A worldwide audience awaits the blockbuster showdown between professional prizefighting's best boxer Floyd Mayweather and Oscar "the Golden Boy" De La Hoya on Saturday May 5 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

The mega fight has already broken Las Vegas gate receipt records with more than $18 million funneled in and is expected to break all pay-per-view records set at 2 million.

It looks simple but it's been a long arduous road for both fighters.

De La Hoya, 34, began boxing in East Los Angeles as a baby-face boxing prodigy who emerged from the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain with the sole gold medal for United States boxing participants. The painful loss of his mother to cancer preceding the international games and his promise to win for her served as a catalyst to the most lucrative boxing career in history including world titles in six weight divisions.

Mayweather, 30, is the son of a former contender and family member of the fighting Mayweathers from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Though he failed to win a gold medal in the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta, he proceeded to storm through the professional world of boxing and has captured world titles in four weight divisions. He's seeking a fifth when he meets De La Hoya for the WBC junior middleweight title.

De La Hoya's road to success hit many potholes before becoming one of the few professional boxers who amassed more than $490 million. Few remember his first year when people booed him at the Inglewood Forum or the scant attendance at his two appearances in the Grand Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles.

But in his first year he beat a fighter named Jazzy Jeff Mayweather an uncle of Floyd Mayweather Jr. on March 13, 1993. Seems like a Mayweather has always been a part of De La Hoya's career.

De La Hoya's first world title fight was at the Grand Olympic Auditorium against Denmark's Jimmi Bredahl. The East L.A. fighter captured the WBO junior lightweight title and weighed in at 128 pounds. He defended that title once against Giorgio Campanella who became the second opponent to knock down the Mexican-American boxer. De La Hoya decided the lack of weight took much of his strength so he moved into the lightweight division.

After annihilating Jorge "Maromero" Paez for the vacant WBO lightweight title, it was deemed time to meet IBF lightweight titleholder Rafael Ruelas to unify the 135-pound weight class on May 6, 1995 in Las Vegas. Both Ruelas and De La Hoya were natives of Los Angeles.

First mega fight

For almost four years boxing fans from Southern California treated De La Hoya as a hyped publicity stunt incapable of beating a rough and tumble Mexican-style fighter. Thousands of fans flew or drove into Las Vegas and filled the seats at Caesars Palace to see De La Hoya meet his demise.

Mexican fans accustomed to seeing Julio Cesar Chavez dominate opponents with a pressure style hated that the East L.A. boxer used a stick and move style mixed with punishing left hooks. Most preferred his opponent Ruelas who grew up in San Fernando but was born in Jalisco, Mexico. Fans roared their approval for Ruelas when he entered the ring and booed for De La Hoya.

That night, in the second round, De La Hoya caught Ruelas with a left hook that sounded like a 45-caliber gunshot. From that moment on his career was like a speeding bullet and he truly became the Golden Boy, a named bestowed on another Los Angeles fighter during the 1950s.

"Oscar De La Hoya deserves that name more than me," said Art Aragon, the first Golden Boy of boxing. "Look at what he's done."

Other lightweight boxers feared him.

"He was a monster at that weight division," said Jesse James Leija, a former junior lightweight world champion. "When I fought him I just wanted to survive. I knew I couldn't beat him. He was too fast and too strong."

Since then, De La Hoya (38-4, 30 KOs) has captured world titles in the junior welterweight, welterweight, junior middleweight and middleweight divisions.

"Oscar is too big and too fast for Floyd Mayweather," says Winky Wright, who hopes to fight De La Hoya next after meeting Bernard Hopkins this July. "Floyd never fought anybody as good as Oscar."

Perfection

Mayweather moved to Las Vegas when still a youth and began racking up awards as an amateur boxer. When his father was imprisoned his uncle Roger Mayweather became his trainer and helped the younger Floyd make the transition to the world of professional boxing.

"Boxing is what I love," says Mayweather, who still lives in Las Vegas. "All of my life it's all I ever wanted to be."

After the Olympic judges failed to recognize his boxing prowess in 1996, the speedy Mayweather eagerly took his boxing skills to the professional ranks and immediately dominated.

Because of his lack of size, many underestimated Mayweather including WBC junior lightweight titleholder Genaro "Chicanito" Hernandez.

"Floyd was just too quick for my brother," said Rudy Hernandez who trained his younger brother and advised him during the fight. "He was hitting my brother with shots that nobody but Shane Mosley could do."

Hernandez retired after that fight despite only losing twice in his entire career. The other loss was to De La Hoya.

Eager to prove his ability Mayweather challenged numerous world champions regardless of the weight. After Mosley defeated Willy Wise in Las Vegas a victory party was held at the Hard Rock Café. As Mosley signed autographs Mayweather approached him and asked loudly "when are you going to fight me?"

Mosley smiled his famous smile and answered: "you really want to fight me?"

Mayweather answered yes and Mosley said: "tell your people to call my people."

That was seven years ago and still Mayweather maintains perfection despite moving up three more weight classes.

"Oscar can be beaten because he has four losses, so that's four times he's made mistakes," said Mayweather (37-0, 24 KOs). "I've never made a mistake. Boxing isn't about who's the quickest or who hits the hardest, it's about who's the smartest inside the ring."

Despite the wins Mayweather was unable to attract large crowds to his fights. In one instance he openly wished he were a different nationality.

"I wish I were Mexican," said Mayweather in the year 2000 while attending a fight between two Mexican fighters that packed an arena. "Mexican fans support their fighters."

But it wasn't long until Mayweather followed his uncle Roger Mayweather's footsteps and beat a popular Mexican fighter in Jose Luis Castillo that launched him into another recognition level in 2002.

If you can't join them, beat them.

Mayweather beat Castillo a second time convincingly and after that he was suddenly the most hated boxer for Mexican boxing fans and most respected among other fight fans. People love perfection.

"Roy Jones used to be a great fighter but he lost his legs so now he can't fight the same," said Mayweather a few months ago. "But he lost four times so there are four ways to beat him. I don't depend on just my legs. That's why I've never lost."

De La Hoya knows that he can't waver in any way with the lightning speed of Mayweather facing him in the ring.

"This fight by far is the biggest for me," said De La Hoya. "I can't wait to run over to his corner and start fighting."

For De La Hoya and his legion of fans they're hoping for one more dip into the cup of success. They're hoping he still has the golden touch.

"It's all about Oscar's stamina," says Rudy Hernandez whose brother lost to Mayweather. "If he can last 12 rounds at Mayweather's pace, then he can win. If not, Mayweather will run over him."