

Fernando Vargas Is Back

Written by Rick Folstad
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He seems older than 27, but that's what happens when you start hanging around the top of the world rankings when you're barely old enough to vote. By the time you hit 26 or 27, you're considered an old man, a wily veteran or a seasoned pro.

Or a guy on his last legs.

Maybe you remember "Ferocious" Fernando Vargas. He dabbled in the junior-middleweight division back a few eons ago, even won a couple world titles.

Brash, showy and dangerous, he strutted his way across boxing's big stage before he ran into some tough times and tougher opposition. In a span of less than two years, he lost big fights to Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya, got nailed for using steroids, and then had his back go out on him, forcing him to hobble away into an 18-month leave of absence.

He started heading back toward boxing's spotlight this spring, though the light wasn't quite as bright as it was back in the heyday. He defeated a guy named Raymond Joval this past March, but the fight didn't make too many headlines.

Now, he hopes to get back to where he used to hang out, up there among the top 154-pounders in the world, up there where the money is right and the back doesn't seem to hurt as much.

Vargas (25-2, 22 KOs), out of Oxnard, CA, fights former world champion Javier Castillejo (58-5) tonight (Saturday) on HBO at the Allstate Arena outside Chicago.

"The only person on my mind right now is Javier Castillejo," Vargas said on a conference call this week. "That's who we've got in front of us."

Castillejo may be out front, but Vargas wasn't against scooting around him.

"I would love to have the opportunity to fight (De La Hoya)," he said when asked about life after Castillejo. "I am very thankful that he may give me the chance, and if he does, I will return the same respect and grant him a rematch."

According to Vargas co-manager Rolando Arellano, De La Hoya is planning to fight twice next year, and Vargas is under consideration.

The other name that kept popping up was Ricardo Mayorga, who won the WBC junior-middleweight championship last Saturday.

But according to Arellano, neither the WBC nor Don King (who has a contract with Mayorga) would be dictating the rules if the Vargas-Mayorga fight was going to happen.

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“There’s a possibility we will fight Mayorga, but it must be made clear we won’t fight under the terms of the WBC or those terms imposed by Don King,” Arellano said. “Fernando is the pay-per-view draw.”

Arellano said that means Mayorga wouldn’t get even as much as 50 percent of the purse.

“That’s absurd,” he said. “He doesn’t bring in 50 percent of the people. He brings in 2,000 and Fernando brings in the other 12,000.”

Vargas didn’t see Mayorga win the title, but Arellano did.

“I think it’s a disgrace that (Mayorga) has the privilege – if you want to call it a privilege – to wear that green belt,” he said.

Then Winky Wright’s name was mentioned.

“He talks like I need him,” Vargas said. “I don’t need him. I would get paid more money fighting someone else than I would fighting him. He says, ‘I’m not going to give him the opportunity ...’ Who is he? He says he’s not sure he wants to give me an opportunity. I mean, is he a draw? Does anyone want to see Winky Wright?”

Vargas is back.