

## **“The Ghost” Guerrero Returns To Vegas**

Written by David A. Avila

Wednesday, 05 September 2007 19:00

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BIG BEAR LAKE, CALIF.-Despite the rain, thunder and lightning threatening the entire mountainside and causing a fire in the southwestern point, the Robert “The Ghost” Guerrero haunts the log cabin training camp of one of his heroes Sugar Shane Mosley like a caged animal.

Under Sugar Shane he’s learned a few more tricks they don’t teach you in any of the boxing instruction books: preparing for the unexpected and never underestimating an opponent is included with the instructions.

About two years ago the Ghost lost to a fighter from Mexico, then he was beaten by a steroid supplemented fighter and just last winter he endured his first road trip where he fought in a country that had no love for him.

All those factors instilled him with one major lesson in boxing: “On any given night anybody can lose,” says Guerrero (20-1-1, 13 KOs).

The pride of Gilroy, California defends the IBF featherweight title against Mexico’s Martin Honorio (24-3-1, 12 KOs) at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas on the fight card promoted by Golden Boy Promotions on Sept. 15. The fight card will be shown on pay-per-view television.

Usually Guerrero prepares in Los Angeles where there’s plenty of sparring available especially at the Wild Card Boxing Gym or dozens of others. But a few of his boxing buddies from Northern California convinced him to hike up the Big Bear Mountain resorts and join them at Mosley’s camp. It was Guerrero’s first experience with high elevation training.

“Being in the ring with Shane Mosley, it doesn’t get better than that,” Guerrero, 24, says. “It’s been the best training camp I’ve ever been in.”

The 10,000-foot elevation has caused Guerrero to discover why elite fighters such as Oscar De La Hoya, Marco Antonio Barrera, Bernard Hopkins and Mosley find the higher altitude preferable to preparing in sea level.

“Usually I can go 10 or 12 rounds easily,” said Guerrero who sparred many times with Mosley. “But up here after six rounds I’m done. It’s a big difference. Wait until the fight happens to see what I can do.”

Guerrero’s eager to show what Mosley showed him while sparring. It’s not often you get one of the master of the fistic science to work with you one on one.

“Shane is just an amazing fighter,” Guerrero said.

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Jack Mosley, father and trainer of Shane Mosley, said Guerrero shows amazing ability and boxing skill.

“He’s been working with Shane and he looks pretty good,” says Mosley.

Shane Mosley was busy with the press tour this past weekend to promote his upcoming bout against Puerto Rico’s undefeated Miguel Cotto and was not available.

At the beginning of training camp Guerrero had been preparing to meet former U.S. Olympian Rocky Juarez. Since the amateur days Guerrero had chased the Texas featherweight to no avail. Then, after Guerrero won the IBF title back, he got the phone call he’s been waiting for from Juarez. A contract was signed and training commenced.

Without warning the main event fell through when Argentina’s Jorge Barrios failed his health exam and suddenly Mexico’s WBC junior lightweight titleholder Juan Manuel Marquez had no opponent.

After a few days Golden Boy Promotions asked Juarez to fill in to fight Marquez for more money and a spot on the main event and a shot at the world title.

Juarez took it and Guerrero was left in the cold.

“We called out Rocky Juarez for six years and never got the fight,” says Bob Santos, co-manager of Guerrero with Shelley Finkel. “Then we won the world title and Rocky Juarez called us out. We gave him the opportunity to fight us.”

Though disappointed, Guerrero understands. Since turning professional on April 22, 2002, the lanky boxer with cannonballs in his punches has knocked out four of the last five opponents who stepped in the ring. He’s seen what can happen in the world of prizefighting.

Wins and losses on an opponent’s record don’t mean a thing to Guerrero. He remembers what happened two years ago when he fought another Mexican fighter named Gamaliel Diaz who didn’t have the press clippings of other fighters. In that fight Diaz showed him the world of inside fighting and surprised Guerrero on his own turf in taking a split-decision win.

Seven months later Guerrero learned his lesson and pummeled Diaz with a sixth round knockout.

That was lesson one.

After capturing the IBF world title against Eric Aiken at the Staples Center in Los Angeles a year ago, he accepted a fight against another Mexican challenger Orlando Salido.

Guerrero jumped on Salido in the first round with a vicious left hand but the Mexican veteran absorbed the punches like no other opponent the champion had ever faced. Punch after punch seemed ineffectual against Salido who captured a unanimous decision and seemed to be the

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new champion.

“Robert hit him with a punch that twisted him around,” says Santos recalling the first title defense by Guerrero. “The next round Salido came out and fired 150 punches. You just don’t do that after nearly getting knocked down.”

Days later the Nevada State Athletic Commission announced that Salido tested positive for steroids and the fight was deemed a no-decision. However, the IBF told Guerrero he was no longer the titleholder.

That was lesson two.

### **A frozen treat**

Unfair as it sounds, though Salido was established to be juiced by NSAC, the IBF sanctioning organization ordered Guerrero to travel to Denmark to face the number one contender or forfeit the title.

“The first thing that went through my mind was let’s go, let’s do it,” said Guerrero, who had never fought outside of the U.S. “Going to Denmark was probably the most important fight of my career.”

Off went Team Guerrero to the northern hinterlands of Denmark, a country located adjacent the southern portion of Sweden and north of Germany. It was freezing colder than a long lost meat locker.

“There was no place for Robert to run. We had to look for a place for him to work out,” Santos said. “Plus the food wasn’t something we were used to.”

On fight night, Feb. 23, the former IBF champion quietly walked into the Falconer Centret in Copenhagen as his foes fans, who numbered in the thousands, awaited an expected execution of the Californian.

“We had to put it on this guy because we weren’t coming back with a decision win,” said Rubin Guerrero, Robert’s father and trainer. “We got to knock this guy out and dominate.”

Team Guerrero said the cheers for local fighter Spend Abazi were deafening as he was announced. But when Guerrero’s name was announced nary a cheer was heard except for Guerrero’s team.

“The only people clapping for me were those in my corner,” said Guerrero. “It kind of seemed like a Rocky movie like when Rocky was in Russia.”

The plan was clear: knock him out.

When the bell sounded Guerrero attacked with added fervor and fully aware that winning by

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decision was not an option. After eight rounds Abazi had tasted the canvas two times as Guerrero dominated.

But Guerrero’s team worried anyway.

“I told him to pick it up. He (Guerrero) looked at me like I was crazy,” Santos said, knowing that a win by decision might not be possible in a foreign land.

The Gilroy fighter quickly realized that his team was correct. As the bell sounded for the ninth round Guerrero raced across and attacked with greater abandon. Down Abazi went for the third and final time.

As Guerrero’s hand was raised, the crowd roared its approval to the surprise of Guerrero.

“They cheered for me as if I were the hometown guy,” Guerrero remembers fondly. “I’m glad I got that experience.”

That was lesson three.

Once again he has the championship, but once again he faces a relatively unknown fighter from Mexico. In this case he’s looking at the only boxer who can claim a victory over fellow featherweight titleholder Steve Luevano, the WBO featherweight titleholder.

But he’s not worried.

“The experiences I had the loss with Gamaliel Diaz, going to Denmark, the steroid incident with Salido, all that comes into play to make me a better fighter,” says Guerrero eloquently. “Mentally, spiritually and physically you have to gut it out.”