

Risking Proposition – Betting on Fernando Vargas

Written by Joey Knish
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Saturday night on HBO “Ferocious” Fernando Vargas makes his return to the junior middleweight ranks after two bouts at middleweight. He tests his creaky back, dented chin and new style against former champion Javier Castillejo.

Vargas has been hyper-inactive over the past two years having only faced Raymond Joval and a bevy of chiropractors since 2003. It will be five months since his bout with Joval, but one could argue that he may be fresher than his opponent this weekend. Spaniard Castillejo last did battle in the ring in June of last year when he took care of someone named Enrique Alberto Campos inside of five rounds. Campos of course has lost six consecutive fights, five of those losses by knockout, and last time out was beaten by a 3-17 fighter, but at least he lasted the scheduled four round distance. So much for Castillejo being active, let alone having a live body in the ring against him.

Most fans remember Javier Castillejo from his 2001 fight with Oscar De La Hoya as the 58-5 (39 KO) Madrid resident was brought in solely to surrender his 154-pound title to the “Golden Boy.” And he did. The bout was Oscar’s debut at junior middleweight and he took a lopsided unanimous decision, including dropping Castillejo in the twelfth round, to claim the WBC trinket. It would seem that he is being brought in again to see if Vargas can do one better than De La Hoya, but will the Spaniard play the part?

Newly crowned IBF junior middleweight champion Roman Karmazin may serve as some serious motivation to spoil the best laid plans of Fernando Vargas this weekend. Karmazin shocked the division when he defeated Kassim Ouma last month by unanimous decision to claim the 154-pound title. The 34-1-1 (21 KOs) Russian Karmazin suffered his lone defeat as a professional to none other than Javier Castillejo. There is nothing quite like watching a fighter you recently defeated go on to claim a major title to provide motivation for a comeback and another run at a belt. Castillejo is in that position now and a win against a major “brand name” like “Ferocious” Fernando Vargas could shoot the former champion straight to the top of the heap.

Taking a financial position in Fernando Vargas, however, is not for the feint of heart. Without a doubt you get a great effort from the Oxnard, California resident every time out, but his chin can cause your heart to skip a beat and your bank account to lose a few “0”s. His two defeats to the cream of the crop – De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad – have come via knockout, and the light hitting Wilfredo Rivera also dropped the Mexican-American.

If you can get past the possibility that Vargas can get caught – and Castillejo is a decent puncher – the wagering opportunities are worth considering. Surely Vargas is the better technical boxer and looks to be in a situation where he can use his new box-and-move style to pick apart his 37-year old opponent and work on getting a late stoppage victory. The current betting line requires bettors to risk \$350 to profit \$100 if Vargas wins, while backers of Castillejo can risk \$100 to return a profit of \$300 should he emerge victorious on Saturday night. The total

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rounds for the junior middle clash is set at 9.5 with the Over being favored in the neighborhood of -300 and +260 coming back for bettors on the Under. The 9.5 rounds represents 9 completed rounds and then 1 minute 30 seconds into the tenth and final round (1:30 being half of a 3:00 round).

I think there is some value to be had backing the Under 9.5 rounds and winning \$260 for each \$100 risked. I say this for several reasons. First is the fact that “El Feroz” has 22 KOs among his 25 professional victories, which represents an 88% KO rate. If you take into consideration that his two losses have also been over before the final bell, that translates to 24 of 27 fights ending early. Secondly, Castillejo has been down before, and if Vargas sticks and moves he may break his opponent down. Castillejo is a sucker for a good jab – he eats them all night long – and, when he wants to, Vargas can put his into overdrive. We saw that Vargas was a jabbing nut against Ike “Bazooka” Quartey and looks able to use that weapon to effectively set up his straight right and heavy hook. Finally, if all else fails and Fernando gets caught and his chin fails once more against the solid puncher that Castillejo is, we still cash a winning ticket if it happens sooner rather than later. Backing Vargas at -350 is simply too risky a proposition to make.

A play on the Under 9.5 +260 on Saturday night appears to be a wager worth making. While Fernando Vargas would love to make a statement with an impressive knockout win over Javier Castillejo, one can be sure that Castillejo has plans of his own, which include testing the questionable chin of the ferocious one. Either way the Under serves both parties, so here's to hoping it serves our purposes as well.

(All information is presented for entertainment purposes only.)