Written by David A. Avila
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A funny thing happened to the most feared super middleweight in the world, he slipped on a banana peel named Joe Calzaghe in Great Britain last Saturday.

It's really not fair to call Calzaghe a banana peel or any other derogatory remark, but the elimination of the vaunted Jeff "Left Hook" Lacy leaves the doors open for a lot of other super middleweights in the U.S. like Librado Andrade.

Formerly based in La Habra, California, the 6-2 in height Andrade has been crushing opponents who dare to stand still or punishing them with his persistent combinations with a zeal not found in prizefighters above the lightweight division.

Andrade, 28, now lives in Las Vegas, Nevada and is primed to meet Canada's Otis Grant the WBC number one super middleweight contender. After that, who knows?

One thing is sure, Lacy's loss to Calzaghe opened Andrade's eyes.

"It's good. Whatever happened was good. Even if Jeff Lacy had won it would have been good for the division because their fight made people pay more attention to our division," said Andrade (22-0, 16 KOs), who is ranked number three by the WBC. "What blows my mind is that Calzaghe just beat Lacy with no contest. Just gave him a clinic."

Andrade watched earnestly in Big Bear Lake, California where he is preparing for his showdown on April

For years Andrade worked in the La Habra Boxing Club, a former church remotely located alongside railroad tracks that was transformed a decade ago into a sparkling clean facility where a small powerhouse of prizefighters developed. Some of those fighters who have come through La Habra include former WBO light heavyweight title-holder Julio Gonzalez and three-time world champion Sugar Shane Mosley.

Because of a growing reputation for super middleweights and light heavyweights, La Habra has also seen international stars fly to California to spar with the local Orange County guys on occasion.

David Martinez, who formerly trained Andrade and now works with Enrique Ornelas, his younger brother, said a number of world class boxers regularly venture into the La Habra Boxing Club including current WBA super middleweight kingpin Mikkel Kessler and number three WBC super middleweight Danny Green among others.

"Kessler, I think out of the group, was the strongest and showed the most skill," said Martinez, who administrates the La Habra Boxing Club. "Kessler, what I saw in his sparring with the boys (Andrade and Ornelas) and Julio, showed the most strength."

He also witnessed Green, the rough and tough Aussie, take a hard hit to his back and continue sparring with the equally tough Gonzalez.

"Green showed when he went back in there, after he had a dislocated disc, he went in there like it was nothing," Martinez said, only later did the Orange County group discover Green had been injured. "When Julio hit him in the back, he still continued to spar. He wanted to go back the next day. That kid has some heart."

Green is scheduled to meet Anthony Mundine in a long-sought battle between Aussie standouts on April 19 in Sydney, Australia. It's one of the biggest fights in that country in years.

Denmark's Kessler recently defeated former title-holder Eric Lucas a few months back.

"He flew out here to get some sparring then flew right back for a fight," Martinez said.

Andrade, Kessler, Green and Calzaghe are just a few of the super middleweights roaming the division looking for challenges like hungry big cats.

"I've been off for a long time just waiting for something to happen," said Andrade, who sparred a little with Mosley who was preparing for Fernando Vargas. "Who knows why I couldn't get a fight."

Andrade's last fight took place more than a year ago against Nick Cervera at the UNF Arena in Jacksonville, Florida. He won by knockout.

"We originally we're supposed to fight last December but they didn't want to come to fight me here. We went to purse bid and they won. It's better for me. I can get a chance to make more money," Andrade said of his scheduled match with Otis Grant in Montreal on April 8th. "Even though I've been off a year and a half I feel I really want to fight."

A still excited Calzaghe said he plans to invade America and display the textbook skills that enabled him to win every round against the bull-neck Lacy.

Many give him props for his performance though some expected a win by the long-time champion from Wales, England.

"I knew Calzaghe was going to fight him that way. He was holding and fighting him in the inside. A champion has to adjust in the middle of the fight. If things aren't going your way you have to go to plan B," Andrade said by phone. "It was speed and movement that won it for Calzaghe. He never gave Lacy time to unload his punches. He wants to overpower you. In this fight Jeff Lacy looked real small. Calzaghe was just pushing him back."

During the last year Lacy dominated press coverage, especially after his three eye-popping knockouts against Scot Pemberton, Robin Reid and Rubin Williams. Now the rest of the talented super middles like Andrade, Chad Dawson (a stablemate of Lacy), Allan Green, Kessler and Green have a chance to show what they can do against the best.

And who is the best?

That would be Calzaghe.

Javier Mora Makes the Big Time

Orange County's Javier "Monster" Mora scored the jackpot with a technical knockout victory over Kirk Johnson last Friday at the Pechanga Resort and Casino.

Though Johnson was forced to quit because of a dislocated left knee that was caused when Mora's stepped on the Canadian's foot, the tide had changed.

Earlier in the fight Johnson established his superior hand-speed and agility, despite the massive 245 pounds he weighed. Using his middleweight-like quickness, Johnson was able to keep his opponent at arms distance. When Mora got too close, a three-punch combination was waiting for him.

Slowly Mora adapted to the speed of the punches coming his way. A right-hand counter in the third opened Johnson's eyes wide. Especially after he had unloaded several punishing blows to the Mexican heavyweight and found nary a sign of quit in his eyes.

Mora's jabs in the fourth round turned things to his favor. Then, in the fifth, three left hooks found Johnson's jaw and wobbled him. The heavyweight title contender lurched out to grab his opponent and lasted the remainder of the round. But Mora, known as the Monster in his neighborhood, saw the change and increased the tempo.

"I knew he was going to slow down," said Mora, who ate jabs for the first three rounds. "It just takes time."

When Mora fired a left jab and accidentally stepped on Johnson's foot, the Canadian immediately fell to the ground and showed no sign of getting up. Mora had scored a technical knockout against a fighter who had only lost to two heavyweight world titleholders.

Can Mora be next?

"The kid fought good," said James Toney, who will be fighting in his own heavyweight title bout on March 18 in Atlantic City. "He deserved to win. He worked hard for it."

Toney advises Mora and has him as a sparring partner as well.

"I learned so much from James," said Mora, 24, who had several hundred fans from nearby Orange County in attendance supporting him. "He's the man."

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutura, 9 p.m., Juan Carlos Rubio (33-7-3) vs. Roberto Garcia (19-2).
Fri. Telemundo, 11:30 p.m., Francisco Rosas (17-5-1) vs. Omar Soto (8-0-1).