On March 9, junior welterweight prospect Edgar Santana of Spanish Harlem in New York awoke early like he always does. However, this morning was different than most, so Santana lolled about in bed until a little after noon.

The 26-year-old Santana, who lives with his parents Maribel and Ramon, knew that what happened later that evening would – for better or worse – change the course of his life.

He awoke with a record of 16-2 (11 KOs), and was scheduled to fight his toughest opponent to date that night at the Manhattan Center. Located directly across the street from Madison Square Garden, the venue is about 75 blocks downtown from Santana's home.

Although Francisco Campos, 20-4-1 (12 KOs), was imported from Costa Rica, there was no reason to think he was in New York to lose. Making things even more challenging for Santana was the fact that this would be his first fight under the promotional banner of Lou DiBella. Although he had appeared on seven previous DiBella shows, this would be his first main event.

As usual, Santana was bringing a big crowd. He was personally responsible for selling $15,000 worth of tickets. Considering the fact that he had given up boxing several years before – after feeling as if he was used and abused by various handlers – the pressure was on him to perform at his best.

Santana couldn't help but think back to the days when he was practicing his second vocation. So embittered by boxing, he had become a barber.

It was only after a chance encounter with a fledgling manager named Ernesto Dallas that his interest in the sweet science was rekindled. Dallas teamed him up with trainer Hector Roca.

Together, the team, which also includes cut man Fred Corritone, a transplanted New Yorker now living in Richmond, Virginia, embarked on a journey that they hope will end with a world title belt being placed around Santana's streamlined waist.

Team Santana knew that all roads to the title would begin with Campos. As the clock ticked away, Santana couldn't help think but figuratively, metaphorically, and realistically about his past, present, and future.

Later that evening, this reporter, Robert Ecksel, the editor-in-chief of TSS, and videographer Chris Cassidy accompanied Team Santana on part of that journey.

*This is our Countdown to Santana's Future:*

8:00 a.m.: Santana awakes. He is relaxed as he eats a peanut butter on whole wheat, drinks some water, and relaxes in the apartment he shares with his parents. He continually goes over

the game plan in his head. If Campos comes forward, let him come forward.

12:45: Santana is up and around. He continues to go over his mental check-list before heading to Patsy's restaurant on First Avenue, a neighborhood institution. He eats lasagna and enjoys the free bread. Afterward, he high-fives scores of well-wishers as he makes his way back to his apartment. Fight posters and flyers abound in storefront windows and on lamp posts throughout the neighborhood.

5:00: Santana heads down to the fight site in a car driven by Dallas. He is still going over his checklist and reminding himself of all the serious preparation he has done to make this night a success.

6:00: Santana arrives at the fight venue. He is no longer thinking much about the fight. Instead he listens to a Puerto Rican rap/reggae artist on his Walkman.

7:00: Santana gives a urine sample to a New York State Athletic Commission official.

TSS arrives at Room 1064, Santana's dressing room. He is wearing a thermal undershirt that is covered by a blue short sleeve work shirt, adorned with sergeant's stripes and the words PUERTO RICO and JEFE, the latter of which is a clothing company that Santana has an endorsement deal with.

7:15: Campos' trainer comes in and asks if anyone from Santana's team wants to watch Campos' hand taping. The trainer engages in jocular banter with Roca. Both trainers are familiar with each other and have mutual respect for each other's work.

7:15-7:50: Santana is pensive and serious but nonplussed, even as he is asked many annoying questions. He talks about setting high standards for himself and how he knows this fight will lead top much bigger things.

When asked about his family he says that his father works in a pawn shop, while one brother is a doorman and the other resides in Puerto Rico. He says he graduated from Park East High School in Manhattan. He knows that his father will be in attendance when he fights, but that his mother never comes to watch him box.

8:10: TSS visits the adjoining dressing room of super middleweight Jerson Ravelo and featherweight Gary Stark Jr. Ravelo, who represented his native Dominican Republic in the 2000 Olympic Games, is on the comeback trail after a series of injuries kept him out of action for an extended period of time. The undefeated Stark is one of the hottest prospects in New York.

8:50: Hector Roca begins wrapping Santana's hands. He does the right hand first. Santana is eerily silent. Asked how he's feeling, he says OK but is clearly in the zone. Asked if he feels like a zoo exhibit with so many eyes upon him, he says "No problem." He doesn't smile.

9:00: Dallas comes into the dressing room with his brother Izzy, a retired NYPD detective, and

several of his friends. They bring some cheer to the somber room. Roca is asked how many hands he's wrapped during his illustrious career. "Thousands," he replies.

9:02: The wrapping is complete. Chief Inspector Felix Figueroa approves the wrapping. Asked how he rates Roca as a hand wrapper, Figueroa replies, "The best, at the top."

