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“From grassroots to glory” is a catchphrase Mzonke Fana has been using to motivate himself in his quest to dethrone Marco Antonio Barrera for the WBC junior lightweight world title.

Fana has been doing all the right things. He’s been training hard, he’s been consulting some of the best trainers in South Africa, getting great sparring, and he’s been receiving psychological counseling and attending a high performance center. It’s all good and well, but the big question is: Is it enough to fill the gap from grassroots to glory?

While Fana is receiving tremendous support from the entire nation and indeed from supporters from clear across the continent, the fact remains Barrera is in a different league. All the well wishes and positive thoughts are sure to help carry Fana to deliver the performance of his life, and while it pains me to say this, there is still no way that he can upset the champion.

Fana does have two things in his favor - he has greater height and he has fast hands. If for some inconceivable reason this rattles Barrera and his “game plan” works, maybe miracles do happen. “We’re going to outbox Barrera,” says trainer Nic Durandt, who will be in Fana’s corner on the big day. “We’ll work behind Fana’s left jab and use his speed to frustrate him. If we can do that for the first four or five rounds then who knows? We’ll take it from there.”

Durandt helped in the corner of Hasim Rahman, when Rahman did the unthinkable and knocked out Lennox Lewis on his trip to Africa, so he has seconded a major underdog who caused an upset before. The big difference, however, is that Lewis was fat, unfit, filled with arrogance, and basically on his way to a loss no matter who he stepped into the ring with that night. Barrera, on the other hand, is a hardworking class act, a living legend, something Lewis never was.

Recently dubbed “Fantastic” Fana to help promotions, Fana will truly need to be fantastic when he steps into the ring against Barrera, and I damn well wish he could be, even if just for that one fight of his career. I think he’ll be lucky to see the fifth round. It could even end in the first two if Barrera lands.

The saddest thing of all is that Fana does represent the state of boxing in South Africa. The sport has dwindled back to grass root levels. The plans are there for resuscitation and hopefully it’s not too late, but the infrastructure of boxing in the country is weak. Boxers don’t get the support they need to be all they can be. Fana has received tremendous help from his promoter Branco Milenkovic, but he is an exception, not the rule.

One positive is that Fana is a shining example of what can be achieved if the support is there. Here you have a boxer of limited abilities who is seemingly on the verge of being the toast of the whole country. He’s landed the dream of fighting a legend for the most credible title in the world. It doesn’t get much better than that. Just being there will be honor enough and something to talk about for the rest of his life. While I don’t see a victory happening, I do wish Fana good luck . . .

because he’s going to need it.