

Casamayor Promises Corrales KO

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Joel "El Cepillo" Casamayor has met with plenty of success during his 11-year career. With 33 victories and 21 devastating knockouts to his credit, Casamayor has twice been a world champion. Despite three defeats, all coming on close decisions (two split, all disputed), and one draw, Casamayor still demands the respect of those willing to face him.

Yet for all his accomplishments, the 35-year-old Cuban feels he still has not received the credit he deserves, a feeling that began when he was an amateur and has continued through this day.

"I have been shortchanged in the respect department," said Casamayor, who will meet WBC lightweight champion Diego Corrales in a rubber match on Saturday, Oct. 7, at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas during the Free Preview Weekend on SHOWTIME (9 p.m. ET/PT, delayed on the west coast).

"Maybe it is because I am from another country and all of my fights are on the road. I never had the advantage of fighting at home, but look at my record. I never get the benefit of the doubt. In my heart, I do not feel like I have ever lost. All of my losses have been controversial."

Casamayor's three losses as a pro came against Corrales, Jose Luis Castillo and Acelino Freitas. The draw came against Almazbek Raiymkulov, aka Kid Diamond.

"I beat Corrales the first time and got robbed in the second," Casamayor said through an interpreter. "The decision was unjust. I knocked him down. I won the last six rounds and they said I lost. I had it eight rounds to four and I was pretty close to the action, so I should know. It was disappointing. I dictated the pace and landed the harder shots. Smart boxers do not get enough credit for ring generalship and defense.

"I also definitely feel I beat Castillo, but fighting him in Las Vegas is basically like fighting a Mexican in his backyard. Being a Cuban boxer, I do not have a country to support me like some of the Mexican fighters have. Take away the knockdown that wasn't against Freitas and I win that. The Kid Diamond fight was an absolute joke."

Casamayor expects the majority of fans to root for Corrales when they collide in their highly anticipated third bout. He also realizes what a victory or loss could do for his stature in boxing.

"This is a fight I have wanted for a long time and I am looking forward to it," he said. "I give Corrales respect for fighting me again. But, after I beat him, I gave him a quick rematch. He made me wait two-and-one-half years. I was supposed to fight him a long time ago, but after he got the decision, he bailed. There was controversy enough that there should have been a quick third fight.

"I have been like a backseat driver ever since the second Corrales fight. If it was not for Castillo, I doubt Corrales would be fighting me now. I am very confident, but I realize it could be my last

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shot. Lose and I am back fighting on basic cable. So, I know I have to win convincingly against Corrales and not let it go to judges' hands.

"I am going to try and knock him out. In our first fight, I hurt Corrales, but then got caught with a good shot and went down. But, if he could not knock me out with that shot, he is not going to knock me out with anything. In our rematch, the big slugger Corrales got very defensive minded and tried to jab. He ran the last six rounds. He ran for his life the last three.

"So, I will fight carefully, but aggressively. I plan to come out and dictate the action from the opening bell. My trainer, Roger Bloodworth, and I have been working on starting a little quicker. I know I have to work harder in the early rounds."

The rap against Casamayor is that he does not always break smartly from the gate and takes too long to get into stride.

"I am an old-time guy," Casamayor said. "I wish there were still 15-round fights. Guys like me like to take their time and figure guys out, break them down and go from there. In the Freitas fight, I ran out of time in the eyes of the judges."

At the press conference to formally announce "MANIFI^ST DESTINY," Casamayor said, "Corrales has been in a lot of ring wars. He is burnt. I just need to touch him in the chin and he will go.

"I said that because I know I can hurt Corrales, and he knows it, too. I have hurt him three times. I expect a good fight, but I have a score to settle with him. I am training to fight Corrales at his best."

In their first fight, Casamayor produced a career-best performance when he scored a sixth-round TKO over Corrales in an IBF junior lightweight elimination bout at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas on Oct. 4, 2003.

Making like a miniature Marvin Hagler, Casamayor utilized effective boxing skills to produce two knockdowns and come away with a controversial victory. The bout was stopped by the ringside physician as Corrales was bleeding badly from the mouth. He was not allowed to come out for the seventh round.

Casamayor led 58-54 twice and 57-55 after six rounds despite having a point deducted for holding and hitting. He sent Corrales down in the third with a quick left hook to the jaw and again in the fourth with a lead right hand. Casamayor, who seemed to hurt Corrales constantly with left hands, went in for the finish after the second knockdown, but was caught by a Corrales left hook that sent Casamayor to the canvas.

In the rematch, Corrales won a disputed, 12-round split decision and the vacant WBO title March 6, 2004, on SHOWTIME. Corrales triumphed by 115-112 twice and 113-114.

Before turning pro, Casamayor compiled one of the most prolific records in amateur boxing

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history (380-30), and was the 1989 World Champion. Three years later, he outpointed Ireland's Wayne McCullough to win a gold medal as a bantamweight for Cuba at the 1992 Olympic Games.

Casamayor's biggest victory, however, had nothing to do with boxing. "The greatest feeling in my life was coming to America," he said.

A prohibitive favorite to repeat at the 1996 Olympic Games, Casamayor defected to the U.S. before the opening ceremonies. He walked away from the Cuban compound in Guadalajara, Mexico, and left a five-year-old daughter, a girlfriend and his parents in Guantanamo.

"I never got to say goodbye to anyone," Casamayor said. "But I wanted to be free."

One of the reasons Casamayor defected was he felt slighted by Fidel Castro, who reportedly regarded him as one of his favorites. Casamayor was given a bicycle as his reward for bringing home the gold medal in '92. He sold the bicycle for a pig to feed his family. Casamayor also had friction with Cuba's national team trainers.

"They did not treat me like a champion," Casamayor said. "They never gave me the honor of someone who had done so much for his country."

Casamayor agonized over what would be the most difficult decision of his life—to leave or stay.

"When I had doubts (in Guadalajara), I thought of the pressure they put on me to make 119 pounds," he said. "It was very difficult for me to make that weight, but they threatened me. 'If you do not make weight, we will send you back to Cuba.' That stayed in my head. That made me strong.

"People knew I was supposed to win a gold medal in 1996, but I made a decision. You cannot eat off of gold medals. I missed my daughter so much. I did not want to leave her, but I had to."

So, one day, Casamayor told his chaperone that he was going to walk down the street to buy a bottle of water and would be right back. "He is still waiting for me, I think," Casamayor cracked.

Casamayor turned pro at age 25 with a first-round knockout over David Chamendis on Sept. 20, 1996. The smooth lefthander won the WBA interim super featherweight belt with a lopsided 12-round decision over Antonio Hernandez on June 19, 1999, in Miami. In an excellent performance, Casamayor captured a world title on May 21, 2000, when he thoroughly dominated defending WBA 130-pound champ Jongkwon Baek en route to an impressive fifth-round TKO in Kansas City.

Prior to suffering his first loss on a controversial decision to Freitas, Casamayor made four successful defenses. He has gone 7-2-1 since, the losses coming to Corrales and Castillo. Despite scoring a knockdown in the first round against Kid Diamond, he had to settle for a draw (115-112, 111-116 and 114 apiece).

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Casamayor has won each of his 2006 efforts inside of the distance, including a ninth-round TKO over Lamont Pearson in his most recent outing on July 7 from Phoenix.

In the Oct. 7, 2006, co-feature, undefeated Vic "The Raging Bull" Darchinyan will risk his IBF/International Boxing Organization (IBO) flyweight crowns against world-ranked Glenn Donaire.