

# LEOW GEARS UP FOR SHOT AT WORLD TITLE

## S'porean muay thai fighter eager to 'level up quickly' against 14-time champ Townsend

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As a student at the Singapore Management University, Winnia Leow thought she had her career path mapped out – get good grades and focus on securing a corporate job after graduation.

That changed in her final year, when she realised her academic results were unlikely to change significantly.

While her peers were stressing over job applications, Leow chose instead to travel and meet new people. After graduating in 2022, she spent a month exploring South-east Asia and she liked what she saw.

In contrast to Singapore, where she often felt one's worth was tied to intelligence and career success, her conversations abroad were different and she "found that it was a breath of fresh air".

"That's when I started to think about what I really liked, what am I really passionate about and what makes me who I am?" said Leow, who started muay thai when she

was 15.

She stayed on in Bali and began to compete in muay thai, with a local gym supporting the cost of her training. She also fought professionally twice (one win, one loss) in Thailand.

The Singaporean has come a long way since – she is 16th in the World Boxing Council muay thai super flyweight rankings.

On April 12, the 26-year-old will be fighting for the International Sport Kickboxing Association (ISKA) flyweight world title against Australia's defending champion Kim Townsend.

Leow's bout against the 14-time world champion is one of three title fights on the main card of the Honour Premier League event at the Royal International Convention Centre in Brisbane, Australia.

As she gears up for the biggest fight of her career, Leow knows it will not be easy but she welcomes the challenge.

She has been preparing for her bout by studying her opponent's fights, and focusing on improving her strength and conditioning.

She said: "Giving me an opponent (like Townsend) and thinking

that I can compete with them is a compliment for me... it's also a big challenge for me to level up quickly and a lot more in order to be better.

"Even if there's just one chance, a very small chance, to beat a very difficult person, I'll still take it, because anything can happen in a fight."

While she was already competing overseas, a trip home for Chinese New Year in 2023 unexpectedly propelled Leow to the next step of her career.

At the invitation of mixed martial arts gym Pineapple MMA, she went to check out the facility and met its Australian founder Nigel Smith, who offered to support her career as a fighter.

Smith said: "I liked her story... I thought if this person is willing to try it, then that's the person I wanted to back and that was my goal with this – to have a handful of athletes whom I could use my resources, contacts and our trainers to try and see how good we can get that athlete."

Although Leow enjoyed her experiences overseas, she felt that being based here would allow her to have a bigger impact on the Singapore community.

But it also took some time for Leow's family to accept her decision to pursue muay thai as a full-time endeavour.



Winnia Leow, 26, will be taking on Australian Kim Townsend for the ISKA flyweight crown in Brisbane on April 12. It will be the biggest fight of her career, since she took up muay thai at the age of 15. ST PHOTO: AZMI ATHNI

### OPPORTUNITY BECKONS

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**WINNIA LEOW**, Singaporean muay thai fighter, on facing Kim Townsend.

She had to assure them that she had a proper plan, and that she believed she had a shot at success.

It took six or seven fights before her family was fully supportive of her sporting pursuits, and they began to watch the live streaming of her fights on YouTube and keep tabs on her events.

She said: "They saw that I didn't give up. Even though I was tired, I was still going for training, I was showing up every day."

"That really made them believe that I really care about this and there is a good opportunity for me

to do well."

Noting that Leow is never one to turn down a fight, Smith added: "We never had a goal to win a world title or anything like that – it's hard to have that goal when no one from Singapore has gotten close to it and that's part of what I want to change."

"I want people to see, whether she wins or loses, that if people live it, breathe it, and commit themselves, it may or may not work out."

"But without doing that, you've got no chance."

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