

Mark Suarez Ready to Fulfill the World Title Dream

Written by David A. Avila

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Riverside's Mark Suarez stands confidently poised to win the city's first boxing world title today, but he has to pass through the big shoulders of Kermit "The Killer" Cintron to do it.

"I predict I'm going to knock him out," said Suarez (25-2, 13 KOs).

Suarez meets Cintron (26-1, 24 KOs) for the vacant IBF welterweight title at the Palm Beach Convention Center in Florida. The event is co-promoted by Bostick Promotions and Don King Promotions and can only be seen on www.Maxboxing.com for a fee.

Though Suarez is well known and received in the Inland Empire, outside of Southern California he remains a mystery to the rest of the boxing world. His promoter Don King barely has a passing interest.

"I don't know how he fights," said Cintron, 27, two months ago while in Las Vegas. "Nobody knows how he fights."

As an amateur the Riverside boxer won many amateur titles and was a perplexing opponent with his long frame and quickness. He won more than 100 fights while losing less than 10.

"I first saw him at a Blue and Gold Tournament and liked him immediately," said Cameron Dunkin, who manages Suarez and more than two-dozen other professional prizefighters. "That was about 10 years ago. I had a hard time convincing promoters to sign him."

After constant prodding, Top Rank worked with Suarez during his early career, but no long-term contract was ever signed. Then, after a short time in prison, he returned to the ring but found few promoters interested in a boxer with talent but no recognition.

"Everyone said he doesn't have any fans," said Dunkin. "But now the Riverside area has more fights than any place in the country."

In the past two years Suarez, 27, was matched against several undefeated fighters and a couple of veterans and fought with a look on his face that seemed dismissive of his opponents. He just didn't seem to think they possessed the skill or power to stay with him and he was always correct.

On a Las Vegas card in May 2005, Suarez faced undefeated powerhouse Viktor Sydorenko who had knocked out almost all of his opponents. He looked at Suarez with disdain and probably saw the low number of knockouts and figured he could easily pound his way to victory. Instead, he found himself looking up at Suarez, and then looking at his corner with a look that said, "How could you tell me this guy can't hit." The Ukrainian hasn't fought since.

Suarez's last fight was in New York at Madison Square Garden last January against James

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Webb. The fight was over in 44 seconds as Suarez and Webb engaged quickly and a body blow took the air out of Webb for a knockout. Mark's father Andy was by his side for the last time.

"I've just been stronger," Suarez says who is listed on most charts at 5-10 in height, but is actually 6-foot-1. "I started breaking on everybody."

It was a painfully slow and arduous road for Suarez and for his now deceased father, whose every fiber believed his son would one day become a world champion.

"My dad always believed in Mark," said Andy Suarez Jr., an older brother of Mark.

While Suarez took the painstakingly slow road, his opponent Cintron had a rather fast track to the top as a fighter under Main Events Promotions. The Puerto Rican fought on many high profile televised bouts and was the toast of the eastern seaboard with his quick knockouts and muscular build. Many saw him as unbeatable.

But a match with another little-known fighter named Antonio Margarito for the WBO welterweight title saw Cintron get battered and turn defensive until his corner stopped the fight. The public turned against him and called him a quitter. Even his promoter let him go.

Cintron regrouped, fired his long-time trainers and signed with Emanuel Steward. Then he met sturdy contender David Estrada last April and slowly overpowered the smaller opponent for a 10th round technical knockout.

"It's great working with Emanuel Steward," said Cintron. "There's great sparring at the Kronk Gym."

Suarez is now working with trainer John David Jackson who has the Riverside boxer sparring with the likes of Allan Green and others in Florida. He's confident of victory and feels his long trek is finally at the proper destination.

"I'm going to fulfill the dream," says Suarez. "I've always been the underdog."