

Emanuel Augustus: Boxing Is What I Do

Written by Robert Mladinich
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Fighting as if his life depended on a victory, junior welterweight enigma Emanuel "Road Warrior" Augustus of Brownsville, Texas, breathed new life into his stagnating career with a sensational tenth round TKO of Jaime Rangel at the Foxwoods Resort and Casino in Mashantucket, Connecticut, on February 10.

In doing so, the 31-year-old Augustus, who has fought a veritable who's who of champions and contenders during his nearly 12-year career, put the division on notice that he is still a force to be reckoned with.

"I had to take the judges out of the equation," said Augustus, whose deceptive 32-25-6 (17 KOs) record doesn't begin to tell the story of what a genuinely good fighter he is.

"I knew that Rangel was a first step to a good future or my last step in the respectability department. This was do-or-die for me. I knew I couldn't give this fight away."

Augustus has received no breaks in a career that has taken him throughout the United States and abroad. Among the luminaries he fought in or near their hometowns were Diosbelys Hurtado in Miami (L 10), Soren Sondergaard (D 8) and Allan Vester (L 12) in Denmark, Floyd Mayweather Jr. (TKO by 9) in Detroit, and Micky Ward (L 10) and Ray Oliveira (TKO 8) in New Hampshire.

He also lost decisions to Olympian David Diaz and Kelson Pinto, both of whom were undefeated, Omar Weis, Leavander Johnson, Leonard Dorin, and Teddy Reid.

He says the toughest opponents of all were not Mayweather or any of the other champions he faced. They were Ward and Weis.

"Micky was the ultimate warrior," he said. "He was the only guy that ever really hurt me. I don't like Weis's style, but he beat me so I take my hat off to him. He doesn't come to fight, he comes to peck at you. But he does what suits him, and he does it well."

(Augustus said that Ward, who was ringside for the Rangel fight, provided no shortage of encouragement for him. A very vocal Ward was screaming directions at Augustus throughout the thrilling bout.)

Although Augustus has proven himself countless times in mostly losing efforts, his fight with the Miami-based Rangel, now 30-9-1 (26 KOs), was basically an audition for what's to come.

He was originally scheduled to fight Emanuel Clotey of Ghana as the televised prelim to the WBC Continental Americas super lightweight championship bout between Donald Camarena and Paulie Malignaggi. When Clotey was forced to withdraw with an injury, promoter Lou DiBella offered up Rangel at the last minute.

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"I live check to check, but the checks seem to get smaller and smaller so I don't really have options," said Augustus. "I would like to fight more often, but it's not easy to do that anymore. I have no job skills except for boxing. I've worked on a garbage truck, with sheet metal, in a restaurant, as a landscaper and a fast food clerk, but boxing is what I do. I'm going to live and die through boxing."

A few hours before the Rangel fight, Augustus waxed poetically about his travels and travails as he watched Pakistani president Prevez Musharraf on C-Span. His keen awareness of current events gave him a rather apocalyptic view of the world.

"I'm an earthling," he said. "When the earth dies, we all die. I watch the news because I want to know what's coming. I want to be as prepared as I can be. Like boxing in the ring, it helps to know what's coming."

Augustus described a grim childhood that didn't get any better when he grew into adulthood. Although his parents are still together and living in Chicago, for reasons he has been unable to ascertain he was placed in a series of group homes beginning at the age of three.

He acted out in a number of ways, dropped out of school in the tenth grade, served in the Job Corps before being "put out for slapping someone," and spent some in local jails before making his way to a boxing gym when he was well into his teens. After just 27 amateur fights he turned pro when he was 19.

"I was naturally gifted but I never had the killer instinct," he said. "Every scar on me came from the streets, not from the ring."

With no real management and no promoter behind him at any point of his career, Augustus was quickly relegated to the role of an opponent. While he could be counted on to usually take even the best fighters the distance, he still found himself on the short end of numerous decisions that could have gone either way.

"I stopped counting my fights at 51 because of all the losses," he explained. "I understand the nature of the business. People see a loss on your record and it counts against you. It doesn't matter if I thought I won. A loss is a loss."

Asked what he knew about Rangel, he answered, "The same thing I know about all of my opponents. Nothing!"

He went on to explain that boxing has always been like a double-edged sword for him. Because he said he lacks a killer instinct, it hasn't been easy for him to unleash all of his power on opponents. But, he concedes, that hasn't stopped him from throwing an abundance of punches in nearly every fight he's been involved in.

"I usually throw more punches than the other guy and I'm standing at the end, but I still lose," he explained. "It's like I have a loss before I get into the ring. It don't matter how many people you beat, a bad record will keep you off of HBO or Showtime."

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Maybe not, said DiBella, a former HBO executive who now promotes Augustus. "When Emanuel is on he can be competitive with any junior welterweight in the world. Tonight he showed what a great fighter can be. His performance was superb. That's why I promote him."

Augustus has often been considered his own worst enemy. That was apparent when he tested positive for marijuana after a bout with Courtney Burton in Michigan in July 2004. The way he sees it, the shabby treatment he's received from the boxing community should preclude any criticism from being directed at him.

"People act like I'm supposed to be a role model, but nobody's ever given me anything," he said. "I don't understand where I'm at, so how do I act? I know I'm not supposed to smoke weed, but I have no sponsors, no one investing money in me. Still, I promise that I won't make that mistake again."

Right now, as Augustus hopes to rekindle his career he also finds himself besieged by a slew of personal problems. He and his wife are involved in a nasty custody battle over their two-year-old daughter Genesis, as well as their unborn son.

From a personal and emotional perspective, Augustus says that is one fight he can't afford to lose. "Every fight in the ring is like the fight of my life," he explained. "What is happening with my daughter is just as important. The last thing I want to happen is for me to leave boxing and people say, 'What a shame what happened to him.'"

"I just want to teach and play with my children with money in my pocket and all of my senses intact. The only way that's going to happen is if I keep winning and the TV people forget about the record and give me another chance to show how good I can be.

"One thing is for sure," he continued. "Right now I'm fighting and feeling better than ever. I'd love to get my hands on Mayweather again, but I doubt that will happen. If it doesn't, bring on Arturo Gatti, Miguel Cotto, Ricky Hatton. Line them up and I'll knock them down."