

Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo: "Enter the Trilogy"

Written by David A. Avila
Tuesday, 30 May 2006 19:00

Prizefighters Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo are about to enter a realm in boxing reserved for a select few when they meet on Saturday, June 3, for the third time.

It's a boxing trilogy folks. And that usually means fasten your seatbelts.

Corrales, the WBC and WBO lightweight champion, defends his titles against former lightweight champion Castillo at the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas. More importantly, they're going to decide who is the most feared boxer of their generation. The fight will be televised by Showtime.

"It's just another day in the office," says Corrales (40-3, 33 KOs) calmly.

Both fighters have a victory over the other and each win was dragged in controversy with Corrales bludgeoning Castillo in the 10th round of the first fight and referee Tony Weeks halting the match when the Mexican native's eyes rolled back. Or the second encounter when Castillo did not make weight but came in four pounds heavy and knocked out Corrales in the fourth for a 10-count.

"Both fights have been full of controversy. Normal things do not happen in my fights. Not making the weight does not normally happen to me, but it happened," said Castillo (54-7-1, 47 KOs) during a telephone conference call. "Now we're moving on to the third fight and I am sure that I am going to make the weight (135 pound limit) and there will be no controversy for this third fight."

Supporters of both sides vehemently defend their boxers, but arguments aside; only the very special fights result in three or more pairings by the same two fighters. Boxing fans can recite them as easily as baseball fans can recite the list of homerun champs of the past. Corrales and Castillo are about to enter hallowed ground for pugilists:

Think Henry Armstrong and Baby Arizmendi, Rocky Graziano and Tony Zale, Sugar Ray Robinson and Jake LaMotta, Willie Pep and Sandy Saddler, Floyd Patterson and Ingemar Johansson, Emile Griffith and Nino Benvenuti, Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran. There are others, too many to recite. Yes Archie Moore and Ezzard Charles had their own thing. And so did Manuel Ortiz and Carlos Chavez.

It's a pantheon of greatness that drips with never-ending stories retelling the encounters in documentaries, books and magazines.

Recently Arturo Gatti and Mickey Ward entered this plateau with their warrior spirit and penchant for almost inhuman disregard for pain in their boxing trilogy that took place in 2002 and 2003. Who could forget Gatti breaking his hands and refusing to quit? Or Ward's instinct to continue swinging after getting knocked down.

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Another trilogy

Now fans are about to witness another trilogy by two fighters that have amassed a combined 80 knockouts out of 94 contests. Neither is accustomed to winning by a judgment decision and few believe the third encounter will be decided this way. Sending opponents out of the ring by concussion is their way of life.

"The first fight I showed I was stronger, the second fight he showed he was stronger," said Corrales, 28, in describing the difference in the two previous encounters with Castillo. "But you know, he did not make weight. I think I'm the strongest lightweight in the world, and I proved that at lightweight."

Though the lightweight division is full of entertaining boxers and heavy-handed sluggers, Castillo and Corrales have proven, with their punching power, that they're a level above the rest.

Castillo, who has faced almost every deadly challenge in the lightweight division, calls Corrales among the best he has ever faced.

"Without a doubt [Floyd] Mayweather is the best fighter I ever fought or got in the ring with," said Castillo, 32, who fought Mayweather twice, losing by decision both times. "I probably put him (Corrales) right there next to Mayweather."

When Castillo and Corrales first signed to meet each other back in May 7, 2005, it was a boxing fan's dream fight-come-true. Few believed the two would ever meet and when they did, it was like a warrior fable come to life.

Castillo, the square jawed Mexican out of the tough northern frontier of Sonora, had risen from being a regular sparring mate of the great Julio Cesar Chavez to capturing the lightweight title by surprise six years ago. He entered a fight on June 17, 2000 against Stevie Johnston as an unknown challenger and emerged a surprise victor. After that win he fought to a draw in Johnston's home turf three months later. But only after a scorecard was correctly read. The ring announcer read the results incorrectly to the crowd and the error was discovered and remedied a minute later.

Controversy, there's always controversy for the boxer known as "El Temible," the Feared One.

Corrales, who goes by the name Chico, is half Mexican and half African-American, and survived gang wars, jail time and a gunshot wound in the streets of Sacramento, California. Now the lithe 5-foot-11 Corrales lives in Las Vegas with his wife and child and trains in Los Angeles. He either knocks out or gets knocked out in his bouts. But he's only lost three of 43 bouts.

Corrales' first loss came against Mayweather. In that fight Corrales had problems losing weight and when the fight took place, he was weak and a shadow of himself as Mayweather ran roughshod over him.

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Weight problems

Ironically, Castillo had weight problems in the second contest with Corrales, but chose to pay penalties amounting to more than \$150,000 and fight three and a half pounds above the 135-pound limit. He stopped Corrales in four rounds. But the boxing public on this side of the border did not appreciate the move and have called him a cheat.

It infuriates him.

"It has been very difficult every week having people coming in to check my weight," said Castillo, who was forced to agree to allow officials to make sure he was attempting to prepare for a 135-pound weight limit. He also agreed to severe monetary penalties by Showtime cable television and the Nevada Athletic Commission should he fail to make the required weight limit.

Corrales feels the weight restriction will aid him in his third match but gives Castillo his due for beating him.

"Castillo made some very smart moves in the rematch. He jabbed a lot more. He did not engage in constant inside battles and that made a difference," Corrales said of their second encounter last October. "He landed a great shot."

For this fight, both differ on the how the fight will end.

"I just care about winning," Corrales says. "If it goes two or 12, it does not matter."

Castillo sees only a knockout.

"I enjoy fighting him and it shows in the ring," Castillo says. "I'm pretty sure that I am going to win and that I am going to knock him out."

Corrales shrugs his shoulders when asked if he's taken too much punishment. It irks him slightly because through and through he feels he's a warrior.

"I love to fight, it's what I do," Corrales says.

Tickets are still available at the Thomas and Mack Center. For more information call (800) 279-4444. The doors open at 4 p.m. on Saturday June 3.