

Andre Ward: A Bit Of Duran, Floyd, Roy

Written by Raymond Markarian
Sunday, 20 January 2008 19:00

Andre Ward is not only first U.S. Boxing Olympic Gold Medalist since 1996, he is also one of the hottest young fighters in the sport today.

This was my first chance to meet with the Oakland, CA. native.

He speaks with confidence and feels like he is ready for the next level. The guy is a boxing junkie. For Andre, boxing is not just a game it is a way of life.

Raymond Markarian: Tell me about how you began boxing.

Andre Ward: Well basically, I was talented in a lot of different sports growing up. My father was a boxer when he was in high school and he was 15-0 as a heavyweight. He used to tell me stories about his preparation for fights, the fights themselves, and he just really inspired me. I wanted to be just like my dad. I wanted to put down every other sport to see what boxing was about. We finally went to the gym when I was 9 years old, and I got my start. From the beginning, my father wanted me to learn the art of boxing. He wanted me to be taught how to hit, and not get hit. We went to the gym and ran into Virgil Hunter who is now my godfather and trainer and we have been together ever since. That was how I got my start in the game. I got battle tested for a year before my first amateur fight. I was well schooled and had to overcome some giants, so to speak, in the gym before my first amateur fight. When I went to the next level, and began fighting, I was ready mentally and physically and I have not looked back since.

RM: If you could compare your style to anyone who would it be?

Ward: I don't think my style is comparable to anybody. At times I have a little bit of Duran in me, you know because I could fight rugged and break you down inside, you can also see glimpses of Roy, and you can see glimpses of Floyd as well. It is not intentional, I don't try to fight like them but talent is talent and skill is skill. There is not one person per say, you could put your hand on because I am still evolving. I have 14 fights now and I am doing things now that I was not doing in my 2nd or 3rd fight. So I am still evolving and I am excited to reach the next level. To be a champion, you have to be able to adjust. If you look at Floyd Mayweather in his last 4 or 5 fights, he couldn't fight the same way. He had the base style with the shoulder roll defense and different things like that. But he had to be able to adjust to his opponent. That is one of the major keys for me being victorious, being able to adjust on a dime.

RM: When do you fight again Andre?

AW: We are looking to fight on February 29th, maybe early March, and possibly again in April.

RM: What can we expect from Andre Ward in 2008, what are your options for this year?

AW: Well, the main thing is to keep winning. I let the critics worry about time tables and who I

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should fight and everything like that. We are just going to keep taking what presents itself. Like I said, I believe I could go with the best of them right now. I believe you have to think that way and I don't believe you can think any other way in a game like this. I also know I am on the verge to go to another level. My body is still maturing and filling out and I am getting stronger daily both mentally, and physically. Just the whole spectrum is coming together. In 2008, I am looking for it to be a big year, hopefully a foundation year. And if the Lord wills it, in 2009, we will be closer to making bigger things happen.

RM: Many boxing experts consider you to be one of the best young fighters in the world. Do you feel pressure to live up to those expectations?

AW: Thank you, but not really, I mean, I appreciate the comments people make about me and I take it in stride. But I just have to keep winning. There is no one that can set the bar higher for me than myself.

RM: A few months ago, there were talks about you fighting Edison Miranda in 2008, is there any truth to that?

AW: Well Miranda's name was brought up and Allan Green was brought up too. But there was nothing that came to me personally. So, it was just something that was just brought up. I don't know who brought it up. I am not quite sure if it was a thought from Goossen my promoter, but it really didn't go any further than that so it was not something we gave a whole lot of thought. So, that is where we stand with that now.

RM: Ok, well let me ask you this, when do you think you will be ready to fight some of the bigger names like Kelly Pavlik, Jermain Taylor, Kessler, or any others?

AW: You have to pay your dues. You have to earn it. You have to keep winning. I have had 14 fights now but like I said, I am still evolving. I just have to keep winning and I will let the critics worry about the time tables. I cannot worry about it. I just have to do my part and that is to win. You know, I mean, these guys have rankings and status like they have. But like I said, I believe I could beat all these guys. I am not trying to be braggadocious but, you have to think like that. You know, at the same time, business is always something you have to consider. I think it is a disservice for the boxers that wouldn't consider it. This isn't pride fighting, it is prize fighting. We are fighting for a prize. So, the bottom line is if you make a step like that you have to be compensated. So everything has to be right and everything and has to be clicking on all cylinders and if it was then that is definitely a fight I would be willing to take. But, then you have to ask yourself, after that then what? Where do we go from there?

RM: You say your goal is to be the best. When your career is over, do you think winning the Olympic Gold Medal will be your greatest accomplishment in boxing?

AW: No I don't. The Gold Medal is something that is close to my heart, representing the U.S.A. against so many different countries is definitely an honor. To be honest, winning a world championship would be difficult to surpass a Gold medal in my eyes, but I am definitely here to become a world champion, and go to the Hall of Fame. I don't want to crawl in the Hall of Fame.

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I want to walk into the Hall of Fame on my own terms. I am here to reach the top and I believe it is going to happen by the grace of God.

RM: With the Olympic Games coming up this summer is there any advice you would like to give to the boxing competitors?

AW: Well there is a lot of great talent out there. Rau'shee Warren and Demetrius Andrade won the world championships last year. But it is not just them, we have a very talented team. I would tell them that it is a short period of time and the results are definitely worth it, just pay your dues and don't cut any corners and you will be compensated in the end.

RM: What do you think of the state of boxing? Do you think it is on the rise or is there still more work to do?

AW: I think boxing needs to keep doing what it is doing. There were articles about people saying boxing is dying out but boxing is not going anywhere. MMA is hot right now and some of those guys train in my gym, King's Gym, and I have respect for those guys because they train just as hard as boxers do. The MMA is on the rise right now but boxing is America's past time. Boxing has been here and it is going to be here in the future.

RM: What do you like to do for fun?

AW: Spending time with my wife and two kids that is my party man! I live a simple life. We have a place in Dublin, CA, and I just love to spend time with my family, that's my party. You know, I am a simple man, and it is well-documented that I am a Christian and I believe in the Lord and I am thankful for everything he has provided for me and my family.

RM: OK Andre, tell me something about yourself that you want the boxing world to know. Is there anything else you want to say?

AW: Stay tuned! Just stay tuned!

Contact: Raymond.Markarian@yahoo.com