

Boxer John Ruiz a Quietman ready to make noise

Written by Mike Indri

Saturday, 03 April 2004 18:00

New York, NY - Talking with a small group from the boxing media yesterday at Carmine's Restaurant in Manhattan, WBA Heavyweight Champion John Ruiz stated that he was ready to take on the division's best fighters.

"I'm not one of the biggest heavyweights, I'm not really muscular and I don't fight pretty. So I guess I don't get much respect," stated the humble and gracious two-time world champion, who added, "I know I've come up short a couple of times, but I'm training hard and I fight with heart!"

Ruiz (39-5-1 with 27 KO's) takes on Fres Oquendo (24-2, 15 KO's) which has been dubbed the "All-Latino Heavyweight Championship" as part of Don King's April 17th -- The New Era Begins -- fightcard, which will be held at boxing's greatest venue, Madison Square Garden. This bout marks the first time in boxing history that two Puerto Rican fighters have fought for the world heavyweight championship.

As Don King would say, "Only in America, and only by Don King." Although he regained his WBA title this past December with a unanimous 12 round decision victory over former world champion Hasim Rahman, Ruiz realizes that he will forever be remembered for his March 1, 2003 loss to then Light Heavyweight Champion Roy Jones Jr.

"It bothered me that I wasn't ready for Jones. Three days before the fight I was in another world. My personal life, my divorce, I'm always apologizing for not being ready and for letting down my friends and fans." Ruiz also stated, "but I learned from it, from my mistakes. With Tua (a devastating 1st round knockout loss to David Tua, March 15, 1996) I learned to be ready right from the very beginning of each fight."

Now smiling, the likeable Massachusetts native added, "with Jones I learned I need to always be physically and mentally ready, and now I am." Never too far from "my guy Johnny", Ruiz's manager, trainer, friend, father-like figure and boxing good guy, Norman "Stoney" Stone vehemently asked, "What's Johnny got to do to get respect? Three fights with Holyfield, he beats Kirk Johnson, Rahman-with the best right hand in boxing couldn't touch him. That doesn't get respect?" Stoney then added, "Johnny doesn't fight in bars, doesn't cause trouble or get arrested. It's too bad, but that's why he doesn't get his respect."

When Ruiz was asked about future opponents, Stoney, the perfect manager, answered, "We'd like to fight Tyson, if Mike is even going to fight. If not, we'll fight Joe Mesi in Buffalo!"

Stoney was now on a roll, "Wait till you see Johnny in this fight, he's ready. They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks-well, you can if you put an electric collar around his neck, and I'm the electric collar!"

When questioned about Fres Oquendo, Stoney quickly exclaimed "Let me say this, when someone comes into your house you don't clinch with him, you don't hold him. You kick his ass

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- that's what Johnny is going to do. We're going to kick his (Oquendo's) ass, and I guarantee it!"

Personally, I've always respected John Ruiz and appreciate the fact that while not the biggest, strongest or most skillful of today's heavyweights, he is the most resilient and also one of the classiest. He is willing to take on anybody and always comes to fight. When you are in a fight with John Ruiz, the current and two-time World Heavyweight Champion, you know you are in a fight - and you also know that Norman Stone is in his corner.

"The Next Era Begins" fightcard, which will be televised on HBO pay-per-view, will also include IBF Heavyweight Champion Chris Byrd (37-2, 20 KO's) taking on Andrew Golota (38-4, 31 KO's) in an intriguing championship bout.

Welterweight World Champion Jose "El Gallo" Rivera (37-3-1 with 24 KO's) puts his WBA title belt on the line against the notorious Ricardo Mayorga (25-4-1, 23 KO's). While "El Matador" Mayorga relies heavily on bullying and intimidation he may find it very difficult to affect Rivera, who traveled to Berlin last September to capture the world title against Germany's own Michael Trabant.

And undefeated WBC Cruiserweight Champion, Wayne "Big Truck" Braithwaite (20-0 with 17 KO's), will face Louis Azille (18-2-2, 15 KO's) in a title fight.

Tickets are available at the Madison Square Garden box office and all TicketMaster locations or by calling TicketMaster at (212) 307-7171, (9201) 507-8900, (631) 888-9000 or (914) 454-3380.