

Feliciano Wants Cintron's IBF Belt

Written by David A. Avila

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LOS ANGELES-Dressed in a sharp dark brown suit Jesse Feliciano uses words the way he uses his fists, he brings them on like a sledgehammer but in a colorful manner that borders on poetic.

He has a Rocky Graziano-like flair for words and a mentality born on the gritty side of Las Vegas.

One more thing: he looks like a professional boxer.

No his nose isn't flattened, yet, nor does he bear too many scars from slashing punches, but he has that gleam in his eye whenever he talks about his profession like a large 300-pound man sniffing the steaks on a smoking barbecue.

Attention-hungry Feliciano (15-5-3, 9 KOs) challenges IBF welterweight titleholder Kermit "El Asesino" Cintron (28-1, 26 KOs) at the Staples Center on Friday Nov. 23. The fight will be shown on Showtime pay-per-view and is co-promoted by Main Events and Starboxing.

"He's got what I want, he's got my belt," says Feliciano. "I don't back down and I don't turn away any fights. I'm just that kind of man, crazy I guess."

It's just days away from the pending welterweight collision but Feliciano walks around the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Los Angeles like a brand new sponge soaking in the attention of his first world title fight. No corner of the massive mall is going undiscovered by the Las Vegas prizefighter.

Since turning pro in 2001, Feliciano has emerged as a crowd favorite because he refuses to engage in a boring fight.

"You get knocked out in a boring fight," Feliciano, 25, says. "If you're not paying attention you can be knocked out with one punch."

The soft-spoken Cintron doesn't come to bore people either. Seated in a room too cool considering the foggy day, the amiable fighter is almost hidden in the half-empty room two floors down from a bustling downtown street.

Now trained by Emanuel Steward, the lean knockout artist Cintron is crusading to erase the memories of his only loss suffered more than two years ago to Antonio Margarito. It's not an easy voyage.

"That was the worst fight I've done," Cintron, 28, says wearing a simple white t-shirt emblazoned with the words Kronk Gym. "I looked really bad."

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Since losing to Margarito in 2005, Cintron has reloaded with the assistance of veteran champion-maker Steward and has knocked out all four opponents in blistering fashion.

"His right hand is as hard as Wladimir Klitschko," Steward says. "He seems to put his whole body behind it."

Cintron, a serious and sincere individual, refuses to tear down former or current opponents. In many ways he's aware that a prizefighter is single punch from anonymity. Though he captured the IBF title against Riverside's Mark Suarez, he realizes few boxing fans know he has the title.

"Nobody seems to know I'm a champion," said Cintron, who grabbed the title 13 months ago.

Outside of Las Vegas only a handful of fans know Feliciano, though he's made a habit of beating fighters with spotless records.

"I got the heart, I'm impressive," chirps Feliciano. "Fans like me cause they want to see a real Rocky, but I don't want to get hit that much. I'm all or nothing."

Feliciano fights like a human wrecking ball, a flesh and blood battering machine that never stops until the final bell rings.

"The person who throws the most power punches wins. That's why I come like that," says Feliciano breezily.

Cintron, though he possesses staggering power, has come to realize that beating fighters in the elite level means a different more Zen-like approach. He respects all opponents who dare to step inside the ropes.

"Jesse Feliciano is a dangerous fighter," Cintron says almost in a whisper. "He has nothing to lose. He fights that way too."

Steward says that Cintron, a fighter he took on reluctantly at first, has evolved into one of his prized pupils. He expects the muscular power puncher to eventually blitz through Feliciano, then mow down Paul Williams, Miguel Cotto, Shane Mosley and Floyd Mayweather. Of course he wants Margarito even sooner.

"That's a fight I really want," Cintron says with his eyes blazing.

Steward smiles at the hunger his fighter feels.

"He's not real fast but his punches seem to find the mark," said Steward who has trained several champions in the past and present including Tommy Hearn, Jermain Taylor and Klitschko. "I can feel his punches through the mitts. They turn me around."

Still walking around the downtown hotel Feliciano smiles as he continues to soak in the championship atmosphere. Seeing Cintron makes him smile even more.

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"Kermit Cintron is going to be in my face and he's not going to give up that easily. I've just to take his heart away, make him give up or knock him out," Feliciano says with no hesitation. "Regardless of who I'm fighting, I'm not worried about nothing but the guy in front of me. Right now I'm as cool as an iceberg."

Like Graziano, he just wants one chance to land his punch.