

Singing on the waterfront with Ricky Hatton

Written by Rick Folstad

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Listening to Ricky “Hitman” Hatton is like listening to Opie Taylor. Respectful and polite outside the ring, he sounds like a choirboy stuck in a longshoreman’s body.

He probably takes in stray dogs, doesn’t swear around children, loves his wife and volunteers to work the soup line back home in Manchester, England.

So how did he end up in this cutthroat line of work?

Hatton (41-0, 30 KOs) is scheduled to fight junior-welterweight champion Juan “Iron Twin” Urango (17-0-1, 13 KOs) on Jan. 20 at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas (HBO) for Urango’s IBF title.

It’s the same title that used to belong to Hatton until he pitched the championship belt aside last spring and moved up to welterweight to fight Luis Collazo for Collazo’s WBA title.

That fight wasn’t one of Hatton’s best, but he blames it on a lot of distractions, including a switch in opponents because of an injury that meant he had to move up a weight class if he wanted to fight for a belt.

Hatton won, but it wasn’t pretty.

“He was a tricky, slick, speedy southpaw,” he said of Collazo. “He proved he was a lot better fighter than people gave him credit for.”

Apparently, Collazo hadn’t read any of Hatton’s clips. He didn’t actually shut down the Hatton coming-out party, but he put a serious dent in the number of champagne corks that were popped.

So now the Brit gets a second chance to fight in front of America on HBO, prove that the Collazo fight was just a fluke, an anomaly, a lousy night at work.

“I never really intended to move up to welterweight,” Hatton said on a conference call promoting his fight with Urango. “It was just the position we got put in when we were looking around for suitable opponents.”

A living buzzsaw with no off switch, Hatton also liked the idea of winning a championship in two divisions. Sounds better when you tell the grandchildren about it 30 years from now.

“I liked the idea of the challenge,” he said. “And I can always say I was a two-weight world champion.”

Asked if he felt like he was going to be fighting Urango for a title belt that was rightfully his since

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he never lost it in the ring, Hatton said it would be disrespectful to Urango to claim it was still his title.

“My goal is to climb the pound-for-pound [ladder],” Hatton said. “I’m going in there as the challenger.”

The future for Hatton looks, well, busy.

If he beats Urango and Jose Luis Castillo beats Hermann Ngoudjo on the same card, Hatton versus Castillo is a natural.

Miguel Cotto is also a good fight for Hatton on paper, and Diego Corrales hasn’t gone anywhere and would probably be up for another good payday.

And of course, there’s the big one hovering out there, though there are still a lot of hoops that have to be jumped through before a fight with Floyd Mayweather Jr. can be signed and sold.

But Hatton still has to get passed Urango, and then maybe Castillo, and Mayweather has a May 5 fight with Oscar De La Hoya, and that doesn’t come with any guarantees.

And if Hatton wins and wins again, and Mayweather beats De La Hoya, Hatton would have to move up to welterweight again since Mayweather probably won’t be moving down.

If all the cosmic tumblers somehow fall into place, we could someday see a Hatton-Mayweather fight.

Maybe.

But Hatton understands how the system works.

“If you lose this fight,” he said, referring to Urango. “You also lose the next one.”

And probably the one after that.