

## Don't Believe Mayorga's Gripes of Wrath, There'll Be a Fight

Written by Michael Katz  
Wednesday, 03 May 2006 19:00

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LAS VEGAS, May 4 – The one-armed bandits were busy when Ricardo Mayorga's two limousines pulled up to the MGM Grand for the ritual final press conference for Saturday's fight. In the Hollywood Theatre, the media had been eating and greeting since 11:30. Backstage, Oscar De La Hoya waited for his beer-drinking, cigarette-smoking, smack-talking opponent. And waited.

Golden Boy Promotions CEO Richard Schaefer said that Mayorga and his promoter, Don King, "had some issues and were in negotiations." Someone said Mayorga wanted half of Nicaragua credentialed. That didn't seem likely since there was ample room for at least the population of Managua in the Theatre. The wait continued. What sounded like Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 kept playing over and over on the muted loudspeakers. De La Hoya remained backstage and the Mayorga half of the dais remained empty as the undercard fighters were introduced. At around 2 P.M., De La Hoya was told that Mayorga wanted to meet with his opponent, and the fight's promoter, before facing Tiny Tim Smith, Dandy Dan Rafael and the rest of the deadline dicks.

On the prefight press tour in Chicago, Mayorga had slapped De La Hoya in the back of the head. Elsewhere, he said he would loan De La Hoya the use of his WBC junior middleweight belt for one night, in exchange for a night's use of De La Hoya's wife. The Nicaraguan terror insulted De La Hoya's beloved late mother, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and said he had trained with chickens to prepare for Chicken De La Hoya.

De La Hoya said even as Mayorga stuck out his right hand to shake, he expected the eccentric former welterweight champion was "going to swing at me." Mayorga said, hey, "we're two great warriors, you're not a chicken, otherwise you wouldn't be fighting me, but listen, I've got to get more money or there's no fight."

De La Hoya looked around. No, George Clooney wasn't there. This was not "Oceans Thirteen", another Vegas heist flick. Maybe Don King was going to pull the rug out from the \$50 pay-per-view show here so that his Showtime card in Worcester, Mass., Saturday night would have no competition. Nah, who was going to watch Alejandro Garcia and Juan Antonio Rivera fight for some other 154-pound title? Kassim Ouma, who would be heavily favored over either King fighter in Worcester, was on the undercard here and could always skip out on his scheduled opponent, Marco Rubio, and move up to fight his promoter, De La Hoya. Nah, Ouma was much too tough an opponent for De La Hoya to face first crack after a 20-month layoff. Maybe Mayorga was trying a heist. But he was holding up the wrong promoter.

Mayorga said he wasn't getting enough money. Golden Boy had paid Don King Promotions \$4 million to produce Mayorga on May 6. Mayorga had signed a \$2 million bout agreement with King. Now, suddenly, he was demanding \$8 million.

De La Hoya figured Mayorga was trying "to get to my head" three days before the fight. He said

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he wasn't about to reach into his pants pocket and pull out his checkbook. Besides, he said, Millie has the checkbook and she wasn't around. De La Hoya said Mayorga's money was "his problem." He said Mayorga seemed on edge, "a lot of times you can be beat outside the ring before the fight."

Whatever. The show must go on, at least the press conference portion. Mayorga traipsed onto the stage. King walked slowly behind him, his son Carl – Mayorga's "manager" – in tow. The promoter, 74, and starting to look it, especially since his wife, Henrietta, has been ailing, carried his usual two little American flags. He didn't have one for Nicaragua.

No one mentioned what had transpired backstage. The press conference, a couple of hours late, continued as if nothing had happened. King did mention cryptically that there were always "whisperers" around fighters, "blowing smoke in your ears."

Later, it was said that someone told Mayorga that De La Hoya was likely to make close to \$30 million for this fight, which of course is hogwash. First, if indeed there were that many pay-per-view sales, Mayorga's share of the "upside" would add maybe \$2.5 million to his own pot. But in fact, for Mayorga to make that much, De La Hoya would still find it difficult to reach \$15 million.

In any case, no mention of the purse dispute was made as the press conference droned on. King kept advising everyone to run out and bet on his kid, who was plus \$2.70 at the local shops while Oscar was minus \$3.30 (if you want that in man-to-man terms so you can strike a deal with your friendly neighborhood barber, the line is 3-1). Mayorga said he was only one and a half pounds over the 154-pound limit, and by fight time will be about 18 pounds over. De La Hoya said he's been at 151½ for three weeks.

