

Write History with Erik Morales

Written by Rick Folstad
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His birth name is Esdrick Isaac Morales Elvira, but you can call him "El Terrible." It's easier to spell, quicker to say and sounds better than Esdrick.

Mexico's Erik Morales (48-2, 34 KOs) has won world titles in three different weight classes, and now he's looking for a fourth. The lightweight division is out there begging him to give it a try, and El Terrible thinks he could.

"I've been working on my speed and punching power," Morales said through a translator on a recent conference call promoting his Sept. 10 fight (HBO) with Philadelphia's Zahir Raheem at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. "This will be my first fight at 135 pounds, and I want to give a good fight."

That's fine, but Morales was on his way to becoming a legend at featherweight and super-featherweight. That's where his three wars with Marco Antonio Barrera took place. Super-featherweight is where he beat Manny Pacquiao this past March. And that's where he'd have to beat him again.

But Morales said he just likes how he feels at 135.

"I feel better at 135," he said. "I don't have to diet and I feel stronger."

But what about Pacquiao, who is fighting Hector Velazquez on the same card at the Staples Center as a kind of teaser to what everyone figures will be a Pacquiao-Morales super-featherweight rematch sometime early next year?

"If [the fight] happens and I have to go to 130, I'm willing to go down to 130," Morales said. "But that's the only fight I would go down to 130 for."

Guess that puts a fourth fight with Barrera in dire straits.

"I'm following my own path," Morales said when asked about facing Barrera again and trying to even the score at two wins each. "I have my own plans and ideas. I know what I want to do."

Just when you figure Barrera is history, Morales reminds himself of what's important.

"If the people want to see a fourth fight, we'll give it to them," he said. "I'm willing to give what the people want. If they want it bad enough ..."

But right now, he seems to be enjoying life as a lightweight. He said his body is more resilient at 135 and he doesn't have to work as hard to get there.

Raheem could be a big test. The 1996 U.S. Olympian is 26-1 with 18 KOs.

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“He’s a difficult boxer with a lot of movement and a lot of speed,” Morales said. “He’s coming in very hungry and we have to be ready for that.”

Training in the mountains outside Mexico City, Morales said he’s watched Raheem’s fight with Rocky Juarez and he thought it was close. He said Raheem was in the fight, he just didn’t get the decision.

“He did very well,” said Morales, who celebrated his 29th birthday on the day of the conference call.

As for winning a fourth title, Morales said the opportunity is there and he wants to take advantage of it.

“Not many people get a chance to write history,” Morales said, “and I’d love to do it.”