

Regilio Tuur's 'Best Jab Ever!'

By Jan Luitzen

Regilio Tuur (left) fights American boxer Kelcie Banks during the Olympic Games in Seoul, 18th September 1988.

Collection ANP/Paul Stolk.



Regilio Tuur: "He threw a jab at me, I slipped, and then I knew: this is it, the jab you have trained for all this time."

In 1988, 21-year-old Regilio Tuur emerges as the darling of the Olympic boxing crowd by knocking down American world champion Kelcie Banks in record time. A right-hand swing, a half jab and a punch. Banks collapses and hits his head hard against the floor. Bam, knock out.

Angelo Dundee, ex-trainer of boxing greats such as Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard, is highly surprised: "That Tuur, is he really from Rotterdam, Holland? Great!"¹ The world press, too, wants to see

the surprising outsider with the fist of dynamite. An American reporter asks:

"Regilio Tuur, that was a great lucky punch, wasn't it?" Who would dare come up with a Muhammad Ali-like one-liner? Tuur does just that: "Sir, you know what the word luck means? Luck is when preparation meets opportunity."²

So: no lucky punch. Really not?³

Seoul, Olympic Games, 18th September 1988, boxing, first round, featherweight. Within two minutes of boxing, reigning world champion Kelcie Banks is asleep on the canvas, his head a little bit to the side, completely knocked out by Regilio Tuur's devastating

Special thanks to Ed van Eeden and Regilio Tuur.

blow. Regilio is still relatively unknown internationally, and his biggest success thus far has been a third-place finish at the European Championships in Turin in 1987.⁴

Instead of counting to ten, the referee kneels beside the American to take out his mouth guard. As the ringside physician is being motioned, a vague smile is covering Banks' face, as if the completely dizzy boxer realizes that he may daydream away and, luckily, does not have to fight any longer.

It scares Tuur that Banks stays down for so long and he hopes that Banks is not seriously hurt. Please let him get up, he prays in silence.⁵ It seems like an eternity before smelling salts bring Banks to, and he is led to his corner. In reality he has been out for about 90 seconds.

Moments later, Regilio Tuur is pronounced the winner, without Banks, in the middle of the ring, and he joins the final 32.

Afterwards, an American reporter wants to know whether it was a lucky punch, allowing Tuur to punch him verbally – albeit wrapped in a velvet glove: “Luck is when preparation meets opportunity. In that sense of the word I'm a lucky guy. And I hope to be that lucky the rest of my life!”⁶ It reads like his own interpretation of quotes he read shortly before, in *Think and Grow Rich*, one of the first motivational and self-help books, published in 1937, during the Depression.⁷ It was Tuur's Bible in 1988. The next day's headline in the papers: “We like this lucky guy”.

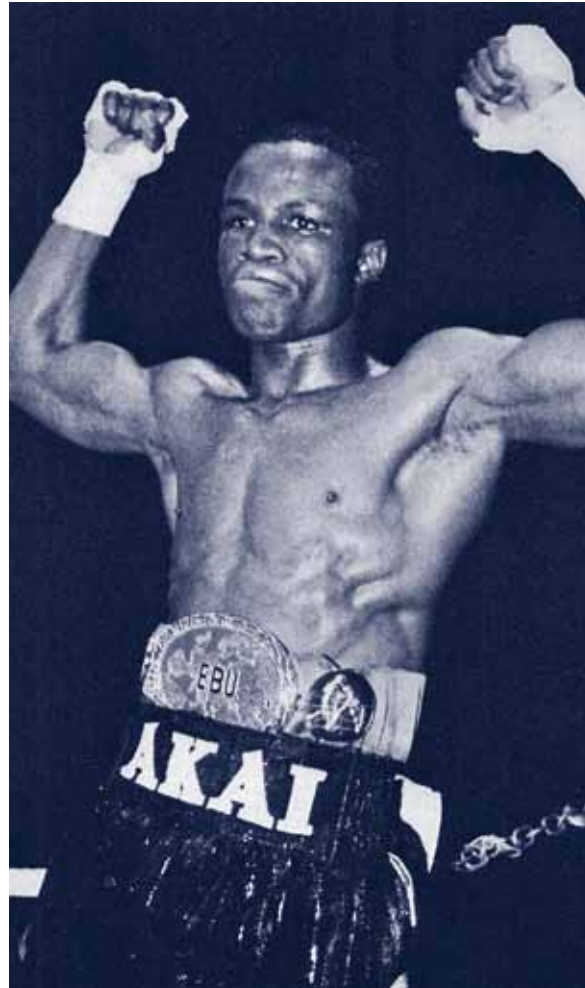
Another reporter asks why Tuur wants to go to America and leave Jan Schildkamp's boxing school in Hoogvliet, where he has trained for the past seven years. He responds that he wants to fight in Madison Square Garden, because that is where all the greats have competed, and that he wants to prepare in Gleason's Gym, since that is the best boxing school in the world. Both are in New York, so that's why Tuur wants to go there.

