

Edgar Santana Steps Up

Written by Zachary Levin
Sunday, 12 March 2006 19:00

Lou DiBella's "Broadway Boxing" series isn't about giving fans great fights. It showcases his stable, builds a local fan base, and pads records. They're regularly matched with used up pugs or under-skilled beginners.

Resto-Warrick I & II at the Manhattan Center are the exception. New Yorkers looking for a real club fight hit Philly's Blue Horizon or Michael's Eighth Avenue in Glen Burnie, Maryland.

But even DiBella's darlings eventually must step up. Last Thursday was junior welterweight Edgar "El Chamaco" Santana's time. (He's been on seven DiBella cards—just signed with him).

"Francisco Campos is a 10-round fighter—a crafty veteran," pointed out advisor Johnny Bos, who vetted Campos. "He comes to fight."

The 34-year-old Campos entered the ring first and waited. He shook out his limbs and blew snot through his nose like a tic. Santana fans heckled him. He stared straight ahead. He was far from his native Costa Rica. It was nothing new. The pressure was on the prospect. He never headlined before, never gone 10 rounds, never fought someone with over 10 victories. Campos, 19-5-1, only lost to solid fighters.

Congas struck up. Puerto Rican colors blanketed the space. Santana's handsome face stretched across T-shirts modeled by busty chicas. As always, the kid drew half of Spanish Harlem—\$15K in tickets sold. But his ringwalk lacked pomp—more Cotto than Camacho. He disrobed, revealing why "Friday Night Fights" chose him as the model for their 2006 intro.

"Campos went 10 with Victoriano Sosa in December," Bos said. "He went the distance with Cesar Bazan and Paul Spadafora. Only that bull Juan Urango dropped him. Edgar does that—it's a *statement*. He decisions him, it's rounds in the bank."

They boxed cautiously for nearly five rounds. Campos countered any of Santana's mistakes. Though he's bombed out six of his last seven in two rounds or less, the prospect showed maturity beyond his 16-2 record, not rushing in. He allowed Campos to sometimes back him up, and used the entire ring, setting up his power shots like a seasoned pro. In round three, when he slung heavy leather, Campos taunted him, dropping his arms and jiggling his legs.

When Santana decided to pick up the pace toward the end of the fifth, he came in fat with looping punches that disposed lesser men. Campos took them on the arms and shoulders, and deftly slipped the rest.

After the round Bos clucked with the satisfaction of his research. Then he bunched up his features and pulled on his Fu Manchu. "Did you see the difference in body language when they went back to their corners?" he said. "Santana's acting like he's got the biggest wad since John Holmes! The other guy's shoulders are slumped and his head is down—even though he's in the

Edgar Santana Steps Up

Written by Zachary Levin
Sunday, 12 March 2006 19:00

fight.”

More than anything, Bos’ objective in matching Santana is to give him confidence. “In boxing, the *belief* that you can do things is almost everything,” he explained.

The 27-year-old is a raw talent with few amateur fights. In ’01 and ’02 he suffered back-to-back losses, dropping to 5-2. Disillusioned, he traded gloves for barber’s shears. After cutting hair fulltime for a year, he met Ernesto Dallas, his dedicated manager, and got a try out with famed trainer Hector Roca. Bos has advised him for his last eight bouts. His hypothesis is: a “work-in-progress” can overcome limitations in skill and experience if he’s brimming with confidence. Santana’s grown with each outing.

By the seventh, Campos was done shucking; the younger man was systematically dismantling him. A gorgeous three-punch combination—double left hook, straight right to the head—dropped Campos. With his nose dripping blood, Campos survived the round, but quit on his stool before the eighth. It was Santana’s best performance thus far.

Predictably, an animated DiBella pulled up a chair in press row and praised his fighter. “He passed with flying colors. He could be two fights away from something meaningful, maybe against a guy like Donald Camarena (who recently lost to Paul Malignaggi).”

This is one time you can believe a promoter.

A STAR(K) IS BORN?

Featherweight Gary “Kid” Stark Jr. (now 14-0, 7 KOs) is another boxer who took a big step up last Thursday. He was training for a “TBA” until three days before the card.

The situation was vaguely reminiscent of “The Lady, or the Tiger?” It tells of an ancient system of justice whereby the accused stood in a packed arena and had to choose between two doors; behind one was a hungry tiger, behind the other a beautiful woman. (There’s more to it, but this is already tangential.)

Unlike the protagonist in the story, Stark learned what was behind the door of his choosing: Debind “The Nepal Tiger” Thapa. (The beautiful woman hopefully came later.) A rough customer who throws every punch with evil intentions, Thapa has pugnacious features Ghengis Khan would admire. Now 20-5-1 with 11 KOs, he has more than twice the experience and victories of anyone Stark’s faced. That the Staten Islander took the risk speaks well of him.

But, upon closer inspection, we see that for the majority of Thapa’s career he was a super flyweight (115). Whereas on this night he was 130—eight pounds heavier than he’s ever been. He hasn’t been busy the last few years, and is coming off a seven-month layoff. Rumor is the layoff includes gym work, too. He’s a good name on paper, as long as you take a cursory look.

Still, Stark was on his game—elusive, quick, slick, and opportunistic. Assuming Floyd Mayweather’s defensive stance, he threw stinging right hand counters the pound-for-pound king

Edgar Santana Steps Up

Written by Zachary Levin

Sunday, 12 March 2006 19:00

would approve. He's not a big puncher and his boxing fortunes are unclear. But on this night, he was a virtuoso.

UNDERCARD

Visit TSS' BLOG where our [Michael Woods](#) weighs in.