9:03: Roca puts white gloves on Santana to hit the mitts with. He is wearing black shorts with a star on front, SANTANA on the waist, and JEFE on the back. Now shirtless, Santana is an incredible physical specimen. His wide-shouldered torso is sinuously muscled and shaped like a perfect V.

9:20: Inspector Figueroa produces a pair of brand new, eight-ounce black Everlast gloves to be used in the bout.

9:21: A well-wisher named Diablito comes in speaking in rapid-fire Spanish that makes everyone laugh heartily. Inspector Figueroa says, "He's a jokester."

9:23: Santana is now loose-limbed and laughing as his co-trainer Martin Gonzalez, a former Nicaragua Olympian, enters the room accompanied by a neighborhood friend of Santana's named Chan. As kids, Santana and Chan used to play baseball with Hector Camacho Jr.

9:28: Matchmaker extraordinaire Johnny Bos is in the house. Having worked with Santana for many fights, he pontificates about the lack of solid matchmaking these days. The larger than life Bos commands attention wherever he goes. At this moment he has Santana's full attention.

9:35: Santana's protective cup is put on and he starts shadowboxing. Asked what the three tattoos on his back symbolize, he says the red dragon implies love, while the Chinese letters stand for power.

9:40: Santana starts gloving up. Bos explains that Santana can switch from boxer to puncher on a dime. Calling that rare, he describes a Santana as a "throwback." There is no greater compliment that Bos can bestow on anyone.

9:45: Inspector Figueroa okays both gloves with FIGGY (his signature), followed by a squiggle.

9:46: Santana hits Gonzalez's pads. The power is frightening. Santana knocks the right pad off of Gonzalez's hand with a left hooks. Left uppercuts land with deafening thuds.

9:50: Santana has a good sweat going. His punches are flowing freely. You can't help but think this is going to be his night.

9:51: Bos rips off the paper from the dressing room door with Santana's name and room number on it. He tells Santana, "This is your first main event. Save this."

9:59: Santana takes a breather and sits down. Corritone puts a towel around his torso. Roca goes to check on the Stark fight. Santana is up next.

10:00: It is suddenly quiet. The only people left in the dressing room are Santana, Roca, Corritone, and the trio from TheSweetScience.

10:09: Cruiserweight contender Punching Pat comes in to offer congratulations. He rode his Harley Ultra Classic to the arena. He says that his Freemason insignia on the bike enabled him to park it out front and ensures that no one will steal it. How he came to this conclusion is anyone's guess.

10:13: Corritone, who is a splendid crooner, belts out his own version of a famous song that begins 'There is a fighter from Spanish Harlem.' Roca deadpans a joke about him singing in the toilet.

10:14: Dallas says the Stark fight has been stopped, with Stark winning by TKO. Santana jumps up with a sense of urgency. The tension is palpable.

10:16: Punching Pat announces that he only visits winners' dressing rooms as Santana bangs Roca's pads.

10:21: Punching Pat is keeping things loose by calling Santana 'Latin Love' and 'The Latin Persuasion.' He tells him not to kill his opponent.

10:25: The commission says Santana is up. We see Campos leaving his dressing room with a white towel over his head. The commission says let's start walking and tells Roca to bring an extra towel and mouthpiece.

10:26: Spanish music is blaring throughout the arena. It sounds more like a hot nightclub than a sports arena. The disc jockey is imploring the pro-Santana crowd to make some noise, as if the ear-popping cacophony is not enough.

10:28: Santana enters the arena to wild applause.

10:31: The fight begins. The referee is Eddie Cotton. It is obvious that Campos came to fight. For more detailed coverage, you can read reports by TSS writers Zachary Levin and Michael Woods.

10:56: Santana drops Campos in the seventh. Campos gets up with blood gushing from his nose. Santana launches two-fisted attack. He looks sensational.

11:00: Santana's night is over when Campos is not permitted to come out for the eighth round. The crowd erupts. Puerto Rican flags abound. Young girls in the balcony are chanting "Edgar, Edgar……." A star is born.

11:20: The always humble and inherently decent Santana is elated at the outcome. Near tears, he says that one of his first orders of business will be traveling to Panama to present some much-needed equipment to a gym there.

While training in that country, he was treated with respect and wants to show his gratitude. Santana is not a man who will ever forget where he came from. He is much too decent for that.

He is asked why he has such fierce loyalty for his friends in Panama. “Because it’s the right thing to do,” he responds.

When he goes to bed that night, his record stands at 17-2 (12 KOs). For the first time in many years, Edgar Santana has a future. Nobody deserves one more than he does.

*(Check out TSS's Photo Galleries to see more of Edgar Santana in action )*