

Mark "Poison" Suarez Fights Kermit "Killer" Cintron For IBF Title

Written by David A. Avila

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Outside of the city of Riverside, California, Mark "Poison" Suarez barely creates a ripple of recognition as he prepares to fight for the IBF welterweight title against Kermit "Killer" Cintron (26-1, 24 KOs) on Saturday, Oct. 28, in West Palm Beach, Florida.

But most fighters in the upper echelon of professional boxing know Suarez.

One punch dropped Floyd Mayweather Jr. to his knees during a sparring session before a title fight years ago, but make no mistake, the fighter known as Pretty Boy remembers and knows Suarez, who was kindly escorted out of the sparring session by Mayweather's handlers after the punch.

"I saw him in Las Vegas a little while back," Suarez, 27, said. "He told me, 'Hey, Mark.' That made me feel good that he remembered me."

The six-foot-one-inch Suarez (25-2, 13 KOs) has been toiling in the Lincoln Boxing Club since he was first able to walk.

"You could say he grew up in the boxing gym," said Ricardo Flores, who formerly boxed out of the Lincoln Boxing Club in the 1980s. "He was this little kid always running around the gym. Sometimes he would even fall asleep in the ring."

As a child Suarez followed his older brothers and his father to the boxing club every day. His father Andy trained numerous fighters including Flores.

"Mark could barely reach the heavy bag but he would be hitting it with his tiny hands," said Flores, who now owns a contracting business in Riverside. "Everybody would get angry at him. He was kind of the gym brat."

As the years passed, Suarez, who attended Rubidoux High, became a well-known amateur star and was eventually spotted and signed by noted boxing manager Cameron Dunkin. It seemed his race to the top would be quick. But it just never happened for the Riverside fighter.

As a youth he was shot in the leg while walking home from high school. Trouble seemed to find the lanky kid who grew up on the east side of town but attended a school on the west side. But no one questioned his talent or heart as he nearly won the U.S. National amateur title in the mid-1990s.

"I think he lost by a score of 13-12," recalled Dunkin. "He came that close to winning it."

Not wanting to wait for the Olympics, Suarez turned professional in 1997.

Though he was undefeated for three years compiling a 17-0 record, fans weren't clamoring for

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the tall and skinny junior welterweight.

Promoters back east noticed his undefeated record and asked him to travel for a televised fight against a hardnosed boxer named Alex Trujillo. He took it.

Suarez boxed the bomber and when necessary he stood his ground and slugged it out. But in the end, he lost a close decision for his first professional loss in August 2000.

After an easy 10-round decision in Las Vegas, he once again ventured to become an opponent for another fighter's promoter and lost again. But this time the loss was painful.

"I knocked him down three times and the referee didn't count any of them as knockdowns," Suarez said of his match against Ricky Quiles in October 2000. "I was robbed."

That was his last fight for three years. He was arrested and jailed for violating probation terms stemming from an earlier incident.

"All I did was exercise," Suarez said of his jail term. "When I came out I was angry."

One other change occurred: he was no longer a junior welterweight but now a full-fledged welterweight. The bigger shoulders replaced the bony frame he had before going into jail.

"I was a little worried," said Dunkin, who's managed Suarez since he turned professional. "He was a lot bigger."

When Suarez finally entered the ring after his release he was truly a different fighter. He sort of transformed from a feather-fisted boxer to a full-fledged power puncher able to take out opponents with a single blow. Sort of like a Mexican version of Tommy Hearns, who was not a big hitter in the amateurs but found his power as a pro. With Suarez, he found his power at the 147-pound division.

"Mark came out with power. He was knocking everybody out," said Henry Ramirez, who assisted Mark's father Andy with training.

Since returning to boxing three years ago, Suarez has kayoed seven consecutive opponents. Before going to prison he had four knockouts in 20 fights. After his release, he KO'd seven out of seven against mostly talented opponents.

"I don't know much about him, nobody does," said Cintron, who is known as a knockout artist himself. "I was at his (Suarez's) fight in New York but it ended so quickly I couldn't tell what kind of fighter he was."

Suarez met James "Spyder" Webb, an undefeated veteran at Madison Square Garden last January. Webb didn't last more than 44 seconds before the fight was over.

"He must be a good fighter," said Cintron, a tall, muscular fighter with power in either hand. "He

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has seven straight knockouts."

But there are big questions remaining for Suarez. Last March his father Andy passed away. Mark had never had another trainer except for his father. A world title match set for April was canceled. But now he's been training with John David Jackson, the famous tutor of world champions Shane Mosley and Bernard Hopkins.

"Andy always said his son was going to be a world champion," said Dunkin, who first spotted Suarez at a Blue and Gold amateur tournament in 1994. "Things were never easy for Mark but here we are, just like his dad said would happen. He's fighting for the world title."

One other aspect about the little-known Suarez: "He's fearless," said Dunkin.

No fighter from Riverside has ever won a world title in boxing.

"I'm going to be the first," said a smiling Suarez.

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Freddie Hernandez (19-1) vs. Carson Jones (12-3-1).

Fri. Telemundo, 11:30 p.m., Joel Julio (27-1) vs. Cosme Rivera (39-9-2).

Sat. In-Demand pay-per-view, 7 p.m., Mark Suarez (25-2) vs. Kermit Cintron (26-1).