

## Hallback & Holm Lead Strong Pechanga Card

Written by David A. Avila  
Monday, 04 February 2008 19:00

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Several of the best female fighters in the world will be showing off their fistic talent including Chevelle Hallback, Holly Holm and Melissa Hernandez.

If you like female boxing, this is a “can’t miss” fight card.

Three world title bouts are featured at the Pechanga Resort and Casino on Thursday Feb. 7. The fight card that begins at 6:30 p.m. is promoted by Roy Englebrecht Events and IFBA.

The entire fight card is one of the strongest in the last two years.

“This all-California under card is a look into the future of women’s boxing,” stated Judy Kulis, IFBA president. “Some top young talent will be showcased.”

Holm (20-1-2), the current welterweight champion, is breaking out of her security blanket and heading toward new adventures. Only once in her career had she fought outside of New Mexico.

The tall redhead has captured junior welterweight, junior middleweight titles and beaten a number of contenders in various divisions. But all of those fights were in her home state with favorable conditions.

It says something that she is willing to fight in California.

“She’s willing to fight anybody,” said Sue Fox, editor-in-chief of WBAN, the premier female boxing site.

Facing Holm will be Puerto Rico’s Belinda Laracuenta (23-19-3) a very formidable boxer who’s pretty much faced any female boxer that’s donned boxing gloves. She can fight.

Holm was voted Fighter of the Year by WBAN and has wins over Christy Martin, Mia St. John and Chevelle Hallback who is also on the fight card.

“She beat me,” said Hallback, a lightweight who fought Holm last year. “I’d love to fight her again.”

Like Holm, Hallback will fight anybody regardless of weight class.

In her last appearance, Hallback fought Terri Blair in a slugfest that took place at Pechanga and resulted in being named the Fight of the Year.

“Terri (Blair) had the kind of style that makes for good fights,” said Hallback (26-5-1, 11 KOs), who now lives in Tampa, Florida. “She goes forward and I just went for it.”

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Hallback doesn't get a break when she meets Bronx fighter Melissa "Hurricane" Hernandez (7-1-1) for the vacant IFBA lightweight title. Hernandez is the current GBU lightweight titleholder and a former junior featherweight world champion.

"It's going to be an interesting fight," Hallback says. "She's a pretty good fighter."

The Floridian formerly lived in Temecula so she should have a few fans in attendance. Aside from her current foe, Hallback really would like to show fans that she can fight better than shown against Holm last year.

"It's great that Holly Holm is fighting on this card. She usually fights in New Mexico and who can blame her for just fighting there," said Hallback. "I don't know what happened, but that was not the real Chevelle Hallback that fought her."

### Crystal vs. Jennifer

In a six-round contest between Californians, Oxnard's Crystal Morales meets Northridge's Jennifer Barber in a lightweight battle between former amateur stars.

Morales participated on the Junior Olympics team for Mexico and successfully fought internationally.

"We've sparred before," said Morales of Barber. "I know her style. I wanted a fight badly so I took this fight with her. Nobody wants to fight her."

Barber is a former U.S. National Golden Gloves champion and is currently undefeated as a professional.

They aren't ducking anybody

In women's boxing you won't find many undefeated fighters. Because of a dearth of female boxers, usually the best need to fight the best and spotless records usually mean a boxer has not fought quality opposition.

"It's not like men," said Mia St. John. "Since there are so few female fighters the good boxers have to fight other good boxers."

Don Leonard, a boxing and MMA writer for a Southern California magazine, said female fighters do not care about undefeated records.

"Everybody loses a fight here and there," Leonard said. "When you see losses on a women fighter's record, it only means they've fought good people. They aren't ducking anybody."

### Other fights

San Diego's Carly Batey (3-2-2) has signed to face San Francisco's Ana Julaton (1-0) in a

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bantamweight bout scheduled for six rounds.

Batey lost a close battle against Kaliesha West last summer but proved she can fight with anybody in her weight division. Julaton is diving into her second tough test after beating veteran Rita Valentini last November. It should be a close and gritty encounter.

World champion Lisa Brown (13-3-3) of Canada will be making a title defense against hard-hitting Jeri Sitzes of Missouri. It very well could be the best fight on the card.

Brown has an all action pressure style and Sitzes is all for that.

Sitzes (14-6-1, 6 KOs) loves to storm the palace with her two-fisted attack and usually wins her fights by knockout. She's won nine consecutive bouts and hasn't lost in three years.

"She's a tough girl," said James Pena, whose fighter Melinda Cooper fought Sitzes a couple of years ago in a taut battle.

Canada's Brown captured the IFBA junior featherweight title by unanimous decision against New Mexico's Jackie Chavez in her home state a year ago. She's been unable to find an opponent in almost a year.

### **More exciting than men**

Leonard, who follows both men and women prizefighting, says there's something special about watching the female fighters.

"It's hard to explain but it's more exciting to watch women fight at the higher level," said Leonard. "When you see their skill and intensity it makes the men fighters look boring. The women fighters are just more exciting than men."

***Fox Sports Network will be showing a replay of the Thursday fights from Pechanga on Friday night. Emmy-award winner Rich Marotta is providing the commentary.***