

De Leon Battles Another Filipino Foe

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
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On August 11th, WBO Super Bantamweight champion, Daniel Ponce De Leon (31-1, 28 KO's) is beset with the difficult task of stopping Filipino contender Rey "Boom Boom" Bautista (23-0, 17 KO's) in what looks to be a sensational encounter as part of Golden Boy Promotion's World Cup of Boxing.

"I've seen his videos, he's got a very good style and he's undefeated so he brings a lot to the table. But he's young. He's about 21. I don't think he's in his prime," said De Leon. "We have a lot of similarities in that we're both tough and from the streets. It should be a great fight."

De Leon is coming off a win over another Filipino, Gerry Penalosa. That's a performance he wasn't particularly pleased with.

It's hard for a fighter, especially a world champion, to admit when they've had a less than stellar performance. "I made the mistake of underestimating him," said De Leon about his fight against Penalosa. "I felt like I was bigger than him and I was just going to push him around but he's a smart fighter. I was prepared physically but mentally I wasn't prepared for him."

Penalosa, a talented former champion moving up in weight, was supposed to be somewhat easy pickings for the Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua native who currently resides in L.A. Penalosa proved to be tricky and elusive. There were so many close rounds that some questioned the wide unanimous decision win by De Leon.

"I learned a lot from that fight. I took his knowledge and experience and I've used it to make me a better fighter," De Leon said. "I'm glad for that fight. I learned some important lessons from it."

Penalosa will be fighting WBO Bantamweight champion Jhonny Gonzalez on the same night as part of the Mexico vs. Philippines W.C.O.P. at the Arco Arena in Sacramento. De Leon has some advice for his "paisano."

"I would tell Jhonny to work the distance properly. He's a very opportunistic fighter and very sneaky," De Leon said. "He will counterpunch you every time you miss. Watch out for those counterpunches."

De Leon feels comfortable with the W.C.O.P.'s team concept since he was a part of the Mexican Olympic team. "I'm used to fighting in tournaments where two countries are paired off against one another. I did that as an amateur so I'm used to the idea," said De Leon. "I think it's a great concept. I also think that Jhonny will beat Penalosa and Mexico will keep the cup."

De Leon is part of the Tahuamara Indian tribe who are known as elite long distance runners. He's not a huge fan of running for hours at a time on flat surfaces as his people do, though. "I'm better with running up hills," he said. "It's more challenging. I can go on for hours."

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De Leon doesn't run in the ring though. He doesn't box. He fights to hurt you. His technique is ugly, but aesthetics don't always count once a punch lands with pain inducing force. He's all action, all heart, all the time. Even in his only loss against the freakishly tall WBA champion Celestino Caballero, De Leon worked until the very last second only to lose by points. "I'd love a rematch against Caballero," De Leon said. "I know exactly what I have to do to defeat him. I'd like to unify the titles against him in the near future."

De Leon once headlined a show in my neck of the woods at the Sho-Palace in Oceanside, California. My photographer, Louie the Loafer, was assigned to take one great shot of De Leon. What we ended up with was hundreds of action shots. De Leon is such an action and volume puncher that we could've used ninety eight percent of the pictures taken. "I work very hard inside the ring. I throw everything I have with everything I've got," De Leon said. "My style may not be beautiful but it works."

RING BYTES Although I questioned the World Cup of Boxing concept in the beginning, I have to admit that it may make a positive mark on today's boxing scene. The first W.O.C. included Mexico vs. Thailand in fights that resulted in intriguing action. Now it's Mexico vs. The Phillipines. The possibilities are endless. It'd be great to see Mexico vs. Ireland. John Duddy and Andy Lee would be great representatives. Russia, Panama and Colombia would also provide some interesting matches.

Watch Daniel Ponce De Leon as he headlines on HBO's Boxing After Dark against Rey Bautista. Jhonny Gonzalez will take on Gerry Penalosa in the semi main event. The bouts are set to be broadcast at 10 p.m Eastern and Pacific time.

For more info on Daniel Ponce De Leon and the World Cup of Boxing, go to www.goldenboypromotions.com