In *Het Vrije Volk*, Edwin Winkels quotes former trainer Angelo Dundee, who is at the Games as a technician for abc television. The 'éminence grise' loves the brilliant blow that 'splendid boxer' Tuur dealt, but he is also looking for an explanation why the American bounty hunter lost: “Perhaps Banks was not 100% motivated. They have dragged him through the entire country lately. He now trains in Houston, Texas, but he should have stayed put in Chicago. Nevertheless, I have never seen him get so down.”⁸

Because Banks was unconscious in the ring for so long, American team physician James Puffer thinks it judicious to transport Banks to the hospital for some neurological testing. They find that the knock-out blow, in combination with the heavy fall to the canvas, has resulted in a severe concussion for Banks. A few days later, just to be sure, they administer an EEG.⁹ Soon, thereafter, he resumes his boxing career.¹⁰

Bafflement, Incomprehension, and especially admiration, mark the Olympic Village the next few days after Tuur's dramatic win by knock-out. In the Dutch section, *Giely* or *Tuurtje* could do no wrong. Everyone congratulated the small, ever-smiling boxer on his 'impossible' victory. To put it more strongly: “I was received with a standing ovation.”¹¹

Ten days later, Tuur lost, deservedly so, to Romanian boxer Daniel Dumitrescu, in the quarterfinals of the



Regilio Tuur, boxing champion.

Photo: Regilio Tuur and Ed Van Eeden. *Regilio. Life, Part One. Waar de Regen Koud Is*, L.J. Veen, Amsterdam/Antwerpen 2005, p. 192M.

featherweights, after having beaten Kenyan John Wanjau and Englishman David Anderson.

“That guy had incredibly long arms, which he used really well. He had good combinatory punches, to which I had no response. Dumitrescu was simply stronger. As a good sport, I applauded him after the match,” is how the 'dark whirlwind from Hoogvliet' accepted his defeat.¹²

That fourth match was simply too much for Tuur. *De Telegraaf* concurred: “Brave Regilio Tuur (...) did not stand a chance against Daniel Dumitrescu of Romania. Tuur lost his match 5-0 and thus did not qualify for the match for the bronze.”¹³

It didn't matter at all. Tuur had established his reputation with his impressive win over Banks.

Southpaw

Months before, Regilio Tuur came off a difficult qualification process with the Dutch Olympic Committee and started preparing for the Games by thoroughly studying his possible opponents. He especially analyzed the styles of the projected candidates for a medal. Tuur: "My physical training was complemented by days of watching video tapes. At the time I was ranked 8th in the world, and all my competitors from the top ten would be at the Olympics. Well, not the Cubans, who boycotted Seoul."¹⁴

Of course Tuur determined who was his most dangerous opponent and how to face him in the ring. Kelcie Banks was the world's number one, named 'Amateur Boxer of the Year' after beating the much-feared Cuban boxer, Cabran Jesús Sollet, for the world title. In the US, Banks' versatility earned him the nickname 'Mister Mix.' Tuur knew that Banks was tall and strong, with a right-foot-forward stance: the right foot forward and a strong left hand in the back. His strength would not be coming from the side right-handed Tuur was used to; this also meant he should expect 'southpaw' (right-foot-forward standing boxer) Banks' blind spot on the other side and he would not, or barely, see punches coming from the left. Due to his youthful inexperience, Tuur had never been in a long match against a southpaw, but even against that type of boxer, Tuur's adage was: he who remains standing will go down.

