Written by David A. Avila
Wednesday, 24 May 2006 19:00

Expect fistic bombs to explode early when Georgia's Paul Williams and Argentina's Walter Matthysse meet for a welterweight round-robin tournament on Saturday night at the Home Depot in Carson.

Boxing and soccer share the spotlight as Golden Boy Promotions and the LA Galaxy are combining forces at the sports complex.

It's a special promotion featuring WBO bantamweight titleholder Jhonny Gonzalez defending against the WBO junior bantamweight titleholder Fernando Montiel. Another world title bout features Daniel Ponce De Leon defending his WBO junior featherweight title against Alejandro Barrera, younger cousin of Marco Antonio Barrera.

But it's the welterweight showdown that packs the most potential pop with two top-ranked 147-pounders vying to remain in the WBA tournament and meet the winner of the Carlos Quintana and Joel Julio showdown that takes place next month.

Williams (29-0, 21 KOs) has been fighting in California arenas for the last two years and has built some following with his Tommy Hearns-like reach and speed.

"He can hit you from across the room," says trainer George Peterson of his fighter Williams who is 6-2 in height.

The long-armed Williams, 24, has been moving from gym to gym across the country in search of the best in the world.

"I sparred with Teddy Reid, O'Neil Bell, Glen Johnson, they're all bigger than me and they can hit," said Williams. "I like to pick up different points of their styles to see what I can do."

Matthysse (25-0, 24 KOs) made his American debut down in San Diego but knocked out his opponent before fans and journalists could warm up their seats.

"We have a tape of the fight but it ended too quickly to make anything out of it," said Peterson.

The Argentine bomber has knocked out all but one in his three year professional career. Golden Boy Promotions wants to find out quick if he can deal with the American fighters.

"It should be explosive," said Eric Gomez, chief of operations for Golden Boy.

When Matthysse, 27, met Xavier Tolliver last December it was felt to be a good test for the Argentine. But the fight lasted only 2:27.

Williams has more tape to evaluate. He's been featured on several televised fight cards

including his last four bouts against Terrence Cauthen, Marteze Logan, Alfonso Sanchez and Sergio Rios. He beat two by knockout and two by unanimous decision.

No opponent has been able to make Williams worry until now.

“I don’t like tough fights,” said Peterson. “I like fights I know we can win.”

But to gain glory and a shot at the WBA world title, the Georgia team is willing to participate.

Gomez said they know Matthysse has power but whether or not he can stand up to American boxers is another factor.

“This is going to be a big test for Matthysse,” Gomez said, adding that Shane Mosley is the marquee welterweight for Golden Boy Promotions.

Whoever wins will then wait to see the victor between Julio and Quintana.

Many boxing experts are picking Julio to eventually win the welterweight tournament and defeat Quintana on June 24 in Las Vegas.

But the Colombian powerhouse has yet to meet someone with serious power. Quintana, out of Puerto Rico, has only beaten veteran Nurhan Suleyman, a clever boxer. Like Julio, he’s never faced someone who can hit him back as hard as he hits.

Both are question marks.

It’s the same regarding Williams and Matthysse. Though the Georgia fighter has fought quality fighters, he’s never faced a true welterweight with serious pop to his punches.

Neither has the Argentine.

“I can’t wait to fight Walter Matthysse,” Williams said. “After I beat him I want Antonio Margarito. Everyone says nobody wants to fight him – I’ll fight him.”

Williams remembers sparring with Margarito when the WBO welterweight titleholder was preparing to meet Daniel Santos for the junior middleweight title. They sparred several rounds at the old LA Boxing Club.

“I didn’t go all out and I don’t think he did neither,” said Williams. “I have great respect for Margarito. I’d like to challenge him since nobody else will. I heard Floyd Mayweather turned down $8 million to fight Margarito. I’ll fight him for $150,000.”

The winner of the tournament eventually meets the WBA welterweight champ Ricky Hatton if he remains at the weight class. The tough Brit has talked of going back down to junior welterweight after tasting the power of welterweight Luis Collazo. He doesn’t hit half as hard as any of the tournament welterweights.

“There’s no welterweight I wouldn’t fight,” Williams says. “I like fighting.”

Mexico vs. Mexico

It’s Jhonny Gonzalez of Mexico City versus Fernando Montiel of Los Mochis for the bantamweight world title.

Gonzalez (32-4, 28 KOs) is a much taller slugger who has developed from a pure puncher to a prizefighter who can box on the outside until the proper moment develops to unleash a left hook or right hand.

The 5-foot-8 bantamweight captured the title against Thailand’s legendary Ratanachai Sor Vorapin last year with an eye-catching knockout.

Montiel (32-1-1, 24 KOs) has already captured world titles in two other weight divisions. First he won the flyweight world title in 2000 against Isidro “Chino” Garcia, a clever and talented flyweight. It shocked the boxing world. Two years later, he moved up to the junior bantamweight division and grabbed the world title in that division too with a dominating win over Pedro Alcazar. That fighter died two days later from a brain injury that had not been disclosed before the fight.

It should be a slow-starting fight until Gonzalez finds the range. Then watch for the fireworks. Both Gonzalez and Montiel have a common opponent in Mark “Too Sharp” Johnson, a future Hall of Fame candidate. Gonzalez demolished Johnson with body shots. Montiel suffered a knockdown by Johnson and eventually lost by decision.

But styles make fights and Montiel has fast feet and fast hands. The question is whether he can outmaneuver the taller Gonzalez.

In another Mexico versus Mexico match, Daniel Ponce De Leon of Chihuahua in Northern Mexico faces Mexico City’s Barrera.

Ponce De Leon uses his southpaw stance to deliver bone-crushing blows to the head and body. Though his defense tends to be weak, he has a solid chin and loves to trade bombs. And he never stops fighting.

Barrera beat Frankie Archuleta, a crafty veteran boxer out of New Mexico. But other than that, the fighter known as “Zorrito” has not fought anyone the caliber of Ponce De Leon. It should be a cat and mouse kind of fight.

Another Filipino fighter named Z Gorres, recently signed by Golden Boy Promotions, will be on the card too. He faces Jose Laureano in a junior bantamweight bout.

Gorres (23-1-1, 12 KOs) knocked out Glenn Donaire in one round a year ago. He’s only 24 and will be tested by Laureano (18-9-1) a Puerto Rican boxer who’s faced stiff competition.

Fights on television

Thurs. Fox Sports Net, 10 p.m., Javier Mora (20-2-1) vs. Fres Oquendo (25-3)

Fri. ESPN2, 6 p.m., Delvin Rodriguez (18-1-1) vs. Luis Hernandez (15-2)

Fri. Telefutura, 9 p.m., Nelson Dieppa (23-2-2) vs. Eric Ramirez (11-3-1)

Sat. HBO, 10 p.m., Jhonny Gonzalez (32-4) vs. Fernando Montiel (32-1-1)