

## Salita/Santana: Boxing Prospects Make Good

Written by Robert Ecksel  
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Two of Lou DiBella's brightest and most engaging up-and-comers – undefeated Dmitriy “Star of David” Salita (25-0-1, 15 KOs) and red-hot Edgar “El Chamaco” Santana (18-2, 12 KOs) – will share top billing in a bang-up Broadway Boxing doubleheader on Wednesday, September 20, in the Hammerstein Ballroom at the Manhattan Center in midtown Manhattan.

Edgar Santana, originally from Manati, Puerto Rico, but now living and fighting out of Spanish Harlem, takes on Vladimir Khodokovsky (14-9-2, 3 KOs) of the Ukraine in the co-main event. Santana, like Salita, exemplifies the prospect of the prospect making good. Santana turned his life and career around with the help of his manager, Ernesto Dallas, and the two of them are like links in a chain. They were at a recent press conference luncheon to hype Edgar's next fight and asked to assess the progress of his career.

“I'm extremely happy with the progress we've made,” said Dallas. “[Santana's] come from being a fighter who wasn't even on the radar screen. He had two losses, was inactive... really difficult to that in boxing, to come from out of nowhere, very difficult to get in the limelight if you're like that. But by virtue of this talent and the hustle of our team, here we are on the tenth Broadway Boxing card with Lou DiBella, so I'm extremely happy, very pleased.”

I hadn't heard of Khodokovsky, Santana's opponent du jour, so asked Dallas to fill me in.

“He wasn't our original selection. We were going to fight a guy by the name of Grover Wiley, who had beat Chavez Sr. He was 30 and 8 with 14 knockouts. Those are the kind of guys I want him to face. But opponent selection is an art,” Dallas said. “It's when guys are available, and money, and timing. So we didn't get Grover, we got this Ukrainian guy whose record is one that doesn't leap out at you – but he's never been stopped, he has a lot of amateur experience, he went 10 rounds with Stevie Johnston, 10 rounds with Kendall Holt.”

So what is Santana working on at Gleason's Gym under the watchful eye of Hector Roca to offset the attack of an awkward Ukrainian?

“I've been imploring Santana as well as his trainer – I want him to throw COMBINATIONS, and A LOT OF THEM. I want his PUNCH COUNT UP. He's got the foot speed. He's got the punching power in both hands. There's no question he can knock people out. I just want more firepower. I'm hoping to match Kassim Ouma in terms of punch output.”

That's a tall order for any manager of any fighter to make, particularly when that fighter is within earshot. I looked at the understated, soft-spoken, seemingly mild-mannered Santana to check out his reaction, and true to form he laughed and said, “He's just putting pressure on me right now, basically. But, yeah, we've been working in the gym to let my hands go a lot more. We feel as a team that if I let my hands go a lot more, that the fights will end quicker, and will end a lot easier for me.”

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I spotted Dmitriy Salita's trainer, Gleason's Gym's rising star Harry Keitt, eating fresh fruit by the buffet table. I shanghaied him into ignoring the food for a second and telling me how it has been working with Dmitriy. "I'm reminding him of all the stuff he used to do," Keitt said, "trying to bring that back. But I'm having fun doing it, he's having fun doing it, we're having a good time getting him to where he was, and where he needs to be and where he needs to go."

I'm used to boxing riddles, especially around free food, but Harry's roundabout took the cake.

"If I win, he wins," said Keitt, reaching for some honeydew melon. "If I lose, he lose. So it's a team effort. We lose together. We win together. I feel his pain, and I'll feel his happiness if he can reach his goal."

Salita's goal has been circuitous and continues to develop as Dmitriy develops over time. He emigrated as a boy with his family from Odessa, Ukraine, and via Israel made to the USA, Brooklyn to be exact. Salita, unlike Keitt and Santana, wasn't a kid from the streets; he came to boxing because of a cat from the Orient named Bruce Lee. "I used to do karate," Salita said, "and watching boxing was very inspirational to me. Then it was kind of a natural transcendence as far as boxing goes. I never did it for self-defense or anything like that. Boxing was always to do it for the sport, to be the best I could be at it and to be a world champion."

I asked Salita, who takes on Francisco Campos (20-7-1,12 KOs), and who recently switched trainers, how it's been working with Harry Keitt.

"I've known Harry for many years and expect we'll do great things together," said Salita. "Harry and I have a good connection together. Harry's hardcore. You can't devise a better system. He's trained many national champions. He's a no nonsense guy. He wants to make a name for himself. He's very capable. He's hungry. So we're both on the road to the same destination."

Tickets for the September 20 Broadway Boxing featuring Dmitriy Salita and Edgar Santana are priced at \$200 for VIP Balcony Box Seats, \$175 for Platinum Ringside, \$125 for Gold Ringside, \$75 for Ringside, \$55 for Lower Balcony Seats and \$35 for Upper Balcony General Admission, and are available by calling DiBella Entertainment at 212.947.2577.