Junior welterweight prospect Kendall “Rated R” Holt of Paterson, New Jersey, adopted his unusual nickname when he heard Hasim Rahman describing his knockout of Lennox Lewis in their first encounter in South Africa.

At first the 25-year-old Holt thought the name was kind of catchy, but now he says it has much more significance. On November 11, at Bally’s Casino in Atlantic City, Holt not only raised his record to 21-1 (12 KOS), he put the division on notice by administering a one-sided, 12-round beating to previously undefeated Isaac Hlatshwayo of South Africa.

Hlatshwayo was 25-0 (9 KOS) going into the bout that was televised on ShoBox: The New Generation.

Having stopped 1996 Olympian David Diaz in the eighth round in February 2005, Holt’s management thinks it is about time that he gets his just due. Not only was Diaz 26-0 at the time, he is now the interim WBC lightweight champion.

After beating Diaz, Holt won decisions over durable journeymen Jaime Rangel and Vladimir Khodoikovski, but still found himself on the outside looking in. He and his promoter, Dino Duva, were thrilled to get the opportunity to fight Hlatshwayo, who many considered the finest prospect in his native country.

They couldn’t have cared less that just a few fights earlier Hlatshwayo had beaten the always dangerous Nate Campbell. Fighting like a man possessed, Holt knocked the South African down three times en route to winning a very impressive unanimous decision that can’t help but garner him attention.

Holt now says that Rated R stands for “running across the division ruthlessly.”

One person who thinks he has a good chance of doing just that is ShoBox analyst Steve Farhood. The only problem, adds Farhood, is that Holt might have scared prospective opponents off with his dazzling display of speed, movement and power.

“Because he was so impressive, it is likely to cost him fights,” explained Farhood. “He’s not an easy guy to fight. It’s rare that you see a fighter whose style is basically that of a boxer with so much movement, who can also punch as well as he does with either hand.”

Farhood believes that Holt would be very competitive with such title holders as Ricardo Torres (WBO), Junior Witter (WBC), and Juan Urango (IBF), but thinks it might be wise to not call Ricky Hatton out just yet.

Hatton is returning to the division after one fight as a welterweight, and hopes to regain his old title from Urango in January.

“Hatton’s non-stop pressure might negate Holt’s speed and movement,” said Farhood. “The type of pressure that Hatton applies is difficult for anyone, so I’m not singling Kendall out.”

At this point in his career, Holt, who works as an electrician by day, is a man on as mission. Things have never come easy for him, and what success he has garnered is testament to his character as much as his athletic skills.

He is one of 11 children whose father was absent and whose mother was incarcerated for many years. Much of Holt’s youth was spent being shuttled from one foster home to another.

Although he started boxing at the age of six, he hung the gloves up for nearly a decade to concentrate on other sports. After returning to boxing at 16, he roared through the amateur ranks, winning three New Jersey Golden Gloves titles in the process.

Since turning pro in early 2001, he has overcome one obstacle after another. Besides having several injuries misdiagnosed, he was engaged in a nasty custody battle for his three-year-old son.

Because he was so naturally gifted, he didn’t train nearly as hard as he was supposed to. He learned an invaluable lesson when he was knocked down twice and stopped in the first round by Thomas Davis, who was then 8-1-1 (4 KOS), in Chicago in June 2004.

Prior to fighting Hlatshwayo, Holt explained how that loss may have been a blessing in disguise. “It really got me in tune with my career,” he said. “It really opened my eyes so much to what was really going on, how things are supposed to really go as opposed to the way they were going for me. I was fighting mediocre guys, so I did not put a lot into training. My talent alone was getting me over. Then I started fighting a couple of better guys, going longer rounds. So now, besides my talent, I am going to need that conditioning.”

With that behind him, Holt is ready to be a champion, which is something he’s been hungering for since he was a youngster. His longtime adviser, McKenley Washington, said that Holt has been shut out of the picture long enough.

“We fought David Diaz almost two years ago when he was unbeaten and we made light work of him,” said Washington. “As far as I’m concerned, we’re still behind schedule”

Washington angrily talks about how many people in the boxing establishment ignored Holt, even though he was willing to step up and fight all comers on several occasions.

“We coped with the situation the best we could,” said Washington. “Everything comes in due time. They didn’t want to let us in the door, so we kicked it down. They can’t ignore us any longer.”

Duva has been touting Holt for several years now, so he is thrilled with the prospect of him engaging in bouts against numerous exciting champions and contenders.

He believes that Holt is at his physical peak and in the right emotional mindset to beat all of them.

“Kendall is healthy and he is now one of the top super lightweights in the world,” he said. “The division is stocked with talent like Miguel Cotto, Ricky Hatton, Jose Luis Castillo, Diego Corrales and Arturo Gatti. This is Kendall’s time to make his mark.”