For many people, home is where the heart is. It is also looked upon as the safest place to settle when the going gets rough. For others, it is too familiar a place where too many bad memories exist. Rather than stick around and face your problems on a daily basis, they leave town in search of a new start.

The latter can be said for still promising heavyweight contender Dominick Guinn, and even more so for undefeated featherweight Ricardo “Rocky” Juarez. Following a loss (Guinn) and a string of less-than-satisfying distance wins (Juarez), the two leave their respective hometowns and share the bill on an ESPN-televised card from Atlantic City, New Jersey (Friday December 3, 9:30PM ET/6:30PM PT). Both are looking forward to the change of scenery.

“I needed to get away from Houston and try something a bit new,” Juarez (21-0, 14KO) told reporters during a conference call last week while preparing for his fight with former featherweight titlist Guty Espadas. “I trained in San Antonio for about a month… I went away for this fight to get away from the distractions back home and to get my mind totally on training and preparing correctly.”

If his past few fights are any indication, then it sounds like a sound plan indeed. His last fight – a 12-round decision over 1996 Olympian Zahir Raheem – saw Rocky lose more rounds than he won for the first time in his career, yet still managed to walk away with the W when all was said and done. Referee Robert Gonzalez wound up deducting three points from Raheem for excessive holding. The deductions – coupled with a knockdown that Rocky scored in the fourth round – proved to be the difference between a win and a split decision draw.

Many in the boxing community insisted that both the scoring and Gonzalez’ rulings were the product of home cooking, which Juarez has grown tired of hearing.

“I’ve already looked past that fight. It was a controversial fight, and people are saying that the referee was on my side, but it’s getting old already. He never caught me with any punches and never hurt me. I won the fight, and deserved to win it. It’s time to move on.”

Guinn (25-1,18KO) is also looking to move on. Unlike Juarez, there is no controversial win or an undefeated record that can come from his last significant bout. No, he has long accepted the fact that Monte Barrett was well deserving of the ten round decision this past March in Little Rock, about an hour or so from his hometown of Hot Springs, Arkansas.

“Monte fought a great fight, and I didn’t,” was the initial reaction after the fight from Guinn, always the class act regardless of result. “I didn’t let my hands go enough in the fight, and that was ultimately the difference. It had nothing to do with anything physical, or with my trainers. I didn’t do my job.”

Not much has changed in his view of the fight nine months later. The only extra wrinkle came

from his co-trainer Ronnie Shield, who offered his take on the fight that night.

“I thought there was a lot of pressure on him fighting in Little Rock. He was trying to please everyone and all of a sudden, when you are trying to please everyone instead of trying to win the fight, you get away from the plan.”

The take is a reasonable one, as Guinn had never looked that lethargic before or since, though “since” only comprises of a first round knockout over battle-tested Phil Jackson. Friday night, he challenges Serguei Lyakhovich (21-1, 14KO) in what is considered to be his first test since the lone loss of his career. Even though the test is about 900 miles away from home, he still likes the surroundings all the same.

“I feel like AC is my second home,” comments Guinn on fighting in Atlantic City for the third time in eighteen months. “After the (Michael) Grant fight, I told Kathy Duva that I like it there and I want to fight for my first championship there.”

For Juarez, it will be his first fight in Atlantic City, and in fact his first fight outside of Houston since the summer of 2003. That fight was against David Murillo, a twenty-six second one-punch KO that many experts had slated as the year’s best knockout. Fittingly enough, it was the last knockout he has scored, as his last three have not only gone the distance, but also failed to impress. Rocky is hoping that the change of scenery changes all of that, though people shouldn’t automatically expect a knockout every time he fights.

“I changed my style a lot. I’ve been boxing a lot more now. You get used to knocking guys out with one punch, but now we are practicing on letting my punches go and not just go for the one punch.”

Facing a former champion in Espadas (38-6, 24KO), Juarez expects another tough fight while waiting for his mandatory title shot in 2005.

“I’ve been ready for a title shot, but I like to fight and I’ve liked the tough fights that I have been in. They have prepared me well. They’ve been tough and now I’m one fight away from fighting for a world title. Espadas has known for two months (about this fight), and I’m sure he’s ready. He’s a veteran and it will be another tough fight.”

While Guinn is in an equally tough fight on paper, he doesn’t plan to allow matters to get too tough once the bell sounds.

“I’m going to go in there and prove that I am the top heavyweight prospect, like I was before the Barrett fight. I want to come out and take control of the fight, let my hands go more. If I fight the way I train, nobody in the division can beat me.”

Considering the state of today’s heavyweight division, he may very well be right.

“Right now, the division is rough. I need to go out there and prove that I am the best. No heavyweight can let his hands go the way I can. After I beat (Lyakhovich), 2005 is going to be

another big year for me."

Should Juarez defeat Espadas, 2005 looks to be a big year for him as well. Rocky is presently the mandatory challenger for both the WBC title (held by In Jin Chi), and the IBF title (held by Juan Manuel Marquez, who also owns the WBA belt). In fact, he could have just as easily pushed for a world title shot now, but preferred to get more experience under his belt first. Both on fight night, and during training camp.

"I was able to spar with (former two-division champ) Acelino Freitas for this fight, which has helped me tremendously. He's a very good fighter – a much bigger fighter than I am. Sparring with him gave me a lot of confidence and allowed me to see where I am in boxing today. The experience only helps my career. Now I know that I'm ready."

Both he and Guinn are ready to do it where they perform best – on the road.