

Canada coach Clark cares

By **CHRIS SIMNETT**

Free Press staff writer

Betty Clark is a bastion of kindness and caring in a cruel sport.

Clark is one of only two level five boxing coaches in B.C. and the only female level five in Canada. Because of her credentials, she's heading to Sudbury, Ontario next week to head up the National Women's Team that will take on Team Sweden in Sudbury and Toronto at the end of the month.

While her sport is violent and sometimes bloody, Clark is at the opposite end of the spectrum.

"I love my coaching and I love the people I work with," says the head instructor of the Shaolin Boxing Club and Cobra Kickboxing Academy in Prince George. "I'm there for my boxers all the time. They come first for me as people. When you love what you're doing and when you care about what you're doing, you get the return."

While she's soft at heart, Clark can be tough when she wants to be. She's had to fight her way up the coaching ranks since opening up her club in the city in May, 1993. She's met resistance along the way to the idea of a woman coaching boxing, but she says the biggest hurdle she had to clear was getting her level five certification.

"I met a lot of resistance as a female coach," she says.

Starting from scratch in 1993, Clark has worked as hard as her boxers train to progress through the coaching levels. A decade of previous coaching earned her her first three levels rather quickly, but it took the better part of three years to progress past the last two levels.

Women's boxing isn't just something Clark loves, it's something she helped establish around these parts. The first female fighter in Prince George, Kristen Josephson, came out of Clark's gym. Currently she has four active female fighters in her stable.

She says the difference between men



Prince George's Betty Clark is the most qualified female boxing coach in Canada and will guide the national women's team later this month.

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and women boxers is surprising.

"Females are more aggressive when they get in the ring," she says. "They're far more aggressive. Maybe that's just their instinct for when they have children and they protect their child."

Clark also says women fighters learn faster than their male counterparts.

But the one drawback female fighters have is lack of numbers, so it's still hard to get fights.

That's part of the reason for Clark's latest trip with the national team. Two years ago she went to Sweden with the team and last year she was in Pennsylvania.

This year the Swedes are returning the favour.

Besides getting to coach top athletes at the highest level their sport can offer, Clark gets other benefits from running the national team.

"I meet a lot of other coaches and I learn from the other coaches," she says. "I learn a lot."

Clark leaves on March 15 and won't return until March 28. She will put the Canadian fighters through their paces at a week-long training camp before the bouts take place in Sudbury on March 24 and in Toronto on March 27.

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