

California Heavyweight Clash Recalls Quarry-Orbillo 40 Years Ago

Written by David A. Avila
Monday, 23 October 2006 19:00

Almost 40 years have passed since two California heavyweights like Chris Arreola and Damian Wills have stirred boxing fans. But more than a few remember the epic battle between Jerry Quarry and Joey Orbillo.

Like a blast from a double-barreled shotgun Arreola (17-0, 15 KOs) and Wills (21-0-1, 15 KOs) have plumaged through opponents in a seek-and-destroy mission. Now the crescendo is upon us as Wills and Arreola meet on Nov. 4, at the Mandalay Bay Resort and casino. The bout will not be televised, though several other fights on the card will be.

"I can't wait," says Arreola, who is preparing in Big Bear for the showdown.

Historically speaking this is a rare event in the boxing crazy state of California. The main reason being: Mexican heavyweights are a rare sight. Heavyweight contenders are rare anywhere since the NBA and NFL began swooping in with million dollar contracts beginning in the 1980s. Now American heavyweight boxing gets the leftovers while former Soviet Union countries fighters are beginning to dominate.

Lately, however, Wills and Arreola have sparked interest from local boxing fans with their power.

Wills, 26, a former football player from the Lancaster area now living in Los Angeles, has plowed through the usual set of heavyweight misfits looking to find fame in the boxing ring. With the mindset of a linebacker (the position he played in football) Wills broke the wills of many opponents while stringing up 21 wins, no defeats and one draw.

"No more small shows for me," said Wills, who has only fought in small venues thus far.

Arreola, 25, a former National Golden Gloves champion from East Los Angeles now living in Riverside, bludgeoned his way through a cast of heavyweight characters while dispensing with his honed amateur skills. Instead of the calculated maneuvers that most boxers use, Arreola cut a path against selected opponents with numbing rights and lefts and now has reached a level where it's time to discover if he is the real deal or not.

Almost from the beginning the two California heavyweights have been compared by fans attending their fights in separate parts of Southern California. Wills has been the centerpiece for many fights at the Henry Fonda Theater in Hollywood where celebrities like Denzel Washington and Damon Wayans flocked to support him. Arreola opened his heavyweight camp in fight cards located in Ontario and Corona where boxing has exploded to sold-out crowds.

Now the two California heavyweights are locked into a game of chicken with the winner perhaps gaining a foothold onto the lucrative heavyweight tourney where checks with five figures are guaranteed for a contender. Neither fighter has ever come close to a \$20,000 paycheck, which

California Heavyweight Clash Recalls Quarry-Orbillo 40 Years Ago

Written by David A. Avila
Monday, 23 October 2006 19:00

is the norm for contenders.

Aside from the boost in cash, Wills and Arreola are helping fans remember an historic mark in the Southern California boxing world.

Orbillo and Quarry

Back in 1966 two young heavyweights named Quarry and Orbillo produced more arguments and piqued rabid public interest with their boxing ability. Quarry from Bellflower and Orbillo from Wilmington were instant hits with the boxing fans at the Olympic Auditorium.

When they finally met on December 15, over 10,000 fans filled the aisles with each fighter's backers. It was the first time two heavyweights had developed in a region more apt at developing lightweights and lower weight boxers. Southern California was excited.

Orbillo had been a man-child capable of sparring with pro heavyweights at the age of 14 in the Hoover Gym in South Los Angeles.

"I remember seeing him get in with Archie Moore. He actually caught the Mongoose with a good shot. Of course the Mongoose wasn't in prime shape but Joey Orbillo was a helluva fighter. Especially at his age," said Art "Slim" Carillo, a former pro boxer who now trains fighters in Mira Loma. "Joey Orbillo would spar with a lot of the good heavyweights."

Orbillo was trained and managed by Jake Shugrue, an old U.S. Navy man famous for his colorful manner of speech.

"He was a Runyonesque character but he had a heart of gold," said Carillo of Shugrue. "He always said if 'I can't make it with this kid then I can't make it with no one.' He really believed in Orbillo's talent."

Quarry was a roughhouse kind of kid whose family moved from Bakersfield to the Los Angeles area. All of the Quarrys were taught to fight and were famous for their sparring wars with each other. But when trainer Bill Slayton began working with Jerry, things began to change.

"Jerry went to Kansas City and knocked out five successive opponents to win the National Golden Gloves," said Bill O'Neil, a boxing journalist from a Long Beach daily newspaper in the 1960s. "Slayton transformed Jerry from a wild swinging amateur to a killing machine."

Each fighter began to gather a large fan base at the Olympic Auditorium. For a while both were undefeated and headed for a collision. Then Orbillo met slick pro fighter Eddie Machen on June 23, 1966 and was tagged with this first loss. Quarry decided to give it a try with Machen a month later and was also set back with a loss.

Though both had their records tarnished a bit, the two decided to quench their fan's desire for a showdown and finally met on Dec. 15 at the Olympic Auditorium.

California Heavyweight Clash Recalls Quarry-Orbillo 40 Years Ago

Written by David A. Avila

Monday, 23 October 2006 19:00

“Both Joey and Jerry lost to Eddie Machen and that kind of took the edge from it,” O’Neil said. “But they still had a great crowd.”

Quarry, 21, was the 7-5 favorite going into the fight. Most felt he was the heavier puncher and had proven himself during his amateur days.

Orbillo, 20, had returned from the U.S. Army and was going to go back in as a volunteer. He was viewed as the slicker of the two and had never been knocked down.

“Joey had a hell of a left jab. He’d lock that sucker up and it came hard,” says Carillo, who sparred in the same Hoover Street Gym located off 78th Street. “He had no dippy-do but he threw nice combinations.”

With 80-degree temperatures outside, Orbillo and Quarry met for a 10-round non-title fight before a rabid crowd. The Mexican-American started quickly and grabbed the early rounds.

In the fourth round, Quarry was hit with a low blow during an exchange and Orbillo also landed a solid right. Referee John Thomas warned Orbillo for the low blow and both fighters touched gloves. Then during a furious exchange, Quarry landed a left hook that snapped Orbillo’s head back and followed it with another left hook and right hand that dropped his opponent for the first time in his career. After that round it was clear Quarry was the stronger fighter.

Orbillo never went down again that night, but the Irish-American boxer was able to connect almost at will for the rest of the 10-round fight. Quarry won by unanimous decision and proceeded to become a huge heavyweight star who later fought Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, Jimmy Ellis and Ernie Shavers.

Now, almost 40 years to the date of Orbillo and Quarry’s clash, Southern California has two prime heavyweights ready to become legitimate contenders. Who will that be?

Both Arreola and Wills are extremely confident of victory.

(Part one of two. Next week: the Nightmare meets Bolo.)