

The Contender

The semi-final of the Contender saw former world titleholder Steve Forbes, Grady Brewer, Norberto Bravo and Cornelius Brundage all fight each other.

Now the final is set for next week at the Staples Center on Tuesday Sept. 26 in Los Angeles.

Today on ESPN, Forbes (32-3, 9 KOs) squeezed out a victory over the bigger Brundage (23-2) who seemed to have an edge in strength and power over the former junior lightweight champ. But the judges liked Forbes activity and gave him a majority decision over the heavier-handed Brundage.

In the other semi-final, Brewer (21-11, 11 KOs) was knocked down in the first round and rallied to beat Tucson's Bravo after five rounds. Though most of the rounds after the first seemed very even, the judges scored it for Brewer and now he meets Forbes in the final. At the beginning of the season, I personally felt Brewer would make the final but I also thought Brundage would too. It didn't work out that way.

Brewer's speed and power are vastly overlooked by opponents. Most of his losses came when he took fights in the last minute. But the veteran from Louisiana has always been an extremely tough boxer when given time to prepare. He lasted all eight rounds against middleweight champion Jermain Taylor and against Peter Manfredo Jr. That's no easy feat.

Forbes, though he's a former world titleholder, is three divisions higher than his glory days when he won the title by beating John Brown. He later lost it on the scales against David Santos in Temecula. He couldn't make weight.

Weight has always been a problem for Forbes, who is based in Las Vegas now. But fighting at welterweight is a big challenge. He was hurt badly against Nick Acevedo and seemed stunned against Brundage. But he is an extremely experienced fighter.

Brewer is also very experienced and has fought middleweights. Though he's not as fast nor as slick as Forbes, he will connect. I'm thinking his power might be the difference against Forbes.

Tickets for the event are on sale. For more information call (213) 742-7340.

Juan Manuel Marquez

Mexico's Juan Manuel Marquez will fight Jimrex "The Executioner" Jaca of the Philippines on Oct. 21 at the Don Haskins Center in El Paso. The fight will be for the WBO interim featherweight title. It's Marquez's first fight under the Golden Boy Promotions banner after years fighting for Top Rank and the Forum Promotions before that.

Boxing Chatter

Written by David A. Avila

Wednesday, 20 September 2006 19:00

“My career was on hold for a while,” said Marquez. “But now I’m back.”

Also on the same card will be WBO junior featherweight titleholder Daniel Ponce de Leon defending his title against the fleet Al Seeger.

Ricky Hatton sighting

Former WBA welterweight titleholder Ricky “The Hitman” Hatton of Great Britain attended Saturday’s fight card that featured Marco Antonio Barrera. Most of the weekend evenings Hatton spent the night away chatting with Latino fight fans over drinks till after midnight. He made a lot of friends over the weekend. The former WBA welterweight, who is dropping back down to the junior welterweight level, is scheduled to meet IBF junior welterweight titleholder Juan Urango on Jan. 13, 2007. That’s plenty of time for the old school type fighter to drop that extra weight he’s carrying.

Librado Andrade wins

Super middleweight contender Librado Andrade kept his world title hopes alive with a first round knockout of veteran Richard Grant on Saturday Sept. 16. Andrade will meet the winner between WBC titleholder Germany’s Markus Beyer and Denmark’s WBA titleholder Mikkel Kessler. Their encounter takes place on Oct. 14 in Copenhagen, Denmark. Andrade is ranked number one by the WBC and is trained by Wayne McCullough.

Ishe Smith

The former Contender star Ishe Smith is now fighting for Golden Boy Promotions and is scheduled to fight in December. “I’m fighting at junior middleweight now,” said Smith who lives in Las Vegas and is trained by John David Jackson. “I can’t make welterweight any more.”

Smith said he likes that his new promoter keeps him busy.

“I like to fight a lot,” says Smith. “It keeps me sharp.”

Mark Suarez

Riverside welterweight Mark “Poison” Suarez is training in Florida in preparation for his Oct. 14 showdown against Kermit “The Killer” Cintron at the Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Their collision will determine the new IBF welterweight titleholder. The IBF belt was abandoned by Floyd Mayweather Jr. who defeated Zab Judah. Suarez was the mandatory for Mayweather who opted for a bigger money fight. Suarez is now trained by John David Jackson, who formerly trained Shane Mosley.

In memoriam: Leavander Johnson

I first met Leavander Johnson in 2003 when he was promoting his fight against Javier Jauregui. He was a soft-spoken person but brimming with inner confidence. The traveling press conference was taking place at Garfield High School in East L.A.; it’s the same school that produced Oscar De La Hoya, whose company Golden Boy Promotions was sponsoring the event, and Panchito Bojado, among others. As each fighter was announced the disinterested students at the school clapped a bit for Jauregui and loudly for De La Hoya. But Johnson didn’t

Boxing Chatter

Written by David A. Avila

Wednesday, 20 September 2006 19:00

receive a single applause.

I asked if he ever fought when everything is against him including a large crowd.

“All the time,” said Johnson. “But I love to show people I can fight.”

He lost to Jauregui, but was willing to trade for 11 rounds. There were instances in the fight when a normal man would have quit. Not Johnson. That word did not exist for him.

When he later traveled to Italy to fight Stefano Zoff for the vacant IBF lightweight title, few were surprised by the outcome. Johnson forced Zoff to quit in the seventh round and returned home with the title.

On Sept. 17, at the MGM Grand, Johnson met challenger Jesus Chavez. The two exchanged vicious punches for six rounds but Johnson began slowing down. He continued to fight valiantly and many times motioned Chavez to continue. After the fight was stopped in the 11th, I was one of the last to talk to Johnson as he walked back through the tunnel.

I asked him: “What did you think of the fight?”

Johnson replied, “I was winning.”

Then he suddenly began to stumble and people quickly ran to his side.

After the fight card, a party was held on the outdoor pool at the MGM. Somebody told Marco Antonio Barrera that Johnson was in danger and taken to a nearby hospital. He and several others such as Shane Mosley, De La Hoya, and Bernard Hopkins jumped in a limousine to jet to the hospital a few miles away. I walked a distance to my car and drove to the hospital too. I never got to see him. They said he was in critical condition.

It was a terrible night spent at the hospital. When daybreak came I had to head back home to write my column. No word of Johnson.

When I finally heard that Johnson had passed away, all I could think about was his family and friends back in New Jersey. My father, an ex-boxer, had died earlier last year and the memory of his departure along with Johnson’s hit me hard.

Boxing is a very tough sport, probably the toughest. Every year around a dozen lose their lives in the ring. But the pride and courage shown by each and every single fighter represents life in general for me.

Every day somebody lives and dies. Why not fight to the fullest?

American military

Just want to say hello to all of you in the military in Iraq and other parts of the world. You’re not forgotten. Keep your guard up.