

Bojado and Leija An Interesting Cliche

Written by Rick Folstad
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Pull out your book of cliches. This is one of those fights that comes with a familiar script, the lines already memorized and the plot already figured out. The only thing that changes are the names.

"Jesse" James Leija (46-6-2, 19 KOs) is the cagey veteran in this case, the old-timer hoping for one last shot at the top. He's a former world champion who has been through the wars and fought some of the best fighters in the world. But to get back to the top, he first has to beat the gifted young upstart with the knockout punch and little patience.

Francisco "Panchito" Bojado (16-1, 11 KOs) is the promising young contender whose path to the next level is blocked by Leija. On a fast track to what he hopes will be a world championship, he first has to prove he can beat a guy as tough and as experienced as Leija.

The final act of the drama is scheduled for July 24 at the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City when the two junior-welterweights, headed in opposite directions, face off on HBO.

The story line sound familiar? It should. It's been played out a thousand times, or ever since the first caveman balled up his fist and took a swing at the guy standing next to him. Cliche heaven.

"I know (Leija) is a tough fighter," Bojado, 21, said on a conference call on Wednesday. "But I'm a hungry fighter coming up and I want to prove something. I believe Leija is the door and I'm the key to open it to get to the (next) level."

Polite and respectful, Bojada just turned 21 and said he's looking to gain ring experience and figures he can do that by fighting a guy like Leija. "I want to be a young veteran in this sport," he said. "Leija has only 19 knockouts in his 46 (wins), but that's how he got his experience."

Leija, who turns 38 next week, reminded everyone that he's done all this before, has been used as a test for upcoming prospects and has broken a lot of well-laid plans. See: Camacho, Hector Jr.

"I still enjoy doing it," he said when asked why he keeps fighting after 16 years as a pro. "It's a business and the money is good and I'm not getting beat up. I enjoy the sport and want to get the most out of it."

At this point in the game, Leija says he doesn't concern himself with the judges' decision anymore. He's seen too many bad calls. The most important thing to him is winning the fight in his own mind.

"I don't care if I get the decision," he said. "I just want to win the fight. That means everything to me. The fans who watch the fights know who won."

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As for fighting Bojada, Leija said he'll start watching film of the young prospect next week.

"(Against Bojada), I'll just have to do the things I've been doing for the last 16 years," said Leija, who has fought several world champions, including Oscar De La Hoya, Shane Mosley and Kostya Tszyu.

While Bojada thinks he's ready to make the step up to world class, Leija's manager, Lester Bedford, isn't so sure.

"I still can't believe they took the fight," he said. "If he beats (Leija), he'll have beaten a real good fighter."

According to my book of cliches, only time will tell.