Written by Rick Folstad
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Junior-welterweight Mickey Ward doesn't own any big-time world title belts. He doesn't live in a 40-room mansion, own a fleet of Jaguars or get invited to all the best parties. He's never guest-starred on Frasier or stood on the middle rope and screamed to the world that he was the greatest.

Because he knows he's not.

He doesn't have blinding speed, quieting power or Sugar Ray moves. He's just an ordinary guy working a blue-collar job in a blue-collar life, a part-time fighter who sometimes works in the down-and-dirty business of the fight game.

Mickey's the guy who flips you the keys to his 1987 Ford pickup when your car breaks down and you've got the date of a lifetime. He's the guy you have a beer with when you're hot and tired and you've put in a long, hard, eight hours and, damn, you want to stop for a cold one.

Mickey Ward is the friend you look for when you're out-numbered four-to-one and there's a gorilla blocking the way out.

You won't confuse him with the great fighters of our time. He's not one of them. He's just a tough guy with a heart the size of North Dakota, a fighter brought up with the simple understanding that losing isn't so bad as long as they have to carry you out of the ring.

He fights Arturo Gatti on Nov. 23 in Atlantic City on HBO in one of those rematches you can't wait to see. Their first fight back in May lived up to all expectations, than went a little beyond them. It was the fight of the year and close to being the fight of a lifetime. It was more barroom brawl than sweet science, more give and take than slip and move.

Ward won, but only by a majority decision. That's why you have rematches. That's also why you don 't care about records or title belts. In fights like this, they're meaningless. "I'll be ready,'' Ward said by phone earlier this week.. "I want to start out fast and fight hard and tough. I'm going to fight my ass off. They're going to have to drag me out by my feet.'' Only if he loses.

Still, it takes two to make a great fight and that tells you a little bit about Gatti, another guy who doesn't worry too much if his clothes don't match his shoes. "Arturo is the kind of guy I would hang around with,'' Ward

said. “He’s a little crazy, like I am. We’re the same type of people.’’

Yeah, both are prone to cutting and profuse bleeding. If Gatti grins too hard he needs a dozen stitches.

But like Ward, he’s tougher than fourth-year physics and that makes for good drama. He doesn’t quit in the ring, he just needs an occasional blood transfusion between rounds. Ward is the same way. He doesn’t lose fights as much as he occasionally runs out of time.

When he’s finally done fighting - and he says he’ll fight one or two more fights at the most - Ward, 37, plans to go back to his regular job. “I’ll still be doing construction work,’’ he said. “I’ll be back on the asphalt paver.’’

You wouldn’t expect anything less