King said Mayorga was the "Latin Mike Tyson, the closest thing to Tyson I've seen." Mayorga said he would "represent all of Nicaragua" and make his mother and country proud of him. King called Schaefer, born to a banking family in Bern, Switzerland, a "Swedish banker." Floyd Mayweather Sr., De La Hoya's bard and self-appointed world's greatest trainer, called Mayorga "the joke blowing smoke with no hope." Stacy McKinley, a longtime King aide who helps train Mayorga, called Mayweather "the ugliest trainer in the world." Mayorga presented De La Hoya with a little skirt for the "Golden Girl." His longtime trainer, Luis Leon, said De La Hoya would be stopped within six rounds.

The wolf who cried "Chicken" was otherwise wearing sheep's clothing. And then it was over and Mayorga grabbed the microphone and said, "I'm thinking about not fighting because I'm not getting the pay I want. I'm not scared of Oscar. I want what I'm worth."

He would get more specific when surrounded by reporters. He admitted he signed a contract for \$2 million, but said it was "a lure" to get De La Hoya to fight him. He said he had been promised \$8 million. King, standing behind him, said this was the first time he had heard that figure mentioned "was when I got here."

"I'm not going to fight for free," said Mayorga. He said when Felix Trinidad Jr. beat him to a pulp

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last year, "Trinidad took all the money" and that wasn't going to happen again. It would be very easy to dismiss Mayorga's belated bargaining, but this is a man who has risen from great poverty. Nicaraguan reporters say there was a time when the family had only enough money for a three-pound bag of rice and had to subsist on mangos, plucked from friendly trees, and rice for weeks. In Nicaragua, it is said, his home is always open to the needy – a father who needs medicine for a baby, a mother who needs food for her children.

It is possible Mayorga realizes that if De La Hoya does what Trinidad did – and they both chose the wide-swinging Nicaraguan against whom to end long layoffs – there may not be any more big-money opportunities. He may be mad, but he's not crazy.

At the same time, he should not be listening to the "whisperers." This is a guy who lost to Cory Spinks – okay, it was close, but he lost to the light-punching son of Leon – and who has a WBC belt only because he was able to beat the ancient Italian, Michele Piccirillo, but needed all 12 rounds after dropping the former welterweight champion three times in the first four rounds.

Mayorga hits hard, has a superior chin and not a hint of technique. At \$2 million, it could be fairly said he is being handsomely overpaid. In any case, Schaefer made it clear that if Mayorga tried to hold a gun to his head, he would simply say, "Pull the trigger."

The Swiss banker said there would be "no extortion." That if Mayorga doesn't fight Saturday, he could forget about his boxing career. And so could King. But then, of course, no one expects it to come to this. De La Hoya seems to think it's just an attempt to play with his mind. Schaefer wasn't sure what Mayorga's plan was. "I don't know what goes through his crazy mind," he said. Maybe, on a week leading up to the Kentucky Derby of horse racing, a threatened work stoppage might be the only kind of headlines that can come out of here.

Maybe King won't be able to keep his half of the \$4 million Golden Boy has paid him, maybe he'll have to cough up a few extra pennies for the one-armed bandits. Peace will be had. There will be a fight. I guarantee it.

**PENTHOUSE:** Just seeing photog Teddy Blackburn, who will receive the James J. Walker Award for "long and meritorious service to boxing," makes one smile.

**OUTHOUSE:** Let's skip Mayorga and King and this silly exercise in brinkmanship and remember what passed for a fight last weekend, the Acelino Freitas-Zahir Raheem matchup of contrasting nonstyles. For the record, off the tube, I had Raheem ahead by a point (one equal round), but almost every round I noted was "close." Close, but no cigar or any other kind of prize. They both lost.

**MORE DIS AND THAT:** It could be that Zab Judah, his father, Yoel, and Floyd Mayweather Jr. cornerman Leonard Ellerbe could face the Nevada State Athletic Commission for last month's extracurricular fights on Monday, executive director Marc Ratner's final week on the job. But Ratner said he wouldn't be surprised if the Judah faction asked for a delay. Not that he wouldn't show up even beyond his May 13 final day on the job before going over to the UFC. "I'll be only eight blocks away," he said....By the way, De La Hoya-Mayorga is not Ratner's last boxing

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match before turning over the job to Keith Kizer. There's a club show next Friday night at the Orleans....So I asked Oscar if he thought Mayorga's money demand was an indication that his opponent was a "chicken." De La Hoya looked at me and laughed. "I'm the king of chickens," he said proudly. More about him tomorrow.