

Guerrero's quest for greatness continues

Written by Ralph Gonzalez

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Lost under the cloud of controversy surrounding the scoring of the James Toney and Samuel Peter heavyweight championship bout on September second was Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero's stellar performance.

Guerrero, 23, wore down the very tough Erik "Mighty Mouse" Aiken with a vicious and calculated attack by the Gilroy, California native. "I prepared well, had the perfect game plan and stuck to it," Guerrero said. "The plan was to put pressure on him and keep him on his heels. I was on top of him with hard body shots which slowed him down. By the grace of God it turned out to be a dominating fight for me." Aiken hung in but couldn't match the power and intensity of Guerrero who beat Aiken's body mercilessly until he had enough. Aiken and his team decided not to come out for the eighth round. It was a crowning moment for Guerrero whose last name translates, aptly enough, into warrior. With the win, Guerrero also took the IBF featherweight championship.

"To say I was happy is an understatement," Guerrero said after he won the fight. "Winning the world title is what we work so hard for." Now Guerrero (19-1, 12 KO's) is set for the big stage as he defends his title for the first time against Orlando Salido (27-9-2, 18 KO's) as part of the Floyd Mayweather Jr. vs. Carlos Baldomir Pay Per View on Saturday.

You'd think that performing on such a high-profile event would create an enormous amount of pressure. "The Ghost" realizes that pressure and performing is part of the business. "The Ghost" claims he's in control. "I don't feel any pressure at all. I was an amateur and fought so many times in my life that performing is my second nature," Guerrero said. "I know it's a big event against Salido who's very rugged but I'm at a hundred percent so I don't expect any big surprises."

Salido is a good fighter but has never been able to pass the big tests when it came to exam time against elite level competition like Juan Manuel Marquez who shut him out in an easy twelve-round snoozer. Salido was unwilling or unable to trade with Marquez effectively who countered him all night long. Since then, Salido's most notable win was a fifth round TKO of Rogers Mtagawa. The question won't be if Guerrero will beat Salido but how he'll beat him. Will he be able to put Salido away impressively? Marquez couldn't do it and neither could former featherweight champion Alejandro Gonzalez who barely got away with a win. Salido hasn't been stopped since 2000 and is prone to sit back and defend once he feels his opponent's power.

Looking spectacular will be the task for "The Ghost" this time out. "I know he's awkward but I'm a big puncher. I've got pop in both hands and I'm showing up to do some damage," Guerrero said. "I know he's a guy that doesn't get stopped often but I'm going to try and change that."

A spectacular performance would position the 5' 9", 126-pounder for a fight against some of boxing's elite. Guerrero welcomes the thought. "It's crossed my mind that once I get past Salido, God willing, I'd like to move up to the 130 pound division," Guerrero said. "I'd like to get in the

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mix with fighters like Manny Pacquiao and Erik Morales in the near future." A jump up in weight would seem to pose little problems for Guerrero who's lanky enough to carry the extra poundage. "I'd be even stronger at that weight. It would be an advantage for me actually," Guerrero said. "Right now I have to get through Salido who can't be taken lightly." Guerrero is smart enough to realize that the conditions for him to fight the big names have to be created by both him and his promoters at Goossen Tutor. "It all comes down to what my management and promoters come up with after Salido but I'd really like to land a big fight," Guerrero said.

But is "The Ghost" rushing things? After all, he only has twenty-one fights and seems like he could use some more seasoning. Guerrero doesn't see that as a major concern. According to him he's ready for the best. "I don't feel like I'd be rushing. Not at all. I've been blessed with God-given talents and the more I train the more I learn and the more I mature as a fighter," Guerrero said. "I'd welcome a fight against any of the top fighters in the world. I'm here and ready to go."

Guerrero and trainer John Bray have been hard at work in a private gym located in the San Fernando Valley where both Bray and "The Ghost's" father, Roberto Guerrero Sr., collaborate to prepare Robert for battle. There was a time when Guerrero Sr. called all the shots, but he was eventually replaced by Joe Goossen, who was ultimately replaced by Bray, who has a great relationship with Guerrero Jr. It was difficult to replace his father but Jr. seemed to feel the move was necessary at the time. Guerrero Sr. still plays a part of the team, albeit a smaller one. "He's still a part of my team. He's a big supporter. He's been there since I first started boxing," Guerrero said. "He and John exchange ideas on my strategy and training and then they decide what I should be doing for my next fight."

Guerrero has been on a tear lately with eleven straight stoppages coming into his first title defense. Strangely enough, he started his career with seven decisions out of his first eight wins. Now he's transformed himself into an unforgiving power puncher who's thrilled his fans with classic knockouts, like the impressive one-punch stoppage of Gamaliel Diaz who was rendered helpless with an uppercut to the midsection that will play on highlight reels for decades to come.

Guerrero's approach and mindset has helped transform the former amateur standout. "I'm coming to fight. Like always, I'm an explosive package," Guerrero warned. "If you're a real boxing fan then I encourage you to watch the fight. There's gonna be nothing but fireworks going on."

Check out Guerrero vs. Salido on HBO Pay Per View. For more info go to: www.hbo.com/boxing

Martin "Gallito" Castillo on the mend

Former WBA Super Flyweight Champion Martin Castillo came out of surgery to repair old scar tissue and to shave down his protruding brow with much success. Castillo is now bandaged up and resting. His management stated that he looked like a mummy once he got out of surgery with all his protective dressing. Lucky for "Gallito" it's Halloween season.