbow people and knee people, too, but I have a very good style to transition over to just hands and

kicks. I've done it before and I'm pretty confident in myself that I can do very well within those rules, especially for me as opposed to other people who rely on the rules in Muay Thai moreso. I'm pretty confident in my abilities, especially my boxing and my kicks. It's perfect for me. You know, I'd love to elbow people all day, but if it's gotta be something, I'd rather it be that.

LK: *I know you follow Muay Thai pretty closely, but do you follow Kickboxing as well?*

KR: I mean, I just love watching fights. I'll watch fights all day everyday. Most of the time I'm watching old school Thai fights, but I'll watch any fights that I can get my hands on.

LK: *Is there anyone in particular in Kickboxing that you'd want to fight?*

KR: Yeah, I mean, most of the guys that I want to fight I'd prefer to fight in Muay Thai rules, but I'd fight all of those same people in Kickboxing. I'd rather fight these guys when we have all of our weapons at our disposal instead of being limited, but I think in most cases that style would favor me as opposed to them. Where as Muay Thai helps level it out, more so in their favor.

LK: *A lot of guys who fight muay thai end up training for MMA as well. Joe Schilling is currently doing that and it seems like you are just a muay thai guy through and through, would you ever consider making that jump?*

KR: Yeah, it was something I was kind of playing around with the idea of back in around 2008. I was seriously considering switching over. I was having a really hard time getting fights, and things were falling through, I wasn't making any money. As long as I'm fighting I'm happy, but when I'm not fighting and not making money, both, I'd rather, I'll go box if I have to. You know, I've dabbled in a little bit of everything just to get that experience in the ring because I love to fight no matter what it is. Muay Thai is my passion, though.

You know, with me, though, if I'm going to switch over into another sport I'm going to do it 100%, I don't want to kind of be half-assed at two different things. Kind of good at Muay Thai and kind of good at MMA. If I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it, completely switch over. At the end of 2008 I made a New Year's resolution that I was going to give Muay Thai one more year, not

going to think about anything else and just focus on that and see where it goes. If by the end of the year they aren't where I want them to be then I'll switch. Then about a week after New Year's I got a call to fight for my first WBC Title and you know all of these fights started picking up, stuff like title shots. Things really took off from there, so at this point? No, I'm definitely not going to do it at this stage of my career, there is really no reason to. When I was kind of in the middle working my way up it kind of seemed more likely, but at this point? No. I've done too much in this sport to quit now. I wouldn't say that it's impossible that one day I'm gonna do MMA, but it won't be any time soon. Maybe when I'm done doing Muay Thai and I've got nothing else left to do.

LK: *Can't Stop Crazy is this group of really super talented fighters based in the US and isn't a traditional fight team or anything, but just a collective of some of the best. Who came up with the idea and got the ball rolling on it?*

KR: I'll put that on Joe. He used to say that it was my idea, but it definitely wasn't my idea. I might have been there during the conceptualization of it, but it wasn't my idea at all. I give that all to him. I think that we were always just talking that we really needed to band together, like obviously this isn't like a fighter's union, but it's obvious that we are all working together. We are all kind of close and we all train together once in a while, some of us are real good friends, so we decided to get together, to start this crew up and try to help each other out as best we can. Give ourselves an outlet for our media, for our interviews and stuff. I think that we were just getting fed up with some of the sites doing stuff with misquoting, some of them printing stuff that never happened and showing this favoritism for certain guys when things were looking good and then when things are looking bad, well, that's the media for you, that's just how it works. We wanted something to put ourselves out here because it has our stamp on it, you know we said it if we put it out there.

That's kind of how it started, then you know, we designed a few shirts and it just kind of picked up from there and it is what it is. People ask me all of the time what to call it and I don't know, it's just us.

LK: *You are a pretty awesome artist, do you ever feel like fighting gets in the way of your ability to draw and stuff like that? Does the thought of breaking your hand and not being able to draw or paint ever creep into your mind?*

KR: Yeah, well which I have done a few times actually. It does, it really does. Art is just

something that I've always done my whole life, where Muay Thai is actually my passion. I definitely couldn't compare the two, but art is definitely my second passion. You know, I think about it, whether I'll be able to keep doing it and fighting definitely takes away from it because it's hard for me to focus on both. After fights I'll definitely try to focus on it and get some stuff done here and there, but yeah, art was kind of just something that I did, like I knew that I could do it forever, that's why I went to school for computer animation. You know, animation wasn't really a passion of mine, but it was more, how am I going to make money with art? So here's something you can do and you can make some decent money, but then, two years into school is when I started training, and I really didn't want to bother with school anymore, but I finished that.

But yeah, it's just another kind of outlet of my creativity. I can only fight for so long and I'll always have some part in the sport if it's coaching or training or whatever, but art is always going to be there, too. You know, if I mangle my hand beyond recognition I'll have to figure something out.

LK: *Did anyone do any write-ins to vote for El Presidente this election season that you know of?*

KR: A few people did, actually and they sent them to me, actually. It was pretty funny. That is another thing, I don't even know where that came from or who started it. I don't even know. People ask me and I don't know what the hell it is, I guess it's just me, man. Stuff like that just happens and people want to know where it came from and you're asking the wrong person. It just happens while you're training and you know, I had the whole shirt and people dig it, they call me that everywhere that I go.

LK: *So what comes after this fight this week? You have actual contracts with Lion Fight and Glory this time around, which makes your life a bit easier I assume.*

KR: Yeah, it will be a little too easy, actually. I'm not even gonna get any breaks, man. Maybe I should have taken some time off after the surgery, like I've taken no time off. I was literally in the gym one week after the surgery and I've taken no breaks. Now I'll have like a week off after this, but nothing's signed. I believe that I'm gonna be on the next Lion Fight fight which is in March, which is like seven weeks after this one. Then I believe that Glory has an event in Italy in April and that I might be on that one. So it's going to be back-to-back-to-back, and that is how it always has been. When it rains it pours, like I'll have droughts and then like 3 - 4 fights in a month just back-to-back-to-back.

You gotta take advantage of it while you can, because you never know when there won't be fights. Even though I'd like a break, even a little vacation, I'm really happy to have these opportunities and not have to go searching and scrounging for fights.