Librado Andrade's win in Montreal over the weekend against veteran Otis Grant propels him to the top of the WBC ratings and the mandatory opponent for the WBC super middleweight champion Markus Beyer of Germany.

"I still can't believe it," said Andrade by telephone from Niagara Falls.

After languishing a frustrating 14 months in search of a match, the Southern California fighter traveled to Canada on Saturday and doggedly blasted his way to victory over the skillful Grant (38-3-1, 17 KOs) in the WBC title elimination bout.

Patience was his virtue.

The former Jack-in-the-Box restaurant manager says all those years spent behind the counter, serving customers, paid off.

"I learned a lot. I used to be afraid to talk to people," said Andrade (23-0, 17 KOs) who floored Grant twice en route to the seventh round technical knockout. "I worked there almost 11 years."

Now the only counters Andrade works on take place in the gym or in front of thousands of professional boxing fans like those at the Montreal Casino.

"The people were very nice to me in Montreal," Andrade, 27, said.

When Andrade arrived, it was a different scenario. He was the opponent for the hometown hero and a target for their diatribes.

"They kept asking me about my predictions," said the former chief manager for Jack-in-the-Box in Brea. "I kept telling them I don't make predictions, I just try to do my best."

Those Jack-in-the-Box people are pretty clever.

Canadian journalists deftly conjured up questions to light a fire under Grant and his supporters, anything, to make the visitor seem cocky or like a jerk. Nothing seemed to work.

"Librado just answered them politely. At first they were a little hard on him but then they began to like him," said Raul Jaimes, the executive vice president for Golden Boy Promotions who attended the fight. "Librado is just a nice guy."

You wouldn't know it by Andrade's record. Seventeen former opponents were nearly decapitated by those lethal lefts and rights. I bet those guys weren't calling him nice after seeing stars or checking their jaw.

Jaimes said Andrade bludgeoned his way through Grant's prickly and effective defense. Round after round he blasted away.

"I missed a lot of punches," admits Andrade. "But I was in great shape."

Andrade claims it was the two months of intense mountain training he endured in Big Bear Lake at Sugar Shane Mosley's cabin. I'm betting it was thousands of irate Jack-in-the-Box customers tossing French fries in his face or cursing him out for a wrong order. Those are the people who prepared him for international war.

"People used to come in all the time and tell me I couldn't be a boxer," says Andrade. "They'd say: 'why are you working here then?' I'd tell them because I need to make money."

Grant, a former world titleholder looking for a second shot, used a variety of moves to offset the heavy punching power Andrade unleashed.

"His defense was very good," Jaimes said of Grant. "But Librado kept punching kept punching, he would find holes between the gloves."

I bet it was just like when people dropped drinking straws between the crevices at Jack-in-the-Box. All those pinpoint scoop moves to grab those fallen straws on the floor probably had something to do with it.

The anger all those years of picking up errant straws must pay a toll on the soul.

I asked Librado how many customers he punched out in the last decade?

"None," he answers.

So what prompts this patient former manager of a fast-food joint to batter opponents to capitulation?

Is it the secret sauce? Or is it the chance to avenge all of the customer's torments?

"No, I have lots of friends who were customers," Andrade says. "I met my wife at the Fontana restaurant."

A-ha!

"I really love my wife," Andrade says.

Darn. I thought I had the answer for Andrade's fury.

"After Librado knocked out Grant people were a little upset. But after they heard him talk, the people really liked Andrade and the respect he showed Grant and everyone," Jaimes said.

During the fight, Andrade's lethal right hand began to open a swelling over Grant's left eye. It began to look grotesque.

"I saw that he was getting hurt bad," Andrade recalls. "I kept saying to myself, 'Is this worth it?' I didn't want to hurt the guy."

After two knockdowns in the fifth and a further beating in the sixth, Jaimes said, Grant did not come out for more punishment.

"Librado is such a great kid," said Al Haymon, Andrade's manager who was in Las Vegas watching one of his other clients Floyd Mayweather Jr. skip to victory over Zab Judah. "He has all the talent in the world."

I wonder if Mayweather worked in McDonald's?

Nah.

Jaimes said Andrade is set for a world title showdown for the WBC belt.

"You know this kid sat around for a whole year and couldn't get a fight," Jaimes said, adding that Andrade was one of the first fighters to sign on with Golden Boy Promotions. "At first he was a little rusty, but he kept punching and kept getting stronger. He never stopped."

Just like those car lines in the drive-through window.

"I learned a lot of social skills there," says Andrade of his work experience. "I'm comfortable talking to people."

So that's what they call bludgeoning opponents: talking to people.

Southern California Fights

Heavyweight contenders Audley Harrison of Great Britain and American Dominick Guinn clash at Agua Caliente Casino in Rancho Mirage on Friday.

Both Harrison and Guinn suffered losses in the past year, but to very credible challengers. The fight card is promoted by Goossen-Tutor Promotions.

Harrison (19-1, 14 KOs), nicknamed A-Force, lost by split-decision against hard-hitting Danny Williams this past December.

Guinn (25-3-1, 18 KOs), called the Southern Disaster, suffered losses to James Toney and Sergei Liakhovich. There's definitely no shame in that. Liakhovich captured the WBO heavyweight title two weeks back and Toney fought for the WBC title and ended with a draw.

Both fighters are riding the crest of the heavyweight division. A win means a lot for the winner.

It virtually brings that fighter back to the forefront of the heavyweight division and a chance to meet one of the five recognized champions. Two are East European and the other three are American.

For tickets and information call (888) 999-1995.

Fights on television

Wed. ESPN2, 7 p.m., Paul Williams (28-0) vs. Sergio Rios (17-2)

Fri. ESPN2, 6 p.m., Audley Harrison (19-1) vs. Dominick Guinn (25-3-1)

Sat. HBO, 9:30 p.m., replay of Floyd Mayweather Jr. (36-0) vs. Zab Judah (36-3-2)