Written by Robert Ecksel
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Edgar Santana is a 25-year-old, 140-pound welterweight with a 12-2 (8 KOs) record. He is trained in Gleason's Gym by Hector Roca.

Roca is best-known for training Hilary Swank for her role as the woman boxer in Clint Eastwood's new movie "Million Dollar Baby." When Roca wasn't training Hilary Swank, he was training Edgar Santana.

I want to talk about the young prospect who lives in Spanish Harlem, but first want some background on Hector Roca.

"My brother and father boxed, but I boxed only for fun, because my sport was cycling. I make two Olympics as a cyclist," Roca tells me. "So my sport is cycling. When I immigrate to America I see there's lots of opportunity in boxing, as a trainer, because the technique is tough, so that's why I'm boxing here."

Roca has seconded some major players in the sweet science.

"I have trained, so far, thirty world champions," he says. "I come from Panama. I like boxing. I like to teach. I like starting with new kids and next year we should have a couple more world champions. I worked with Renaldo Snipes, Iran Barkley, Buddy McGirt, Michael Olajide, Arturo Gatti, a lot of big names in America."

Big names in America is the name of the game, but fighters going places, fighters like Edgar Santana, don't usually have two losses early in their careers.

"Edgar is 12-2, but those two fights he's got is fighting in clubs with no preparation. You wanna fight," says Roca, "you have to come in to fight. He's a kid from the barrio, from Spanish Harlem, a tough kid from the streets, and someone comes up to him and says 'You wanna fight in two days?' and he says 'Yeah, I'm gonna fight,' and that's just the way he does it, only like for fun."

There's nothing fun about boxing. Boxing is too serious for that.

"Now he's serious," Roca says about Santana. "Now it's a career. He leaves his job. His father help him to become a boxer. He's got a lot of skills because he's a boxer with power - a lotta power puncher. Edgar has talent and heart and strength and a lot of futures in boxing. And we've been working the fighter to do the right things so that we can fight for a world title. Next year or the following year is Edgar Santana."

I ask Johnny Bos, who acts as an advisor to Team Santana, his impression of Edgar.

"Edgar still has a lot to learn. He's still in the growing stages. But he's a murderous puncher,"

Bos says. “He’s one of the biggest ticket sellers in New York. The kid is improving every fight. He’s still in the learning process. He sells a lot of tickets. And being that he can sell a lot of tickets will give him the opportunity to improve his skills, because everybody wants to use him. But I don’t care who it is he’s fighting. If they’re gonna stand in front of him, he’s going to take them out.”

Edgar Santana is training hard at Gleason’s Gym in Brooklyn. He takes a few minutes to talk about boxing and how he got started.

“I started boxing because I was always street fighting, so boxing got me off the streets,” Santana says. “I came to America I would say ‘87. I was around maybe six or seven years old. I didn’t speak no English. It was tough. Joey Torres, a champion, a Puerto Rican champion, came to my school - I think I was in the sixth grade - he came to my school to talk to the kids and everything, and ever since then the next day I went straight to the gym. That’s how I got into boxing.”

Santana didn’t start training at Gleason’s. He says he “went straight to a gym in Spanish Harlem on 112th. It’s not there no more. It used to be in a basement. Old little gym. Lotta good fighters. At first I was intimidated. I never been to a gym before. But once I started going every day and sparring and getting to know people, I got comfortable and said this is for me.”

Edgar Santana found boxing. Boxing found Edgar Santana.

“I’m a pretty complete fighter,” Santana says. “I can box. I can fight. I can punch with either hand. And I’m always in the gym, so I’m always in shape.”

So long as Santana stays in the gym and stays in shape, the sky is the limit.

“This is Edgar Santana’s year,” he says. “This is my year.”