The ability to overcome adversity is what can make or break a fighter and take them from being just a fighter to a legend. In the case of American Muay Thai fighter Kevin Ross, the adversity has never been his skill, abilities or drive, but instead an ACL injury that he suffered last year. He spent months rehabbing it after surgery and everything was built up for his comeback fight this January at Lion Fight 8. We spoke with Kevin back then about his comeback trail as well as the details of what he goes through in his personal life, what actually makes Kevin Ross tick and we were all treated to seeing Kevin's successful comeback against Chris Kwiatowski.

It was the first step of many for Ross after coming back from an injury that would have stopped most fighters in the prime of their career and this Friday, live on AXS TV, Ross looks to once again enter the ring and take on a very game opponent in the UK's Bernie Mendietta. Part of his last fight was not knowing exactly what Chris would bring to the table, and in the case of Mendietta he expects the same.

"I think that I know less about him than I did Chris," he joked. "I've just really seen clips at this point, where with Chris I had at least seen a full fight or two. I know that he's a tough guy, though, I know that he likes to brawl, so I know what I'm in for."

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Ross is one of the few modern Western fighters who has jumped right into the deep end in the past with some of Thailand's best. His "home" in Thailand is the Sitmonchai Gym, which served as a kicking off point for Ross's training camp for this fight, but it served to be a remnant of his painful injury from last year just as well.

"Yeah, I went back to Thailand and trained at Sitmonchai," he stated, before continuing. "But you know, it wasn't really planned or anything. I had this plane ticket to Thailand from last year that I didn't get to use because of my injury and all. So I had this plane ticket that was worth $1,300 and it was about to expire, so I had to use it now. I did my first two weeks of my training camp out there, which was a good way to start things out."

It is also no secret that Ross has been looking to fight in Kickboxing fights as well, with a contract signed with Glory. There was a false start involved with Glory with them announcing him as a participant in an upcoming May tournament, only for them to retract it right after. The story behind it is quite fascinating and shows how differently the fight game can work overseas for some fighters.

“Well, they never talked to me about it,” he laughed, remembering back to the day that it was announced. “I had people congratulating me and telling me that they were going to book tickets to Japan to see me fight over there and I had no idea what was going on. I have a contract with Lion Fight and a fight scheduled in May for them, so my manager got on the phone with them to explain that they had to work around that contract, you know, work together. I think that they understand now, but we still don’t have anything officially planned yet.”

As for that fight in May with Lion Fight, Ross was blunt with who he wanted to fight and who they were working on getting for him; “Matt Embree,” he said. Matt Embree, the Muay Thai standout from Canada, also known as one of the best in North America. It makes for a great matchup between the two, but don’t look for it just yet. “Nothing is signed yet,” he cautioned. “It’s still in the works, but that is the plan for right now.”

This would be his third fight in five months, which is a daunting task for any fighter, never mind one coming back from such a debilitating injury, but Ross seemed ready to go. “I’ve tried planning vacations before and I just get bored,” he said. “This next fight gives me 10 weeks so I might take a week or two off from the gym,” he joked. “But I took a month off once -- I forced myself to, actually -- and when I got back to the gym just everything hurt more, everything was a challenge.”

There is something unique about fighting in Lion Fight for Kevin and that is that the promotion is also home to many of his friends and quasi-teammates from Can’t Stop Crazy. This upcoming card features Tiffany Van Soest as well as his good friend Joe Schilling in fights and one has to wonder what kind of impact it has on a fighter to have friends competing on the same card.

“It’s definitely not weird,” he laughed. “It’s really kind of cool as we can all pump each other up and it’s easy to get excited because you have friends competing on the same card. It can be tough if one of them loses, though, or gets hurt. You know, it is a lot easier if you fight first and then the pressure is off and you can just watch them.”

When we last talked with Kevin, we talked about how he has come to a role of prominence in American Muay Thai and how there are people that look up to him and look to him to be America’s great muay thai hope and with him fighting on AXS TV now, it seems like it has only gotten bigger.

“Oh yeah, I’ve definitely noticed a change,” he noted. “It’s on a national network and, you know, one that people actually get. This isn’t ESPN 8 or something like that, this is a network that most people get. It isn’t global or anything, but people in the United States are seeing these fights and it is becoming a big deal.”

His role as America’s muay thai hero has also allowed him to help out and give back, as he has recently been the face of K-Hero’s FIGHT CANCER campaign . Brent Magnussen of K-Hero lost his mother to cancer and decided to use the K-Hero brand to help give back to the community and to raise money, choosing his friend Kevin Ross to help out. “I’ve known Brent for a while, trained with him and everything. So he asked me and this was a good cause and he’s a good friend. He said that he’d sponsor me, make my walkout shirts and everything, but I’d do it even if they weren’t sponsoring me, either. I like to give back.”

Ross fights on the same weekend that NIck Diaz gets his shot against GSP, with Nick Diaz known to do part of his training camps down at CSA Gym where Kevin calls his home. It was too hard to resist asking Kevin about Nick. “Nick?” He laughed, the inflection in his voice changing. “You want to know about Nick? Oh man. You know, he’s a great guy, not at all what people make him out to be. He’s a lot like Joe [Schilling] where people see what they want to see, they see this badboy and whatever, but Nick is a great guy. He’s super respectful. He actually called me ‘sir’ for the longest time, which just blew my mind. Nick is just an easy-going guy, real easy to like and he likes most people. Well, unless he doesn’t like you and then you’ll know, he let’s you know right away that he doesn’t like you. He’s a great guy and a great

fighter."

Ross steps into the ring for the second time since his injury last year this Friday at Lion Fight 9 in Las Vegas. The fight will air live on AXS TV at 10pm Eastern Time and as Ross noted to us, the card is just absolutely stacked full of great fights. So much so that he couldn't pick which fight he wanted to watch the most. It is that good.

Header image by Galen Okazaki of West Coast Muay Thai .