

## Karmazin: "A Smart Boxer, But No De La Hoya."

Written by David A. Avila  
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LOS ANGELES-Everyday Roman Karmazin strolls along the streets of Hollywood and not a single person knows one of Russia's best boxers.

Fate is sometimes cruel.

In 2001 Karmazin was signed and set to meet Oscar De La Hoya in a welterweight fight. But soon after the press conference and media hype, the East Los Angeles boxer suffered an injury to his hand. The fight never was rescheduled and all that remained was a footnote in history.

Karmazin shrugs his shoulders at the misfortune.

Now it's 2008 and Karmazin is about to meet Africa's Alex Bunema (28-5-2, 14 KOs) at Madison Square Garden on Saturday Jan. 19. A win by the Russian junior middleweight could catapult him into another world title shot.

But no De La Hoya.

"People back home always told me I'm a smart boxer, but no De La Hoya," said Karmazin (36-2-1, 23 KOs), who began training in the Wild Card Gym in 2001 when the fight was signed with De La Hoya. It's also where he met trainer Freddie Roach. "I would have liked to have proved what I can do."

Despite the inability to test his skills against the future Hall of Famer, the Russian boxer decided the sunny climate, the abundance of sparring and the presence of Freddie Roach was a good reason to make it his boxing central.

"Where else can I enjoy sunshine almost every day," Karmazin says.

Roach says Karmazin would have been a formidable foe for the Golden Boy. Last year the owner of the Wild Card Boxing Gym helped prepare De La Hoya for the showdown against Floyd Mayweather. He experienced first hand the Golden Boy's fighting tools.

"They're two different kind of boxers," said Roach as he watched Karmazin go through his boxing drills in the crowded gym. "Roman is a great counter puncher and he has a beautiful power left hook."

So does De La Hoya.

"Oscar is a different type of fighter and he's very fast," said Roach, who declined to say who would win a match between both fighters. "It would be a good fight."

One common opponent both Karmazin and De La Hoya had was Spain's Javier Castillejo.

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Karmazin lost in 2002 while De La Hoya soundly beat him in 2001.

It could have been Karmazin fighting De La Hoya, but alas, fate spun in another direction.

Though Roach has worked with Karmazin for more than six years, he knows the chances of the Russian boxer getting to fight De La Hoya are remote.

But De La Hoya does know Karmazin.

"Oscar was sitting in the front row with Bernard Hopkins when Roman beat up Kassim Ouma for the world title," said Steve Bash, who advises Karmazin and translates. "He winked at Oscar as he was hitting Ouma."

Karmazin battered Ouma for 12 rounds while De La Hoya, Bernard Hopkins and Shane Mosley watched their newly signed boxer get his title ripped away. But in his next fight, Karmazin lost the title to Cory Spinks in St. Louis.

"Everybody says that I won the fight against Spinks. For me, in my mind, I lost that fight," says Karmazin, a soft-spoken and well-mannered person in and out of the ring. "I lost it myself."

Though he only has a few years left in his career, he still hopes to make that one big score against an elite fighter.

Last November he met former WBA junior middleweight titleholder Alex "Terra" Garcia of Mexico and dominated him. In the third round Karmazin knocked Garcia out with a blistering left hook.

Roach was not surprised.

"He's capable of fighting any style of opponent," says Roach who sees Karmazin walk through the doors of the Wild Card every day. "He just knows boxing."

But does boxing know Karmazin?

His next opponent Bunema is a rugged boxer with a ton of experience. He's the kind of fighter that can ruin a run for the world title and even the slim chance of meeting De La Hoya.

"A fight against Oscar would be a good opportunity to win some money, and a great chance to show the entire world that I can compete with the best," Karmazin says with resignation. "I want a chance to prove who I am."

### **Madison Square Garden**

The old New York edifice is enjoying a resurgence in big boxing title matches.

This weekend is the first world title fight card for 2008 but a few more are coming down the road

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including the heavyweight showdown between IBF titleholder Wladimir Klitschko of the Ukraine and WBO titleholder Sultan Ibragimov of Russia on Feb. 23.

Last November Miguel Cotto defended his welterweight title against Sugar Shane Mosley.

It's beginning to be like old times at the Garden, which had its heyday before the 1960s and hosted such epic battles as Sugar Ray Robinson's fights against Jake LaMotta, Henry Armstrong and Gene Fullmer in the Manhattan arena.

The first version of Madison Square Garden was erected in 1879 and was located on 26th Street and Madison Avenue. It closed its doors in 1890.

A second version was built on the same site in 1890 and had a Moorish architecture. It lasted until 1925.

The next version opened its doors in 1925 but was moved to 50th Street and Eighth Avenue by its builder Tex Rickard, he of Jack Dempsey fame. Of course the famous heavyweight fought there one time.

The fourth and current version of the Garden was built in 1968. Penn Station is situated underneath the arena. Muhammad Ali's first fight with heavyweight champion Joe Frazier was the first mega fight in the Garden.