Even though super middleweight Jerson Ravelo was defeated in his very first Olympic bout at the 2000 Games in Sydney, he was still good enough to be considered a blue-chip professional prospect.

After all, Ravelo, who was raised in Newark, New Jersey, but because of dual citizenship was able to represent his native Dominican Republic in Sydney, had lost a close decision to an Australian in his home country.

Having compiled a 96-15 amateur record, which included a win over Jeff Lacy, who also beat Ravelo twice, the tall and lanky but deceivingly strong Ravelo had no shortage of world-class amateur experience.

After signing with manager Gary Gittlesohn, he turned pro in January 2001 at Madison Square Garden. Within one year he was undefeated in eight fights.

In October 2002, in his 12th fight, he got primetime exposure when he squared off on Showtime's ShoBox series against once-beaten George Walton in Tampa. A few years earlier Walton had received widespread media exposure as the subject of the acclaimed 1999 documentary film "On the Ropes," which was directed by Nanette Burstein and Brett Morgen.

"Jerson was one of the better prospects from the [Olympic] class of 2000," said ShoBox commentator Steve Farhood. "He had good size and a lot of spunk. If he could have stayed healthy, he'd be right in the mix of a wide open division."

Like so many others, Farhood inadvertently spoke of Ravelo in the past tense. Because the 27-year-old Ravelo incurred several serious injuries—including two that necessitated separate hand surgeries and a bulging disc in his back, the word was that he was damaged goods.

Those feelings were exacerbated when Ravelo suffered his lone professional defeat—a ninth round TKO loss to David Lopez in Tucson in April 2004. When he fought Lopez, who was coming off a surprising knockout victory over former WBO middleweight champion Lonnie Bradley, Ravelo had been inactive due to injuries for 15 months.

"I have this reputation that I'm plagued by injuries," said Ravelo, who rebounded from the loss to Lopez with a 10-round decision victory over Mohommad Said six months later to bring his current record to 14-1 (9 KOs).

"People always ask me if I'm still fighting. I'm fighting better now than I have been in a long time. The only reason nobody's seen me is because I haven't been offered good fights. When I fought Lopez, I just wasn't with it mentally. I had back-to-back hand surgeries and my mind was everywhere but on boxing."

Ravelo is no longer managed by Gittlesohn, nor is he aligned with any promotional entity. There have been some offers, but none that he thought were worth entertaining.

Instead of fighting, over the past half-year he has spent one month each as a sparring partner in the camps of Antonio Tarver and Bernard Hopkins while they were training for Roy Jones and Jermain Taylor respectively. The experience he garnered with those elite fighters, he believes, was the equivalent of having seven or eight fights.

"My last surgery was two years ago and I've been healthy ever since," proclaimed Ravelo. "I was healthy enough to give two of the best fighters in the world a lot of good work. Bernard was so happy with my work he paid me double what we had agreed on."

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"Things were bad for a while, and I got kind of depressed," he said. "I even told [Main Events matchmaker] Carl Moretti that I would fight for free [on the November 30 show in North Bergen, New Jersey]. I just needed to get back in the game. It's been very frustrating. Not fighting is bad enough, but then having to convince everyone that I'm not injury prone makes it worse."

Ravelo was recently offered a bout with tough Philadelphia fighter Yusaf Mack, who is undefeated in 22 bouts, which includes two draws and twelve knockouts. Had the circumstance been a little different, he would have welcomed such a formidable challenge.

But he was offered the fight on short notice, which only made him believe more that the boxing establishment has written him off, even though he is still in his twenties and physically, mentally and emotionally stronger and healthier than he's ever been.

"With all of my inactivity, I wasn't ready for that fight," said the refreshingly honest Ravelo. "I made that mistake already when I fought Lopez after being inactive for a long time. I've learned a lot over the past few years.

"Some of it was a hard, but in the long run I'm a better person and I'll be a better fighter. The most important thing for people to know is that I'm healthy and I'm ready to fight. I'd love to fight eight times in the next year, just like I did when I turned pro."

Farhood, for one, would be glad to see Ravelo back in action. "One good fight and he's right back in the picture," he said. "Unfortunately, boxing has a *what have you done for me lately?* mentality and Jerson became invisible.

"That's too bad, because he was universally considered a very good prospect. Knowing what I know now, there is no reason to believe he can't regain that status."