

An Italian Civil War: Calzaghe and Manfredo

Written by David A. Avila
Tuesday, 03 April 2007 19:00

One is from Great Britain and the other from New England but both super middleweight champion Joe Calzaghe and challenger Peter Manfredo Jr. are Italian, so that means serious fireworks on Saturday.

Calzaghe seeks to win his 20th successive world title defense when he faces Rhode Island's Manfredo (26-3, 12 KOs) of the Contender reality television show at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, Wales. HBO will televise the showdown on Saturday.

"I love to fight and obviously we both have got big hearts," Calzaghe (42-0, 31 KOs) said during a telephone press conference.

Though the sport of professional boxing began earnestly in Great Britain in the 18th century, once John L. Sullivan captured the heavyweight title the Americans have dominated. Call it sheer numbers or hungrier fighters.

But Calzaghe has that hunger too.

"As long as you've got excitement you've got the hunger wanting to train and you are still feeling good, then why retire," said Calzaghe, 35.

The descendant of Italy lives in Wales and with the help of his father Enzo Calzaghe has acquired fighting skills to enhance his southpaw style. He's never been beaten despite a pretty healthy dose of American opponents.

When he faced hard-hitting Omar Sheika he knocked him out in the fifth round. When he faced former champion Charles Brewer he beat him by unanimous decision. Against another former super middleweight champion Byron Mitchell he was knocked down for the first time in his career in the second round. Though he looked shaky getting up, he rallied and stopped Mitchell in the same round. It was a fight that exemplified his career up to that point in 2003.

After that, Calzaghe returned to fighting WBO mandatory opponents such as Mger Mkrtchian, Kabary Salem, Evans Ashira and he fought them all on his home shores except for a win over Mario Veit in Germany.

So when Calzaghe finally accepted a fight with America's Jeff "Left Hook" Lacy, who owned the IBF title, most Americans felt it was a mismatch for their fighter though most had never seen the Welsh fighter's style.

They soon learned Calzaghe could fight.

For 12 rounds on March 2006 Calzaghe ripped through Lacy like tennis player Roger Federer rips through most of his opponents. American fans had never seen his hand quickness or

An Italian Civil War: Calzaghe and Manfredo

Written by David A. Avila
Tuesday, 03 April 2007 19:00

mobility. Nor had they any idea of his punching power. But that night he shattered all previous perceptions. He wasn't another British pushover.

Manfredo knows the feeling of being perceived as untested.

Because few fight fans had seen Manfredo before he entered the Contender series, most felt he would be gobbled up against more serious competition once he fought outside of the Contender umbrella. Not so.

The Rhode Islander moved up to the super middleweight division and suddenly seemed stronger and faster. Former world titleholder Scott Pemberton ran into the Manfredo buzz saw and was annihilated in three rounds a year ago. The fellow Rhode Islander Joey Spina also discovered that Manfredo was not simply hype, but a truly skilled boxer-puncher who can end a fight quickly.

"The pressure is definitely on Calzaghe," says Manfredo, 26, who is fighting for the first time in Europe. "I'm going back to his back yard in front of 30,000 people screaming his name. He's been the longest reigning champion. He's undefeated."

Sugar Ray Leonard has been working on strategy with Manfredo against the taller champion who has a three-inch height advantage.

"The key is just fighting your own fight and not being taken out of your game plan," says Leonard who beat Roberto Duran, Tommy Hearn, Wilfredo Benitez and others.

The slick dressing Manfredo has become an American boxing idol with his friendly demeanor and aggressive boxing style. He doesn't resort to holding or running.

"Neither of us is going to back up and that's what people want to see," said Manfredo whose trainer Freddie Roach cannot make the trip. "It's got the makings of an Arturo Gatti/Mickey Ward type of fight."

The last time two world class Italian boxers met in the ring for a fight of this magnitude Gatti exchanged clobbering time with Italy's Gianluca Branco for 12 consecutive rounds for the WBC junior welterweight title. Fans were amazed at the doggedness of Branco. He was thought to be a power puff for Gatti.

It shouldn't be a surprise to see the same happen when Manfredo and Calzaghe meet on Saturday. Whenever Italians meet in the ring for a world title you can imagine how a Roman centurion must have fought. There is no quarter given nor none expected.

Carmen Basilio's two grizzly battles with Tony DeMarco have been shown on television many times and were action-packed. Others like Rocky Graziano's war with Tony Janiro and Tony Canzoneri's epic fight with Lou (Luigi D'Ambrosio) Ambers are still talked about by old-timers.

There have been many exciting fights between fighters of Italian descent. It's their way. Those

An Italian Civil War: Calzaghe and Manfredo

Written by David A. Avila
Tuesday, 03 April 2007 19:00

bloodlines don't run they fight.

Expect nothing less.

Bojorquez wants rematch

A nearly sold out audience at the Pechanga Resort and Casino saw Eddie Sanchez win by decision over Carlos Bojorquez and capture the GBU America's junior middleweight title last Friday.

"I thought I deserved at least a draw," said Bojorquez by telephone on Sunday. "He never hurt me."

Sanchez used his much longer reach to keep Bojorquez from landing the big bombs. After the fight, Sanchez discovered he had broken his right hand.

"I broke it in three places around the third round," Sanchez estimated. "He hurt me a couple of times."

Bojorquez wants one more fight and hopes Sanchez will give him a rematch.

"Eddie Sanchez was a tough guy. I give him all the credit. But it was a close fight and I want to fight him one more time before I retire," Bojorquez said.

Gonzalez retains world bantamweight title

Jhonny Gonzalez knocked out challenger Irene Pacheco in the ninth round at the Desert Diamond Casino in Tucson last Friday.

Gonzalez was coming off a knockout loss to junior featherweight champion Israel Vazquez. But he returned to the 118-pound level and stopped former flyweight champion Pacheco.

Andre Ward wins

Oakland's Andre Ward, who captured a gold medal in the 2004 Olympics, stopped Julio Jean in the third round at the HP Pavilion in San Jose. Ward fights at junior middleweight.

Fights on television

Fri. ESPN2, 6 p.m., Jason Estrada (7-1) vs. Alvin Manley (11-1-2).

Fri. Showtime, 11 p.m., Travis Walker (22-0-1) vs. George Garcia (13-0).

Sat. HBO, 2 p.m. (Pacific Time), Joe Calzaghe (42-0) vs. Peter Manfredo Jr. (26-3).

Sat. Showtime, 9 p.m., Diego Corrales (40-4) vs. Joshua Clottey (30-2).