

Robert Guerrero: Featherweight Division's Galloping Ghost

Written by Robert Mladinich
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Although it is just days away from his September 16 bout at the Palace Casino in Leemore, California, red-hot featherweight contender Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero's management team, which consists of promoter Dan Goossen and manager Shelly Finkel, have been unable to secure an opponent.

While many boxers would become discombobulated with so many what-ifs lurking less than a week before a fight, the long-limbed, well-muscled, always-smiling Guerrero, who hails from Gilroy, California, the nation's garlic capital, is nonplussed. "It doesn't matter to me who I fight," said the 23-year-old Guerrero, 15-0-1 (8 KOs), who earned his nickname due to the inability of opponents to hit him solidly. "I've been sparring with fast guys, sluggers, boxers and runners. I'm prepared for anything or anyone."

As unconcerned as the 5'10" Guerrero is about whom he will be fighting, he is equally unconcerned that the fight will not be televised on even a regional basis. Although it is not often his habit to do so, he can't help but look beyond his yet to be determined opponent. The way he sees it, much bigger things are just around the corner and he's worked too hard and long to see his plans scuttled on Friday.

"It really doesn't matter to me if the fight is on TV or not," said Guerrero, who will be defending the NABF title he won from Cesar Figueroa in December 2004 for the second time. "I just want to keep my skills sharp and stay busy. Once I get in the ring, I get in a zone where it doesn't matter who the opponent is or whether or not there are cameras there. I'm just totally focused on my opponent."

Guerrero credits his intense focus on several things, not the least of which are his immense belief in the Lord and his wonderful relationship with trainer John Bray. He feels that the Lord has blessed him in countless ways, including his association with Bray, a former heavyweight boxer. Bray has brought out the best in Guerrero by having him spar regularly in Los Angeles against such championship caliber fighters as Diego Corrales, Manny Pacquiao, Israel Vasquez and Latka Sim.

"Working with fighters like that is a blessing," said Guerrero, a onetime amateur standout who became, at age 16, the youngest boxer to ever qualify for the Olympic Trials. (He lost a close decision to eventual 2000 Olympian Clarence Vinson.) "You really have to be at the top of your game, even in the gym. You can learn more in a few rounds of sparring with such great fighters than you would learn in several fights."

Guerrero is currently rated number two in the WBC and highly rated in all of the other organizations. With the alphabet organizations stripping featherweight titlists with abandon for a variety of "offenses," Guerrero hopes to be fighting for a title in six to eight months.

However, first things first. If he gets past his still unknown opponent on Friday, he has a

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December 2 date on ShoBox. If also successful there, his publicist Mario Serrano says, "The floodgates will open. A star will be born. The Ghost will stamp his mark in the featherweight division."

"Robert is now universally considered the heir apparent to the featherweight crown," added Goossen for emphasis.

The deeply spiritual Guerrero wholeheartedly believes that everything happens for a reason. Since aligning himself with Finkel about one year ago, he is certain that all of his lofty dreams will come to fruition. "With Shelly in my corner, anything is possible," said Guerrero. "He's the best of the best. Having him take me under his wing is an honor."

As if joining forces with Finkel wasn't enough, Guerrero experienced another motivational factor when he became a father this past March. His wife Casey gave birth to Savannah Rose, who Guerrero says is the apple of his eye.

"Being a father has only made me hungrier," he explains. "Knowing I have a family to support makes me work even harder . . . and I've always worked hard. There are days when I want to just go home and relax, but I want to be able to send my children to college and provide a good life for them. She was born one week before my birthday, so I think of her as the best birthday present I ever received."