Everybody was laughing him in his face: Won't Tuur only get to face Banks in the final if he gets that far?, but Tuur began to focus his training on Banks. Running in the mornings, sharpening his techniques in the afternoons, and sparring in the evenings. Tuur: "The final few weeks of my training camp, I sparred only with Jos and Stan Van Den Driessse. This allowed me to practice against fast, tall opponents who were boxing just like Banks. Stan was a former professional and a southpaw. Jos was willing to switch to right-foot-forward stance for my training purposes, which made it almost impossible to hit him."¹⁵

Strategic details were of the essence during that phase of his preparations. "I noticed fairly quickly that I would never be able to punch Banks with my straight right hand. He was just too tall and experienced for that. Since he also had a good jab¹⁶, my chances would lie in my counter hook. Thus far I had scored most of my knock-outs with my straight right hand, but my right hook was my best punch. For that I would have to get really close up to him, which was risky. During those weeks, I practiced the combination to prepare the right hook – jab, slip¹⁷, slip, bam – five hundred, if not a thousand times. I knew it by heart."¹⁸

After a few days acclimatizing and training in Seoul, said Gyula Bodis, the somewhat eccentric supervisor of the Dutch Olympic boxers Tuur and Arnold Vanderlyde,

Regilio had to start off against Kelcie Herron Banks in the first round. Tuur was not happy, and his first reaction was: "Trained like crazy for an entire year, but it was all for naught: I have to face the world champion in the first round."¹⁹

But he immediately corrected himself: "I accept no excuses, not even from myself. Setbacks are there to be turned into positive steps. If you lose, you have failed somewhere." So he flipped his thinking 180 degrees and upped his game by accepting that the draw sucked for him, but also for Banks. He was not going to go home just like that – he would put up a fight.²⁰

The chance of Tuur winning was considered small, very small. Bookies had him at 10 to 1, favoring Banks, of course. Tuur had to hear this all the time, also from several Dutch boxing officials. His grumpy response: "Screw losing. I haven't even been in the ring yet!" Days before the match against Banks, the Dutch Olympic Committee even went one step further in undermining Tuur's self-confidence by bringing him a ticket to fly back home the day after. Mad as hell, Tuur ripped up the ticket, determined to shame the doubters.²¹

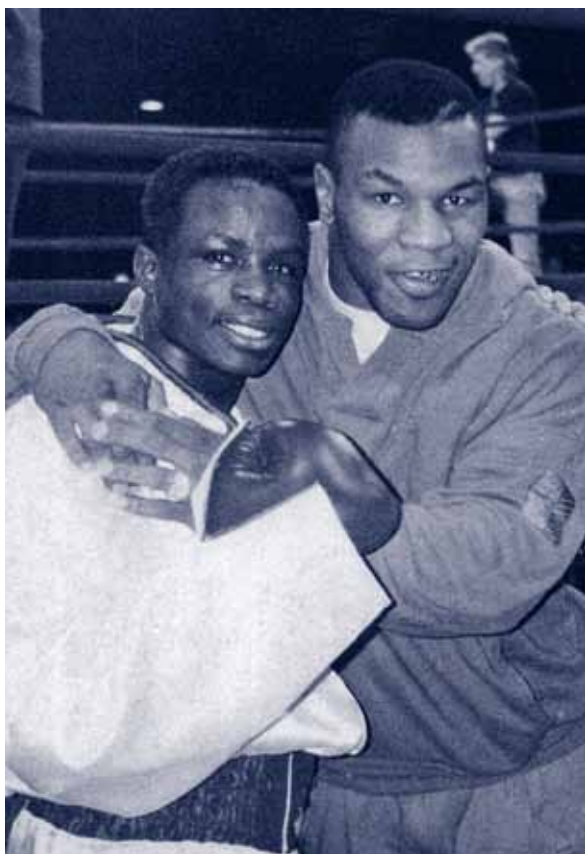
But the Dutch contingency also had two men who displayed an unshaken confidence in Tuur: fellow boxer Arnold Vanderlyde, in whom Suriname-native Tuur had found an experienced friend who helped him find his way in the boxing world, and Hungarian Gyula Bodis. The latter claimed that, apart from László Papp, his compatriot with three Olympic gold medals, he had seldom met anyone hitting so accurately. Bodis: "This is unprecedented. But ... he is not there yet. Bam-bam-boom, series, variation, still need improvement."²² And right before the match against Banks, Vanderlyde said to Tuur: "You can – You must – You will win."²³ The small boxer from Rotterdam got an incredible kick out of this pep talk.

