

De La Hoya Time Again

Written by David A. Avila
Tuesday, 09 May 2006 19:00

Exactly 11 years before Oscar De La Hoya dismantled Ricardo Mayorga, the beginning of the Golden Boy era took place at Caesars Palace when the East L.A. fighter met a cross-town rival on May 6, 1995.

Rafael Ruelas was the IBF lightweight champ and many predicted the Mexican-born fighter living in San Fernando Valley would overrun the gold medal winner who had just captured the WBO lightweight title.

Up until that time, De La Hoya had not defeated an opponent the experts deemed capable of beating him. Sure Jorge Paez Sr. was a world champion, but many felt he was in the latter stages of his career. Little did anyone know Paez still had another eight years to go and the one-round knockout by De La Hoya was no fluke. It was a precursor of things to come.

Leading up to the fight Latino fans, especially Mexican-born fans, began assembling behind Ruelas. Even in East Los Angeles many Mexican-born fans supported the San Fernando Valley boxer, not their own native son. But that was the whole point, many Mexicans did not see East L.A. as their native area. But those with ties to the area and were born and raised in those streets glued their eyes on the television sets or flocked to Las Vegas to see if De La Hoya was the real thing or fool's gold.

Thousands of fans carrying Mexican flags entered the outdoor arena, with a few people carrying American flags. One set of fans high up in the bleachers had a banner claiming Ruelas the real champion.

Before the fight there was even talk by younger brother Gabriel Ruelas of getting a crack at De La Hoya. By the end of the night, however, that fighter would never be the same after ending the life of his opponent Jimmy Garcia. A gallant but limited warrior who was carried out of the ring and succumbed to the beating, Garcia died after the fight. Ruelas was crushed by the news.

In Oscar's fight, the same left hook that downed Mayorga like a lightning bolt made its first appearance on a grand scale against Ruelas. The sound of that punch as both fighters unleashed their blows still echoes in my mind. Ruelas crumbled from the impact and never really recovered though he beat the count.

It was De La Hoya's grand opening to the mega fight.

That night I sat next to the great journalist Allan Malamud. We both covered the fight for the LA Times. The newspaper sent us both to make sure it had its bases covered. "Just in case this kid De La Hoya happens to win," stated the sports editor the week before the fight.

I can still hear the roar of the crowd and the look of astonishment from Ruelas supporters.

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Many saw the East LA kid as some kind of hyped fly-by-night fighter.

After De La Hoya was declared the winner by knockout, Malamud leaned over to me and said: "this kid is the real thing." Truer words were never spoken.

Malamud died a year later and I moved on to another newspaper. I often wondered what the great sports columnist would have thought of De La Hoya's incredible unparalleled success. He had witnessed countless other Southern California boxing hopefuls come and go including Mando Ramos, Bobby Chacon, Armando Muniz, Danny "Little Red" Lopez, Jerry Quarry and Raul Rojas. Would he have believed a young kid out of East L.A. with the face of a choirboy could rocket to superstardom and amass a fortune never seen before in boxing?

In De La Hoya's next fight he took on another town rival in Genaro "Chicanito" Hernandez.

Return of the Golden Boy

No sooner did Oscar De La Hoya left hook his way to victory over the Nicaraguan strongman Ricardo Mayorga when the lineup of possible contenders marched into the post fight press conference at the MGM Grand.

In the crowded ballroom – that was transformed into the media center – dozens of elite prizefighters like Antonio Margarito, Winky Wright and Floyd Mayweather Jr. entered the press conference to plead their case why they should be considered for the lottery prize aptly named the Golden Boy.

"We'll see, I don't want to make no decision," said De La Hoya as each prospective opponent presented their case in front of hundreds of reporters and non-reporters on Saturday night.

The most probable scenario and one that De La Hoya considers at the top of his list as an opponent for Sept. 16 in Las Vegas has the East Los Angeles boxer meeting Floyd Mayweather Jr., the son of his esteemed trainer and considered the best fighter in the world today.

"I'm positive that fight is going to happen," said Mayweather Jr. as the media frenzy began when De La Hoya entered the room. "It makes too much sense."

De La Hoya also made several passing references on Saturday night and on several prior occasions that fighting Mayweather Jr. would be his first choice.

"He's the best fighter in the world," said De La Hoya.

But blocking the possible mega fight is Mayweather Sr.

"I don't want that fight to happen," said the father and former prizefighter, adding that he doesn't want to train De La Hoya to beat up his own son.

The son feels his father should let it happen.

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“We can work it out,” said the young Mayweather known as Pretty Boy Floyd. “This is a fight that has to happen. Oscar is a great fighter and I’m a great fighter. People want to see this fight.”

Many boxing journalists predict a match between De La Hoya and Mayweather could attract more than 1.8 million pay-per-view buys and possibly much more. The all-time non-heavyweight pay-per-view record was set by Felix Trinidad and De La Hoya in 1999 with 1.8 million.

De La Hoya refused to make a decision any time soon. He said he wants to have a heart to heart talk with the elder Mayweather and with his team. If his trainer refuses to train him, the East L.A. fighter has said earlier that he won’t enter a fight.

“I need him in my corner,” De La Hoya said. “He gives me confidence.”

Other fighters like Winky Wright, who is scheduled to meet Jermain Taylor for the middleweight world championship on June 10 in Memphis, had someone speak for him during the press conference. That person said that if Mayweather is unattainable because of the parent-son situation, that Wright would be the best choice.

Margarito himself stepped to the mike and asked De La Hoya for a match.

De La Hoya sang Margarito’s praises but mentioned the possibility of Shane Mosley facing the Tijuana warrior who has the WBO version of the welterweight title.

Mayweather, who quietly sat in a corner to the right of the podium where De La Hoya answered questions, made a brief analysis to this reporter of De La Hoya’s performance.

“He got hit some but everybody gets hit. Even I got hit against Zab Judah,” Mayweather said. “Oscar’s a great fighter, one of the best of all time. I’m the best fighter pound-for-pound, it’s a great fight.”

Local fight shows coming up

May 18, in Los Angeles. Mighty Mike Anchondo meets Ulises Pena at the Shrine Auditorium. For tickets and information call (213) 480-3232.

May 18, in Irvine, Vladimir Zykov meets Jesus Rodriguez at the Irvine Marriott. For tickets and information call (949) 760-3131.

May 19, in Montebello, Kaliesha West meets Elizabeth Cervantes at the Quiet Cannon Country Club. For tickets and information call (323) 781-4871.

May 19, in Cabazon, Samuel Lopez will be featured in the main event at the Morongo Casino. For tickets and information call (866) 328-2024.

May 20, in Los Angeles, Marco Antonio Barrera meets Rocky Juarez at the Staples Center. For

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more information call (213) 480-3232.

May 25, in Temecula, Javier Mora meets Fres Oquendo at the Pechanga Resort and Casino. For more information call (877) 711-2946.

May 27, in Carson, Jhonny Gonzalez meets Fernando Montiel at the Home Depot Center. For more information call (213) 480-3232.

Fights on television

Wed. ESPN 6 p.m. Jesse Brinkley (26-3) vs. Joe Spina (17-0-1)

Fri. ESPN2, 6 p.m., Edner Cherry (19-4-2) vs. Monty Clay (20-0)

Fri. Telefutera, 9 p.m., Abner Mares (8-0) vs. Edison Morillo (12-3-2)

Sat. HBO, 6:45 p.m., Oscar De La Hoya (38-4) vs. Ricardo Mayorga (28-6-1) replay. Ricky Hatton (40-0) vs. Luis Collazo (26-1)