

Oscar De La Hoya Has It

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Thursday, 16 September 2004 18:00

In Hollywood, it's called the "IT" factor. He has it, she has it. The question is, what is "IT?" The closest I can come to defining it, is that it's star power and appeal that crosses all boundaries and cultures. It's something that those who have it are born with, and it can't be learned. Mel Gibson has it, as does Julia Roberts, despite neither one of them being the best looking man or woman in Hollywood.

In boxing, the "IT" factor is huge. Jack Dempsey, Muhammad Ali, and Mike Tyson all had "IT," as did Sugar Ray Robinson and Leonard, along with Oscar De La Hoya. The persona of Muhammad Ali literally smothered Joe Frazier and George Foreman during the early to mid-seventies. In all actuality, Ali-Bugner would've outdrawn Frazier-Foreman had they been on the same night. Why? Because Ali had "IT." No doubt Frazier-Foreman is the much better fight, but Ali had that appeal which crossed over to more than boxing/sports fans. Everyone just wanted to see him.

Just as Ali overshadowed two greats in Joe Frazier and George Foreman, Mike Tyson did the same to Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis. Holyfield and Lewis are definitely regarded as greater fighters than Tyson in the eyes of history, not forgetting they both beat him convincingly when they fought. However, Holyfield and Lewis did not captivate the public like Tyson did. Holyfield and Lewis needed to be matched with another great fighter to captivate the public's interest. As opposed to Tyson, who at one time could fight anyone with a heart beat and it would draw.

Today, Oscar De La Hoya is the fighter who most has "IT." Like the before mentioned, De La Hoya could fight the likes of Oba Carr, Patrick Charpentier, or Yory "Boy" Campas, and it's an event. Simply because of Oscar De La Hoya. As of this writing, De La Hoya is two days away from the biggest fight of his career. His opponent is undisputed Middleweight Champion, Bernard Hopkins. Hopkins hasn't lost a fight since 1993, and that was a decision to Roy Jones, who is thought by many to be the best fighter of his era. On top of that, Hopkins has held the middleweight title since 1995. Match those credentials with the name Oscar De La Hoya, and you have what will most likely be the biggest grossing non-heavyweight fight in boxing history.

Here's all the proof anyone needs to convince them how big this fight is. The women in my office know about it and are talking about it. I've had many of them come up to me in the last 10 days and say, "Frank, do you think De La Hoya will win his fight next week?" Or, "Frank, how good is this guy De La Hoya is fighting?" The guy they're talking about is unbeaten in 11 years, and they don't know his name. Yet they know the name De La Hoya, and that he has a big fight coming up. I've even heard of bets being made between men and women on the fight in the office. Obviously the women took De La Hoya and the men took Hopkins. Not a single person in my office said a word to me about Lewis-Klitschko or either Jones-Tarver fights before or after those fights took place.

In the last year, De La Hoya has fought twice. In his last fight he won a 12 round unanimous

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decision over Felix Sturm to capture the WBO Middleweight title. Against Sturm, De La Hoya appeared to be in poor condition and looked lethargic and sloppy. Not to mention that many thought he actually lost to Sturm, and it was his name and proposed fight with Hopkins that influenced the judges more than his performance in the ring.

Prior to fighting Sturm, De La Hoya lost his WBA/WBC Junior Middleweight titles to Shane Mosley. In the fight with Mosley, De La Hoya started very fast, but started to slow mid way through. Mosley came on in the later rounds of the fight and even shook De La Hoya a few times. Mosley won a unanimous decision, that at least half the boxing public disagreed with. The fight was very close, regardless of who you thought won. What is not in question is the fact that Mosley hit De La Hoya harder than he was hit by De La Hoya. And De La Hoya was hurt by Mosley more than once during the fight. Something he never did to Mosley.

Heading into the Hopkins fight, it can be said De La Hoya is 0-2 in his last two fights, as easily as it can be said he is 2-0. What can be said with impunity, is in the last 24 rounds De La Hoya has fought, he was hurt and shook by both Mosley and Sturm. And in those same 24 rounds, he never hurt either of them once.

As the countdown to Hopkins-De La Hoya winds down, there is a growing sentiment towards De La Hoya. It's picking up momentum like a snowball rolling down hill. In fact, it's so overwhelming that you have to pick Hopkins if you're trying to pick an upset. I remember less than a year ago, many were saying De La Hoya would never agree to fight Hopkins. The underlying thought being he knew he probably couldn't beat him.

Only a fighter that has "IT" could sway the public the way De La Hoya has. In the last year he's had life and death with two fighters who would be overwhelming underdogs against Hopkins. But because of De La Hoya's magnetism and appeal, many boxing observers have convinced themselves that the Boxing God's will pull him through in the hopes of keeping the Boxing Universe in balance. Oscar De La Hoya definitely has "IT."

Incidentally, the fight Hopkins-De La Hoya is most often compared to is the Hagler-Leonard title fight of 1987. De La Hoya in the role of Leonard and Hopkins in the role of Hagler. In that fight, Sugar Ray Leonard shocked the boxing world and decisioned Hagler as a 4-1 underdog. Just for the record, Sugar Ray Leonard had "IT" too.

In my opinion, Leonard had even more of "IT" than De La Hoya.