Tuur knew that his match against Banks would be the perfect occasion to put into practice what Bodis had taught him during his preparation: "Box more offensively, instead of walking backwards in the ring. Bodis (...) showed how to with a series of feints and a right-hand hook – luckily, for the bystanders, in the air".²⁴

Banks's arrogance

The boxers had to be inside the Olympic building a few hours before the match. Tuur thought that he was given extremely thin bandages. "You could see your knuckles through these bandages – took a half hour to wrap my hands. The gloves we got were Asian, very thin too, an advantage for knock-outers. An official sealed them, so that we couldn't take them off unnoticed."²⁵

Then there was still enough time for warm-up exercises. "I remember noticing that Mike Tyson – who



Regilio Tuur (left) after one of his fights, with Mike Tyson.

Photo: Regilio Tuur and Ed Van Eeden, *Regilio. Life, Part One. Waar de Regen Koud Is*, L.J. Veen, Amsterdam/Antwerpen 2005, p. 96l.

in turn learned it from his idol, Jack Dempsey – always entered the ring sweating. This means you are warmed up and ready to go. That was one of the prerequisites for Tyson's famous first-round one-punch knock-outs. While I was doing my warm-up exercises, I noticed Banks wasn't doing anything. Experienced boxers tend to work with a cold start. They want to first work up a sweat during the game itself. But he really went a bit far: until ten minutes before the match started he had done just a few stretches and some fake punches, and then he just sat on a small chair talking to some journalist."²⁶ So Banks would enter the ring cold, which meant his body would be able to absorb less. Tuur had to hit him hard in the first round.

Because of the large number of participants, the 1988 Olympic tournament was held in two rings, both well visible for the audience. In the one ring a bell indicated the end of each round, whereas in the other it was a gong. Preceding the Tuur-Banks match, there was a match in which a Korean boxer had not paid attention and could not tell the difference. At the sound of the gong – a typically Asian sound, easily recognizable for the Korean participant – he lowered his hands, assuming that his match's round had ended. Unfortunately for him, the gong sounded for the other match, and his more alert opponent gave him an enormous blow to the side of his head, landing him on the canvas. The match was over right then and there, but the Asian boxer did not accept this: furious,

he protested by sitting in the middle of the ring, and it took a while before the organisation could carry off the obstinate Korean boxer.

As a result, Banks and Tuur had to wait even longer before their match to begin. Tuur kept warming up, to keep his nerves in check. Right before the match, Banks took a stroll between the locker rooms and, occasionally, he glanced at Regilio, who was furiously hitting a punching ball. Banks seemed both apathetic and complacent. Tuur: "I was loosening my muscles really well, but he wasn't doing anything. At some point, he gave me a look that said 'why get so worked up?' It irritated me. That this guy didn't know me, okay, but why act like this? Maybe that motivated me some more."²⁷

The impression of Banks' arrogance was corroborated by Arnold Vanderlyde, who had told Regilio during their preparation that Banks was a bit 'cocky.' After landing some blows and thus feeling safe, he would drop his hands, and therefore his defense, play Mr. Nice Guy and 'toy' with his opponent.²⁸

On his way to the ring, Tuur was given a spontaneous ovation by Dutch fellow athletes, with accompanying supporters yelling his name. The enthusiasm in the stands moved Tuur, but when he and Banks climbed into the ring, the sizable American delegation began shouting their support for Banks, which seemed to dwarf the encouragements from the Dutch.

Once in the ring, Banks was even taller than Tuur thought. The skinny and muscular American was very slowly taking off his robe, while Tuur was thinking: He is cold. All I have to do is hit him as hard as I can before he has warmed up. My right-hand jab is deadly, and he doesn't know it.²⁹

Yet, Tuur had quite a scare following the first gong sound, when he could not come close to Banks in the first half minute, not to mention getting past his defense. "Banks was a bit of a surprise. I had heard that he was a cautious fighter, but from the start he was attacking me like a madman. The first ten seconds I was having a rough time; in the next ten I got going."³⁰

All or Nothing

Regilio Tuur is best placed to tell the story of what happened at the decisive moment, one minute and 50 seconds into the match: "When I got him in the corner, and he wiggled himself deftly out again, I realized: this is not going to work. So I had to attack him in the middle of the ring, where his wider wingspan would serve him most. (...) As inconspicuously as possible, I let him punch me a few times with his jab. And sure enough, it was like a movie: after four blows, he lowered his hands a bit, and his right hand slowly left his chin exposed. (...) I could hear his trainer shout: 'Pick up the hands!'



