

## VARGAS AND HIS CONFUSION

Written by Jose Torres

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The most recent news about top contender Fernando Vargas taking steroids before his last title match against Oscar De La Hoya, was not surprising to me. A youngster so obsessed with the power of the muscle and "machismo" in boxing may not hesitate to try anything in order to enhance his beliefs. In fact, my choice of Oscar to win was provoked precisely by "the ferocious" continuous statements suggesting that physical strength was the most important ingredient in ring victories. He repeatedly appeared to ignore the fact that muscle and strength will never defeat character and intelligence in boxing contests, particularly in a championship match.

But not to Fernando, who spent his last days before his match with Oscar accusing his compatriot of embarrassing his Mexican roots by running in the ring and refusing to face his rivals like a true Mexican who walks in punching and "doesn't mind getting hit in return."

"He didn't fight like a true Mexican against Trinidad," proclaimed Vargas, before he faced Oscar last September 14th at the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas. "He fought like an American. He has an American style. He hates to fight face to face... man to man."

The fact that both boxers were born in California from Mexican parents was not the question. The issue was, apparently, that Oscar allowed himself to totally forget his roots by using his brains instead of his physique to win fights.

It was awkward for me to hear a young man with so much boxing ability say those things so sincerely. He truly believed that getting into a ring possessing heavy artillery is all a boxer needs to win the war. No, Sir, the trick is its application. Having a heavy punch means nothing if you don't know when and where to apply it -timing and accuracy.

In any event, once I was convinced that Vargas was not kidding, I decided he didn't have a chance with De La Hoya. I even predicted he could wind up unconscious due to the fact that when one has a sure plan to win in his mind and all of a sudden it fails to work, time and again, during the course of the fight, the disappointment and discouragement could be so strong as to confuse him to the point of forcing him to give up.

Don't get me wrong. Vargas is no dummy. No fighter with a record of great timing and accuracy by knocking out 90 percent of his opposition can be considered brainless. But I have no doubt in my mind that Vargas really believes the best assets in a champion's arsenal are strength, muscle and machismo. As such, Vargas concentrates his effort in developing his multiple muscles around his body, instead of the one upstairs -his brain! Although I do believe that when he's able to mix physical power with instinct he becomes one of the most dangerous boxers in the business.

During his fight with Oscar, I noticed that Vargas was obviously superseding his instincts with brute force. It was a conscious decision determined by his pre-fight genuine anger. The cold,

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impersonal, objective conduct expected of champions...well, Vargas didn't have it that night. His total confidence in his physical mechanism ruled him all the way throughout the making and conclusion of this match. He didn't allow a place for his natural forces to act and react. He was constantly playing the macho-man, insisting that at the end he would exit triumphantly as planned by himself.

Paradoxically, the fight was never one-sided. It was a competitive match that anyone who knew boxing could not predict with complete assuredness by the sixth or seventh rounds, who would emerge the winner. In fact, when De La Hoya finally knocked Vargas out in the 11th round, two of the three judges had Oscar winning by two points; one had Vargas by three.

One could argue that if Vargas went up the ring with his system influenced by steroids, he was undoubtedly damaged. Consequently, he was at a disadvantage during the course of the fight. Anything that interferes with the use of one's psychological and emotional weapons in boxing competition ruins for sure one's possibility of victory.