

Javier Mora vs. Fres Oquendo In The Cards

Written by David A. Avila
Sunday, 21 May 2006 19:00

Javier "Monster" Mora returns for yet another test in pursuit of a heavyweight world championship when he meets Puerto Rico's Fres Oquendo.

After polishing off his first ranking contender two months ago, Mora, a Mexican-American boxer, faces another contender in Oquendo (25-3, 16 KOs) at the Pechanga Resort and Casino on Thursday in Temecula, California. The fight card is promoted by Goossen Tutor Promotions and will be televised by Fox Sports Net.

Mora stopped Canada's Kirk Johnson in his last bout at the same location. After withstanding the big heavyweight's firepower, he slowly began to change the complexion of the fight when he landed a right and Johnson went down and wrenched his knee simultaneously. He couldn't continue.

People said Mora was lucky that Johnson was hurt.

"A lot of people said I got lucky, but I say he got lucky," says Mora (20-2-1, 18 KOs), who grew up in Orange County. "He (Johnson) had an excuse to go out with dignity because I was going to knock him out."

Known as Monster by his homeboys, Mora has been boxing professionally for more than six years and has a goal.

"I want to be the first Mexican heavyweight champion of the world," he says.

It wasn't always easy for Mora. In Orange County, there aren't many trainers or advisers for Mexican fighters seeking a heavyweight world title. Few boxers of Mexican heritage have ever progressed to a point that a world title was a possible goal.

Joey Orbillo was a heavyweight hopeful back in the 1960s and was stopped by fellow Californian Jerry Quarry.

Manuel Ramos was talked about for a few years but Orbillo beat him and "Smokin" Joe Frazier annihilated him.

Alex Garcia was talked about seriously as a match for big George Foreman, but took a tune-up before that fight despite his manager's advice and was stopped. He fought as late as last year and lost.

Mora has one advantage over all of the other Mexican hopefuls in the past: he has a world champion helping him.

James Toney, a four-division champion as a middleweight, super middleweight, cruiserweight

Javier Mora vs. Fres Oquendo In The Cards

Written by David A. Avila
Sunday, 21 May 2006 19:00

and heavyweight, has been working with Mora for the last year. "He's got the tools," says Toney. "He has to believe in himself."

Aside from being one of the most skillful prizefighters on the planet, no other fighter uses psychological warfare more effectively than "Lights Out." It's something that he employs against not only opponents, but against sparring partners, potential opponents and fellow heavyweights.

"You got to be mentally tough as well as physically tough," Toney says.

It's this mental toughness that he imparts on all of his guys.

Mora is one of a small group of guys who train with Toney regularly. Just recently, Toney began mentoring the Orange County heavyweight and has polished up the Californian's skills in toe-to-toe warfare.

"James took me under his wing. He believes I'm a great fighter. He has confidence in me," said Mora, who has battled for support throughout his young career. "That's the thing. I'm an OG, a veteran at age 24."

Dan Goossen, president of Goossen Tutor Promotions, has a busload of heavyweights in his boxing stable including Toney. He says the young Mexican fighter shows promise. But Mora's opponent Oquendo is no easy touch.

The Chicago-born Oquendo fought two world champions and lost both by decision. Against Chris Byrd in 2003 he went the distance for the IBF title but was outfoxed by the clever boxer. A year later, he fought WBA titleholder John Ruiz and was beaten by the fellow Puerto Rican in a technical knockout loss. But the fight was extremely close.

Oquendo can fight.

"He's kind of awkward and he's fast," said Mora, who has studied his opponent. "I got to keep my defense nice and tight. I'm going to wear him down."

Mora's gained incentive from his last fight. Until beating Johnson, few in the boxing world outside of Southern California knew who he was and what he did.

"From my last fight I got recognized in New York, it made my day," said Mora. "That's gangster."

One other thing Mora has planned on Thursday is to celebrate his birthday.

"Thursday I turn 25," Mora says. "When I'm hitting him I'm going to say 'happy birthday to me. Happy birthday to me.'"

Julio Gonzalez and Dirrell Brothers

Javier Mora vs. Fres Oquendo In The Cards

Written by David A. Avila
Sunday, 21 May 2006 19:00

Also on the fight card will be former light heavyweight titleholder Julio Gonzalez and Andre and Anthony Dirrell.

Gonzalez meets veteran Jeff Baker of Indianapolis in a six-round bout. The former world champion who gave Dariusz Michalzewski his first loss and grabbed the WBO title is looking for an opportunity to face Antonio Tarver if he should beat Bernard Hopkins. Gonzalez lost the title to Zsolt Erdei and was unable to wrest Clinton Woods title last year. But he feels he still has a lot left for another title run.

Few fighters are able to stand and trade with Gonzalez. The one man able to square up with Gonzalez was Glen Johnson. Gonzalez beat him by narrow decision.

Like Mora, Gonzalez lives in Orange County and has been friends with Mora for years. Though Mora is much bigger, he's sparred with Gonzalez on occasion.

"Julio hits pretty hard for a light heavyweight," Mora said.

Gonzalez has fought Montell Griffin, David Telesco, Manu Ntoah, Joseph Kiwanuka, Roy Jones Jr., Kenny Bowman and Jorge Amparo.

He captured the public eye when he fought the late Julian Letterlough in a blazing 12-round battle for the several regional titles. Gonzalez was dropped three times but came roaring back while knocking down Letterlough two times en route to capturing a unanimous decision. It was nominated for Fight of the Year in 2001. Though he did not win, it led to Gonzalez's match against Jones at the Staples Center.

"I wasn't ready for Roy Jones Jr. then," said Gonzalez a year ago. "Now it would be a different story."

The La Habra, California resident seeks any one of the world titleholders to accept his challenge. His last bout came against Jason Delisle in San Jose last November. Gonzalez gained a unanimous decision victory to win the number two spot on the IBF rankings. Another light heavyweight looking to make waves is Andre Dirrell who has the height, speed and power to eventually crack the contender list. He's also a southpaw. His younger brother Anthony fights at the same weight division and is a right-handed boxer. The brothers originate from Flint, Michigan. There's been a lot of talk about the Dirrell brothers. Whether they fight at light heavyweight or super middleweight, it's a tough road ahead.

Also scheduled to fight on the Pechanga fight card is Jason Gavern who is also part of James Toney's team. The former police officer has made incredible leaps in the heavyweight division and looked very good against Rafael Butler last month in Palm Springs. He handed the heavy-handed Minnesota heavyweight his third loss. He's also beaten Charles "Chili" Davis and lost a close decision to Malcolm Tann a few years back. But working with Toney seems to have accelerated him to another level in the heavyweight division. Gavern says he'd like a shot at Chris Arreola. He lives in Florida now but spends most of his time in California training with Toney, Mora, and Arkansas' Terry Smith.