

The Glass is Half Full for Harutyunyan

Written by Joe Rein

Thursday, 19 January 2006 19:00

Finally!

What passed for a grin flickered on Kahren Harutyunyan's face. I'd just said, "You know what's the matter with you: The glass is always half empty."

Harutyunyan's a jockey-sized bantamweight, with dark, wary eyes, gulag stubble for hair, a permanent six-o'clock shadow, and a monument to Armenia in the center of his face. His expression reads, "*I know it's bad news.*"

I've watched champions, contenders, trainers, managers and promoters – *tough critics* – lean into the ring apron at the Wild Card Gym to catch the 24-year-old spar. Nothing but nods of approval for his hand speed, feints, counters and ring generalship.

No sign of recognition from him – beyond stoic. Makes Gary Cooper look an extravert.

After a sparring session, Harutyunyan crossed the ring – eyes always downcast – touched gloves with the spar mate, exited the ring and disappeared into the swirl of activity – no high-fives. If anybody patted him on the back – pumped him up – he just nodded, without expression, intent on floor exercises.

Compliments are an anathema; discipline's the thing – keeping it in perspective. *Keepin' it real* ...In the ring and life. He doesn't suffer fools easily – not with James Toney bluster, just a shift of his eyes. The fair-weather, he doesn't snap at – just listens. It's how he was raised: polite...respectful.

His dad's frequently at the gym. One of his few confidants. He's the Ying to Kahren's Yang – always a smile. If Norman Rockwell cast Gepetto, he'd be a shoe-in.

Harutyunyan trains in L.A, but in the seven years he's been here, he's never gone Hollywood – learned the word *frivolous*. He's a semester from a BA at UCLA; his taste runs to classics, not hip-hop, and the moment he leaves the gym, he races to his internship on ESPN2-Hollywood.

His values haven't changed since he left Yerevan. The rest is babble. Only when he speaks of his boyhood – his friends – does the cloud lift, his speech animates.

For all of his work ethic and precision in the ring, his record gives no hint: 13 wins, two losses – one a TKO – three draws and no KOs. But everybody at Wild Card knows the stats don't tell the story. It's age-old: No-choice fights at the last minute; the other guy's back yard; much heavier men; a cut that erases a sure win... blah blah blah. Caveats don't change BoxRec.

But, Harutyunyan put it all together last April at the Quiet Cannon Country Club in Montebello, Cal. – thanks to Freddie Roach's game-plan and the torturous demands of OZ conditioner,

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Justin Fortune – he masterfully boxed – never treaded water – and controlled the ring all 12 rounds, wobbling Tatsuo Hayashida several times, shocking him with a straight right, almost knocking him out in the third round, to win the vacant WBO Super Flyweight title.

Once again, Harutyunyan's faithful rushed the ring. He was the eye of the hurricane. With a championship belt girdling his middle, he left the ring as if going to a dental appointment, while delirious celebrants jumped and danced, waving the Armenian flag, trying to get close enough to congratulate him. If he were any more thrilled, he'd have gotten out a restraining order.

Same scenario played out in all his fights. He keeps a tight rein. "I don't know when it will be I do something insane. It's my personality," Kahren explains.

Though only a 1000 people saw the non-televised show, the gym buzz made it clear what quality boxer he is.

So, just as the Wild Card boxers – and most of Glendale – have supported him in Irvine, Fresno, Bakersfield, Del Mar, they'll be out in full force tonight at the ShoBox: The New Generation card at the Pechanga Resort & Casino in Temecula, CA. to cheer him in the main event against Nonito "Flash" Donaire, for the vacant NABF Super Fly title.

Depend on a decibel level that'll cause tremors in Armenia, and semaphored banners of red blue and orange whenever the camera's near.

This is not a coronation for Harutyunyan, Donaire's more than a *live* opponent. Off his record, he should be the favorite. He's taller, busier, a distinguished amateur, 13-1 as a pro, with eight KOs, four in less than two rounds. The guy can fight.

"This is a very exciting opportunity to showcase my ability worldwide," Kahren says, uncharacteristically.

It sounds like the glass is half full.