But Banks wasn't listening because he thought he was winning. He threw a jab at me, I slipped, slipped, and then I knew: this is it, the jab you have trained for all this time. I stepped closer to him, almost touching his front toe, and he was therefore within my reach. (...) I slipped once more and was perfectly in position. I saw him make the classic mistake of following his own punch, and I threw him a razor-sharp right-hand hook. All my shoulder muscles were taut, I put everything in that jab, all or nothing! On the video it all went so fast, but I knew when I hit him: he is going down; it is over! It was my best jab ever, and it made me an instant celebrity. My right-hand hook exploded on his chin, and he fell forward, his arms across his chest. The video shows how his shoulder muscles are shaking – that's how hard I hit him."³¹

Regilio Tuur made a triumphant gesture with his fist, walked to the neutral corner, crossed his chest and could hear the Dutch in the stands erupt in loud cheering. They were jumping on top of their seats, ecstatically waving the Dutch flag and chanting: Tuur! Tuur! Tuur! This is the kind of Orange-pride enthusiasm that prompted journalist Ben de Graaf – no doubt also referring to the European Football Championship, won by The Netherlands, earlier that year – to write:

"Nowadays, supporters of our national teams think they have to manifest themselves as much as possible everywhere. When the American fighter was knocked unconscious, in spite of his protective headgear, the Dutch contingency shouted: Oh, aren't those Yankees quiet! If Banks had died on the spot, they would have enjoyed the moment even more."³²

The Americans around the ring, jaws dropped, were deeply shocked by the knock-out, as were doubtlessly the millions of Americans at home watching TV, witnessing the downfall of their favorite, one of America's prime candidates for a gold medal in Seoul.

An American reporter asked: "What the f... happened?"³³ ■

- 1 *Het Vrije Volk*, 19th September 1988, p. 11.
- 2 Regilio Tuur and Ed Van Eeden, *Regilio. Life, Part One. Waar de Regen Koud Is*, L.J. Veen, Amsterdam/Antwerpen 2005, p. 60.
- 3 An earlier version of this story in Dutch appeared in: Ad van Liempt and Jan Luitzen (eds.), *Achilles 06. Sportverhalen van Toen en Nu*, L.J. Veen, Amsterdam 2009, pp. 122–131.
- 4 For a video of the match, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xz83K6HJDOE>.
- 5 To write the book *Regilio. Life, Part One*, ghostwriter Ed Van Eeden spent more than 250 hours with Regilio. During those recorded conversations, Van Eeden reported, Tuur regularly burst out crying.
- 6 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, p. 60.
- 7 Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich*, The Ralston Society, Meriden, CT 1937. In it, Hill says, on p. 97: 'Millions of people go through life hoping for favourable "breaks." Perhaps a favourable break can get one an opportunity, but the safest plan is not to depend upon luck. It was a favourable "break," which gave me the biggest opportunity of my life – but – it took twenty-five years of determined effort before that opportunity became an asset.' The quote 'luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity' is also ascribed to Lucius Annaeus Seneca (Seneca the Younger), though this is disputed. For example, see: https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Seneca_the_Younger.
- 8 *Het Vrije Volk*, 19th September 1988, p. 11.
- 9 Electroencephalography = research into the brain function by registering the brain's responses to different stimuli.
- 10 *Het Vrije Volk*, 19th September 1988, p. 11, *Bangor Daily News*, September 19, p. 21.
- 11 *Het Vrije Volk*, 23rd September 1988, p. 11.
- 12 *Het Parool*, 28th September 1988.
- 13 *De Telegraaf*, 29th September 1988, p. 1.
- 14 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, p. 53–54.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 16 A 'jab' is a punch with the left fist.
- 17 When a boxer 'slips,' he uses a quick turn to put his shoulder before his opponent's punch, so that he can get quickly past it and retake the initiative.
- 18 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, pp. 54–55.
- 19 *Het Vrije Volk*, 19th September 1988, p. 11.
- 20 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, p. 56.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.
- 22 *Sport International* 8, no. 10, p. 35.
- 23 *Trouw*, 19th September 1988.
- 24 *De Volkskrant*, 19th September 1988.
- 25 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, p. 57–58.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Trouw*, 19th September.
- 28 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, p. 59.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 30 *Het Vrije Volk*, 19th September 1988, p. 11.
- 31 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, p. 59.
- 32 *De Volkskrant*, 19th September 1988.
- 33 Tuur and Van Eeden, *Regilio*, p. 59.