

Gianluca Branco: "I want Arturo Gatti"

Written by Luca De Franco
Wednesday, 19 October 2005 19:00

Gianluca Branco is one of the best Italian fighters of the last ten years. He dominated the super lightweight division on his own continent, winning the Italian and European titles. He also challenged Arturo Gatti for the vacant WBC title at the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. The two warriors clashed on January 24, 2004: after 12 hard rounds, Gatti came out on top getting a unanimous decision (116-111, 115-112 and 116-111). That ended Gianluca Branco's undefeated streak.

Today his record stands at 36 wins (19 by KO), 1 loss and 1 draw (against Viktor Baranov, in 1998). Branco is currently ranked number 3 by the WBC and number 6 by the WBO among the super lightweights. His most recent match took place in Campione d'Italia on July 22. He simply destroyed Farid El Houari, who had a decent record of 23-8, scoring a 4th round TKO.

Branco's performance excited the usually quiet crowd of Campione d'Italia, an Italian enclave in Swiss territory surrounded by amazingly beautiful mountains and a charming lake. The fight was held in the open square in front of the Casino, a practice more common in Italy than in the U.S. When the local sports-complex is not big enough, Italian promoters love to put the ring in the main square of the town. This happened in Gianluca Branco's hometown too; he is so popular in Citivitatevecchia (Central Italy) that his fights attract over 5,000 people – a *huge* number, considering that most Italian shows attract less than 2,000 fans.

Recently, Salvatore Cherchi, Branco's manager, worked out an agreement with the management of England's Junior Witter (32-1-2). Witter is scheduled to defend his European, British and Commonwealth belts on October 21 in London against Colin Lynes (26-1) at the renowned York Hall. After that, he will meet Gianluca Branco. The winner of that bout gets a shot at the WBC champ Floyd Mayweather Jr.

Branco wants to be world champion, but he also dreams of another challenge.

Gianluca, who would you like to fight?

"Arturo Gatti. I would fight him anytime, everywhere. There's no doubt in my mind that I didn't lose that fight. I hit him hard many times. After the match ended his face looked so bad that he put on sunglasses. He never hit me hard. Even when he knocked me down, during the 10th round, I wasn't in danger. As a matter of fact, I got up immediately. I'm not saying that it wasn't a real knockdown, because he hit me with a good left hook; I have no excuses for that. In the 11th round, I dominated. All the people who saw the fight agreed that the 11th round was mine, but the judges gave it to Arturo. I just don't understand some decisions."

When Floyd Mayweather Jr. defeated Gatti, were you surprised?

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"Yes, because Arturo is one of the most skilled fighters around. He fought many great champions, defeating most of them. The way he knocked out Leo Dorin was simply fantastic. I thought he could win against Mayweather, but he was outclassed. That's the most incredible thing about that battle: Mayweather hit Arturo at will. Only Gatti knows what happened to him."

Why should Arturo Gatti fight you again?

"Why shouldn't he? After all, he just signed to face Thomas Damgaard, next January 28. If he can fight the Danish, why not me? He did three battles with Micky Ward. We could make Gatti-Branco II. If I win, we could make Gatti-Branco III."

Was Gatti your toughest opponent?

"No, Allan Vester and Gabriel Mapouka were more difficult to face. I beat them both. I'm very proud of the win against Mapouka because I broke my left hand during the second round and kept on fighting. Two scorecards were in my favor: 116-113 and 115-114. The third one was 114-114. For a non-French boxer, getting a decision in France is very rare. The victory gave me the vacant European super lightweight belt. It was also useful to put me on the map because Mapouka was considered a future star. He had only two losses in his record, one against Oktay Urkal, and had been French super lightweight champion."

Your next match was against George Scott. He became famous after Angelo Dundee took him under his wing and guided him to the WBU lightweight title. What do you think of Scott?

"He was a pretty good fighter, but not a real champion. I beat him in six rounds, in Civitavecchia."

Would you fight for an alphabet title, like the WBU title?

"If somebody offers me the opportunity, my answer will be: *Let's talk about it*. Of course, we should talk about big money. My real dream would be winning the World Boxing Council title, but I respect all the organizations. I was WBU Intercontinental super lightweight champion in 1997."

What do you think of the current holders of the major titles?

"I respect them all: Floyd Mayweather (WBC), Carlos Maussa (WBA), Ricky Hatton (IBF), Miguel Cotto (WBO) are all outstanding fighters. I can say that for many super lightweights in the top ten. My division is the best in boxing."

Is there somebody you would have fought, but couldn't?

"Yes, Kostya Tszyu. We started talking about the match in early 2003, but the match never took place. That's why I wasn't active from November 2002 to January 2004. You understand? I faced Gatti after a 14 months layoff."

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Gianluca Branco

Birthplace: Civitavecchia, Italy. (This town is close to Rome.)

Division: Super Lightweight

Age: 35

Born: 1970-09-20

Stance: Orthodox

Height: 172

Manager: OPI 2000 Salvatore CHERCHI

Trainer: Franco Cherchi

Record: 36 Wins (19 KOs) 1 Loss 1 Draw