

Joel Casamayor Takes the Road Less Traveled

Written by Joey Knish

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David Santos, Jong-Kwon Baek, Roberto Garcia, Acelino Freitas, Nate Campbell, Diego Corrales (twice), Daniel Seda . . . and now Jose Luis Castillo.

Those names are among the fighters Cuban Joel Casamayor has challenged just in the past five years as he heads towards a WBC lightweight title bout with champion Jose Luis Castillo. Taking on rough waters is nothing new to Casamayor, who left his family behind when he defected Cuba in order to become a professional prizefighter.

After capturing a 1992 Olympic Gold Medal in the bantamweight division, the native of Guantanamo snuck across the border from Mexico where he had been training with the Cuban Olympic Team in 1996. Since that time Casamayor has been taking on the best of the best and giving as good as he gets.

After a tough and controversial defeat to Acelino Freitas in 2002, Casamayor stopped Juan Arias (33-2-1 at the time), won by TKO 5 over Yoni Vargas (then 23-3-0), shutout Nate Campbell (23-0-0 entering the bout) and then stopped powerful 37-1-0 Diego Corrales by TKO at the end of the sixth.

'El Cepillo' - as he is known - then dropped a split decision to Diego Corrales in their rematch and, rather than take an easier bout on the comeback, went right back at things in challenging 20-0-1 Daniel Seda. After handing Seda the first loss of his career Casamayor is once again heading straight to the toughest fight he can find. Enter WBC lightweight champion Jose Luis Castillo.

While Castillo represents yet another title shot for Casamayor, he also represents a major challenge, again. Castillo is a big lightweight with an even a bigger punch. In non-title fights between defenses, the Mexican has seen his body grow up to a fighting weight of 147 pounds. He is a big guy who manages to squeeze himself into the 135-pound division and put back on pounds before fight night. Oh, and he hits like a mule.

In Castillo's first 37 wins, 35 came by knockout and the two that didn't only lasted six rounds. Facing a big guy with a big punch is nothing new for Casamayor, as he held his own with the tall, heavy-handed Diego Corrales on two occasions. There seems to be no such thing as an easy way for Casamayor, and that is by choice.

Big names equal big fights and big fights mean bigger money for Casamayor. And at this stage in his career that may be a top priority. At 33 years of age the punch card on his boxing time clock may be running out fast and while another loss would only be the third of his professional career it would also be the second defeat of this year.

From the day he landed on US soil and found himself in a contractual dispute between Bob Arum and Dino Duva, it has been one challenge after another for Casamayor and most of it has

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been his own doing and a lot of it has been by choice. Win, lose or draw in December against Jose Luis Castillo, we can be sure we will see the best that Jose Casamayor has to offer on that day.

The path of least resistance has never paved the way for Casamayor and in taking on Castillo in Las Vegas he faces a major roadblock. Again.