Oscar De La Hoya has taken a few risks in his career. Some would say that he hasn't taken enough of them, but he has taken some. None of those gambles he took in the past compare to the one he will take on May 6th this year when he faces free-swinging, trash-talking Ricardo "El Matador" Mayorga.

In 2000 De La Hoya released his debut album, a bilingual 13-song piece that really had no business being made. Risky business.

The CD was a major risk for the Mexican-American who already had his share of detractors that felt he was far too much of a "pretty boy" to be representative of the macho Mexican men who had boxing in their blood. The "Golden Boy" was a more "American" than "Mexican" as far as they were concerned; the fact that the ladies adored him didn't help his appeal to male boxing aficionados, and putting out a lightweight CD made matters even worse.

The album was his first – and last, we hope – despite the public relations vehicle that tried to spin it off as a success. Some critic still managed to write that "De La Hoya's sweet vocal stylings have you down for the count . . . (he) bombards you with an irresistible love TKO." Please. The teeny-bopper, boy-band, bubblegum crowd drove his single "Ven A Mi (Run To Me)" to the top of Billboard's "Hot Latin Tracks" chart, but he could have been singing "Yellow Submarine" in Spanish and still made a dent at the top of that chart.

Against Bernard Hopkins in September of 2004, the 1992 Olympic gold winner took a big gamble when he overstayed his welcome at 160-pounds to fight for the undisputed middleweight championship. Prior to meeting Hopkins, De La Hoya was on the fortunate side of a twelve-round unanimous decision over relatively unknown Felix Sturm of Germany. The Sturm bout was his first at middleweight and Oscar had a ton of trouble at it despite winning by two points on each of the three judges' scorecards. Still, a showdown with Hopkins was signed and De La Hoya, who had won his first world title at 130 pounds when he defeated Jimmi Bredahl for the WBO super featherweight title in 1994, would challenge one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world (at the time), "The Executioner."

It wasn't a good gamble, but that paid off for De La Hoya nonetheless. Oscar found out he wasn't a 160-pound fighter and, as always, pocketed some decent change in the process of determining that fact. Still, the way he lost left some people questioning the validity of the body shot that dropped him and wondering about his manhood. Those who doubt the knockout are, of course, those who have never been hit by a perfect body shot. Regardless, that is the last memory boxing fans have of the "Golden Boy" as a boxer.

Now, after what will be more than a year and a half of inactivity, De La Hoya will fight dangerous Ricardo Mayorga of Nicaragua for the WBC light middleweight title.

While the bark of "El Matador" is far worse than his bite, I say that if De La Hoya loses to

Mayorga on May 6th, his entire career will be brought into question.

A loss to Mayorga will leave Oscar with a professional record of 37-5 (29 KOs) and have him on the losing side of 3 of his past 4 bouts (losing to Mayorga, Hopkins and Shane Mosley with the lone win being the controversial decision against Sturm). That slide to end his career, and it certainly would be the end of his fisticuffs, could wipe out what has been a lifetime of achievement.

It's not just that De La Hoya will have lost so many fights in such recent memory, it is that he is SUPPOSED to beat Mayorga (28-5-1, 23 KOs) to secure the light middleweight title that is at stake. Sure, Mayorga is the champion on paper, but we all know it is De La Hoya's belt to have, just as Javier Castillejo was brought in from Spain to surrender his WBC light middleweight title in June 2001 in order to give Oscar a belt at 154-pounds.

Don King will try to tell us that Ricardo Mayorga is twice the "man" because he beat the man (Vernon Forrest – who Mayorga beat twice) who beat the man (Shane Mosley – who Forrest beat twice) who beat the man (De La Hoya – who Mosley beat twice). Fortunately that math doesn't add up, otherwise David Tua might be the "man" at heavyweight if Hasim Rahman beats James Toney this weekend. (Tua defeated Rahman by TKO 10 in 1998 when he connected after the bell rang to end the ninth. Rahman never regained his senses and the fight was stopped in the following round with Rahman way ahead on all three judge's scorecards at the time.)

No, Mayorga is not the "man," and anyone who suggests that he should beat De La Hoya in May must be assumed to be related to the 32-year-old Nicaraguan, or have a financial interest in him emerging victorious.

After three early career losses in Costa Rica and Nicaragua to Humberto Aranda (now 32-14), Roger Benito Flores (13-28-2) and Henry Castillo (13-2), Mayorga got the chance of a lifetime when he was discovered by the team of Don King. After carefully being placed against WBA welterweight champ Andrew "Six Heads, No Chin" Lewis, Mayorga got inside the mind of Vernon Forrest, which served him to add the WBC version of that title to his name. Cory Spinks showed how Mayorga could be outboxed when he won their bout in 2003 while Felix Trinidad came out of retirement to outclass him a year later. Last year the potty-mouthed, cigar smoking Mayorga beat Michele Piccirillo for the WBC 154-pound belt that will be on the line when he faces De La Hoya.

Mayorga has done what he does to sell tickets – which means to disrespect his opponent in every manner imaginable and some ways once unimaginable – but the attraction at the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas will clearly be Oscar. Love or hate him people come to see De La Hoya fight, whether it is to cheer or jeer.

This May De La Hoya will be battling a 20-month layoff and a strong crude opponent as he sets his eyes on retiring on a winning note. His ego won't let him leave the sport off a loss, so he must leave on his terms, as a champion.

If he doesn't emerge victorious, the debate begins as to where Oscar De La Hoya belongs in the history of this great sport. Many fighters have won gold medals, and others won world titles in multiple weight classes, but that all will be swept into history if De La Hoya can't beat a fighter like Ricardo Mayorga and goes on to lose his third bout in his past four tries.

The man who did everything he could to be accepted by everyone, Mexicans and Americans alike, who beat the Mexican legend Julio Cesar Chavez in order to claim Chavez' spot in their hearts, who put out an album and broke the hearts of teenage girls – that man puts everything he has ever done on the line one last time . . . he hopes.