

Nearing End Of Road For Forrest Or Baldomir?

Written by Michael Woods
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Deep journalistic secret: writers sometimes overstate, for dramatic effect, the stakes of a situation.

Boxing writers do it, every now and again. One guy I won't name, I recall, called a particular Micky Ward fight a "crossroads" fight, a scrap that would mean curtain for the Mickster if he didn't prevail.

That bout, that ultra-important beef the writer was talking about took place in 1991. If you'll recall, Ward had two fights in 1991...and one in '97 and '98...and one in 2000, and another in 2002...before he engaged in the trilogy that he'll be known for for 100 years.

So when I hear that it's must win time for both Vernon Forrest, and Carlos Baldomir, who meet up in Tacoma, Washington on Saturday to determine who walks away with the WB-somethin-or-other 154 pound belt, forgive me if I'm skeptical.

Because if one man loses, and looks OK, he'll live to fight another day. Heck, even if he loses and doesn't look all that good, but an up 'n comer's manager wants a name scalp to attach to his guy's resume, the loser will get another shot.

Granted, both these men are old, in boxing years.

Baldy (43-10-1, 13 KOs), the former Cinderella Man, turned 36 in April, and he's walked the steps into the ring for money 59 times. But he's got some tread in the tires, as he's lost only once, to PBF, since 1998.

Forrest (38-2-1, 28 KOs), no longer answering to the nickname Viper, turned 36 in January. The Georgian, a 1992 Olympian, has had to be patched, if we go with the tire metaphor, a few times too many.

He's got suspect limbs, having had multiple surgeries on his left arm. His shoulder, his elbow, tendons, joints, it's been a mess in there. A damn shame, those recurrences, because if we crank back the mental way-back machine, you'll recall Forrest was a big darned deal back around 2002.

Shane Mosley was kickin' it atop the P4P lists, looking to branch out, spread his profile beyond boxing. Then the Viper struck, and only the bell saved SSM from a KO loss. Forrest won that January 2002 effort (UD12) and did the same six months later (UD12).

He was tall for a welter, could work with both hands, and he also possessed a big ole heart, to boot. This was the sort of man a sport in search of some good ink could latch onto.

But a different sort of man, a cig scarfing, beer swilling wretch named Mayorga screwed up the

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script. He beat Forrest, twice, in 2002, and since then Forrest has fought just three times.

His last outing came last August, when he won a controversial UD10 against Ike Quartey. The road to this point has been a little longer, paved with more oil patches, for Forrest. So it's possible that this bout, to be shown on HBO on Saturday evening, really is a crossroads special.

But these people are fighters, after all, supremely stubborn beings with extra helpings of courage tucked down their shorts. I do believe we'll see both men again after Saturday.

That said, I like Forrests' reach advantage here. He'll have more at 154 than will Baldy, who won't have enough sting to keep the Viper at bay. I say Forrest, by decision.