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Two fighters long removed from boxing superstardom have found comfort in one another as Fernando Vargas and Shane Mosley are set to do battle February 25 at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas. The California natives have each been looking for a big payday as they inch their way back into the limelight. And with no upcoming opponents set for Oscar De La Hoya, who happens to be the promoter of this pay per-view event, the two former champions will make do in what promises to be a very intriguing bout.

It seems like such a short time ago that “Sugar” Shane was as sweet as his infectious smile suggested and well on his way to superstardom. A June 2000 victory over “Golden Boy” De La Hoya was supposed to bring riches and fame to the quick-fisted two-division champ, but for some reason the crowds didn’t follow. Three knockout victories later, Mosley was still searching for that missing ingredient as he accepted the challenge of Vernon “The Viper” Forrest, a challenge that would forever extract the sweetness from his game.

As we know, Forrest was simply the better boxer on that night in January 2001, just as he was in the rematch six months later. Mosley used the weight as a crutch but the fact is that Forrest had the style and execution to beat him, twice. In the background there was turmoil inside Camp Mosley. Frustrations grew and fingers were pointed as missed opportunities took their toll on relationships. A move up to junior middleweight solved little as yet another victory over De La Hoya gave Mosley more world title belts (WBC, WBA and IBA) but no glamour.

When Mosley, 41-4-0 (35 KOs), met Winky Wright to determine who was the best junior middleweight, it looked like it could be a repeat of the Forrest fights. And it was. Two bouts in 2004 proved that Mosley could not beat Wright as the slick southpaw simply outclassed his opponent. Dropping back down to 147-pounds, Mosley put together two rather average performances in winning unanimous 10-round decisions over David Estrada and then Jose Luis Cruz.

It is worth noting that at one point in his career Mosley had knocked out 35 of 38 opponents, but he has not scored a knockout in over four years at higher weights. With a 3-4-0 (1 No Contest) record since 2001, the 34-year-old is in desperate need of a fresh breath of life into a now stagnant career and hopes the WBA-sanctioned junior middleweight eliminator will be just that.

If nothing else, Vargas, who turns 28 on Dec. 7, has age on his side. A world champion at the tender age of 21, the Oxnard fighter has since seen his stellar career set back by a faulty back, a steroid suspension, and two one-sided beatings. Vargas’ losses have both come against boxing’s elite, De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad, but to be the best, you have to beat the best. Victories over Wright and Ike Quartey are now distant memories, and one has to question if Vargas can be the fighter he once was. Beating Mosley would answer that doubt.

In the past four years “El Feroz” has only had five fights and hasn’t quite put it together in any

of those bouts. At 26-2 (22), he still has great marketability and has done well for himself financially both in and outside the ring. While Mosley has tried to be a public darling, Vargas has been as bad as he wants to be, and his appeal comes from the fact that most people either love him or hate him. It is rather safe to say that many fight fans are not very passionate about Mosley one way or another. But when it comes to Vargas they turn out in droves, either hoping he lays a whopping on his opponent, or that he gets his butt kicked. Either way, they come out by the masses.

Weight may be an interesting factor once the bell tolls. Vargas has fought as heavy as middleweight and has a tendency to blowup in weight between fights. Getting back down to 154 could be a problem, and the stronger fighter may be the winner of this fight. On the other hand, Mosley was a lightning quick, strong lightweight in the late-1990's, but has fought just four times at 154-pounds. To put it in perspective, in 1999 Vargas was entering the ring at 154-pounds while Mosley made the 135-pount limit.

It will be a treat for boxing fans when these two fighters lay it all on the line in an attempt to resurrect their careers. Only one will find the answers to his next career move while the loser may question a ring return altogether. If nothing else, it is an incredibly compelling bout.