

Nonito Donaire Warns: Filipinos Are Coming

Written by David A. Avila

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Nonito “The Filipino Flash” Donaire hit the heavy bag with his usual flair in the crowded Hollywood boxing gym. Very few of the others realized that he was just days away from a world title fight.

None gave Donaire a chance of beating the fearsome Vic Darchinyan.

No matter, he continued his work.

“The kid told me that he was going to knock Darchinyan out,” said Cameron Dunkin, who manages Donaire. “I felt he could beat him but he insisted he was going to knock him out.”

When Donaire and Darchinyan met in July at the Harbour Yard Arena in Bridgeport, Conn. most felt it was a mere exercise to fill the time for the undefeated Armenian slugger. Especially after Donaire’s younger brother Glenn had been stopped in six rounds less than a year earlier.

“Nonito told me he was going to walk him down and make him run into a left hand,” said Dunkin reciting the conversation just before the fight. “He did exactly what he said and he was exactly right.”

The lean Filipino boxer proved he had the antidote for Darchinyan’s raging bull attack and repeatedly found the mark for his rights and lefts. By the fifth round it was evident that Donaire’s punches were as accurate as a cruise missile. They hit the mark every time.

“That guy can take a punch,” said Donaire of Darchinyan. “I was hitting him and hitting him with good shots but he kept coming.”

But a riveting left hook counter dropped Darchinyan for good and the IBF and IBO flyweight titles changed hands. Donaire became the second of three Filipinos to hold a world title. A month later Gerry Penalosa grabbed the WBO bantamweight belt from Mexico’s Jhonny Gonzalez by knockout.

“It doesn’t feel like I’m a champion,” says Donaire, a well-spoken and articulate person who now lives in Northern California. “I feel like I have to do something more.”

After the stunning victory Donaire was flown to his native Philippines where he met that country’s president, was a guest in numerous television shows and paraded across the country.

What do you do next?

“We’re trying to get one of the other flyweight champions to fight me,” said Donaire, 24.

Donaire’s knockout victory probably woke up the other flyweight champions and junior

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bantamweight champions. Despite the constant smiles, the other boxers near his weight class definitely saw a fighter with great hand speed, good footwork and the power to crack a granite block with either hand.

“This kid can crack,” says Rick Smith, a boxing writer for a local boxing magazine. “The way he put Darchinyan to sleep was a wake up call to everybody in his division.”

The two other major flyweight world titles are possessed by Japanese fighters Daisuki Naito with the WBC flyweight title and Takefumi Sakata with the WBA flyweight title, but both are scheduled to defend their respective titles.

“It’s difficult getting the Japanese to fight Nonito Donaire,” says Cameron Dunkin, who manages Donaire. “Nonito is fast, hits hard and is just huge (in height) for the flyweight division. He’s huge for the super flyweight division too.”

Donaire (18-1, 11 KOs), who was born in the Philippines and moved to California at age 10, now lives in Hayward, California. He still has a large family base in the Philippines.

Watch out for the other Filipino fighters, he warns.

“Everybody knows Manny Pacquiao is the best,” says Donaire. “But there are a lot more Filipinos coming now.”

Donaire predicts more world titles will be claimed by his countrymen in the near future after a long period where prizefighters from the island nation were virtually ignored.

“It’s not that we just started having good fighters from the Philippines, we’ve always had good fighters. We just never got the chance,” said Donaire.

Edito Villamor, who trains many Filipino fighters, said the arrival of Pacquiao helped spark the current explosion of successful Filipino prizefighters.

“Boxing is big the Philippines,” Villamor says.

Following Pacquiao’s huge success, a number of boxing promotions have sent scouts and representatives scouring the Filipino islands. They know there are others with super talent.

In the past, Filipino fighters with good records were brought to this country with less than two weeks to prepare and lost. But those days are over.

“Michael Domingo doesn’t have a good record but when they gave him time to prepare properly he beat a good Mexican fighter who was undefeated,” said Donaire Sr. of a fight that took place in Sacramento last Aug. 11 between Domingo and formerly undefeated Miguel Roman. “He’s a good example of a Filipino fighter who can win if given enough time.”

Now Donaire is one of three Filipinos who hold a world title and anxiously awaits his first title

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defense. But who will it be?

Team Donaire is now looking elsewhere for a suitable opponent.

“Right now it looks like Nonito will be fighting the number one mandatory,” says Nonito Donaire Sr. the father and co-trainer of his son. “That fight might happen on Dec. 1.”

Donaire sits in Darchinyan’s old perch as a fighter to be feared and avoided. Though efforts to arrange a mega fight with fellow flyweight titleholders have been unsuccessful, moving up a weight division or two is a viable option.

“He can fight anybody,” Dunkin says. “He’s just not afraid.”

But the speedy Donaire who has power in either hand plans to do when other Filipinos have not accomplished: unify the flyweight division.

“I want to be the first Filipino champion to have all the belts,” said Donaire. “That would be an accomplishment.”

The Filipino Flash intends to “seize the moment” and plans to show the world his desire was boosted by winning the title.

“My main goal is unification,” re-emphasized Donaire. “I want that more than anything.”

After that, he sees moving up to challenge the Mexican world champions Mijares, Martin Castillo and Arce.

“I have no hesitation fighting them,” Donaire said.

Dunkin says the flyweight champion overflows with confidence and points toward Donaire’s speed and power as an equalizer against bigger opponents.

If he wins against any of those champions it won’t be such a shock.

“This kid can be champion for a long time,” Dunkin says.

Hard Rock Café and Arce

Tijuana’s Jorge Arce returned to Las Vegas and captured a title at the bantamweight division over Tomas Rojas at 1:00 of the sixth round at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino on Sunday.

Who knows if that’s good news or bad news?

Arce is a former flyweight world champion who ventured to the junior bantamweight division and was embarrassed by WBC titleholder Cristian Mijares over 12 rounds.

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Few fighters are as popular in Mexico as Arce, who made his fame in a television reality show where he was able to captivate audiences with his crazy but endearing personality. As a fighter he's shown power and a penchant for slugfests that have made him just as popular in boxing circles.

But can he fight in the junior bantamweight or bantamweight divisions?

There's a bushel of great fighters at 115 and 118 pounds including Martin Castillo, Alex Munoz, Jose Navarro and Fernando Montiel to name a few.

It's not going to be easy for Arce who is now trained by Javier Capetillo.

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Chris Arreola (21-0, 19 KOs) vs. Thomas Hayes (26-1, 18 KOs); Ricardo Cortes (20-1-1, 14 KOs) vs. Fernando Zuniga (26-8, 20 KOs).