“There were times when I didn’t think I’d make any money in this sport,” remembers WBC super bantamweight champion Israel Vazquez (42-4, 31 KO’s). “I was giving so much of myself and I was getting very little in return. I seriously considered giving up boxing.”

That was in 2000 and boy how things have changed. Vazquez is days away from his highly anticipated third meeting on March 1st against Rafael Marquez which will earn him a high six figure purse. Their second encounter was considered 2007’s fight of the year by most boxing media outlets, with good reason.

To say that their fight last August was a breath-taking example of machismo-tinged warfare would be correct. It was beautiful and awe inspiring. Better than any of the Gatti vs. Ward fights. As good as Barrera vs. Morales I. Vazquez stopped Marquez after six rounds of violent give and take action.

Their rubber match is expected to be no less spectacular than the first two. “He’s bringing everything. He’s looking to redeem himself. I know the feeling,” said Vazquez. “After I lost the first fight to him I felt the same way. I wanted to prove myself in the worst way.”

The initial press conference to announce the Showtime televised event drew close to sixty members of the media. That’s a far cry from where Vazquez was a few years ago. Unnoticed and practically ignored by the press, it took Vazquez years and trouncing several well-known victims to get to this point.

Knockout wins over world champions Oscar “Chololo” Larios, Jhonny Gonzalez and Marquez, have catapulted the30-year-old Mexico City native to the top of most credible pound for pound lists.

Things were remarkably different a few years ago.

“Israel Vazquez is done. He looks shot,” was the response I got from a friend in late 2002 after having viewed Vazquez’s fight against Justo Almazan in National City, California. Almazan was a rugged Mexican “opponent” type with an 8 and 27 record who was supposed to be a mere snack for a high level fighter like Vazquez.

Vazquez was on the comeback trail after a brutal affair in an “interim” title shot against the aforementioned Larios in which both men fought the fight of their lives. It was an easy “fight of the year candidate” in which Vazquez lost by TKO in the twelfth round.

Many felt that the Larios fight took too much out of Vazquez and there he was, struggling against a journeyman in a small venue close to the border town of Tijuana.

“I remember that fight,” said Vazquez. “Obviously I didn’t take it too seriously and I wanted to

get some rounds in. It was at a time when I was feeling very down about the loss to Larios and my career in general."

The fact that Vazquez had knocked Larios unconscious in the first round of their first meeting in 1997 had made him a bit overconfident. By 2002, Larios was in his prime and fought a masterpiece which ended Vazquez's championship aspirations for the moment. "He fought a brilliant fight. It was "Chololo" at his best," said Vazquez. "Larios in his prime was almost unbeatable. You had to fight a perfect fight to beat him."

Vazquez eventually avenged the loss in their third meeting by stopping Larios in 2005 and taking his WBC title in the process. "I've been lucky that I've had the opportunity to fight meaningful fights. My team and my manager Frank (Espinoza) have put me in the right situations and I've responded well," said Vazquez. "I had to fight and beat someone like "Chololo" who had defended his title nine times in order to make my name. After beating Jhonny Gonzalez and Rafael Marquez that's when I started to make some noise."

Quite a bit of noise.

Seeing the number of press that showed up to the first Vazquez vs. Marquez III press conference was a humbling experience for the father of two. "I never imagined it. I always dreamed of being part of an article somewhere but all this is unbelievable," said Vazquez. "It's a testament to the hunger and motivation that I carry with me. That's what's made this success possible."

The Showtime network which will televise the clash for the third time has been following Team Vazquez around for their pre fight preview titled All Access: Vazquez vs. Marquez III. "It's been an amazing experience to be filmed and to see it play on t.v. and on the internet. It's indescribable," said Vazquez. "I'm glad Showtime realizes that this fight merits all the attention they've been giving it. Rafael Marquez is a great fighter who's given great performances and our styles will always combine for an explosive fight."

The fight itself is expected to shake-up the Home Depot Center by the fans and media. The outcome is still considered a toss up. "There are no guarantees in this type of fight," said Vazquez's manager Frank Espinoza. "You've got two elite and explosive, pound for pound fighters that are determined to win. Absolutely anything can happen at anytime. The only thing I'm sure of is that it'll be a dramatic fight with a dramatic ending."

There's been talk that if Vazquez should defeat Marquez, he'll likely face Mexican legend Marco Antonio Barrera who's looking to step out of retirement in order to face the two time WBC Champ. "It would be an honor and a dream come true," said Vazquez. "Fighting someone I've always idolized like Barrera would feel a little strange but I would welcome the opportunity."

One has to wonder if such talk will only serve to take his focus away from the very dangerous Marquez. "Not at all. It motivates me even more. I'm very focused for the fight against Rafael. I have that hunger to be someone and I know that if I win this fight, bigger and better things will happen for me," said Vazquez. "I know I have to win or else any talk about fighting Barrera is

just talk."

Both men know deep inside, that the winner on March 1st will be the one who lands the bigger, more accurate bombs. So don't expect any fancy dancing in the ring ala "Money" Mayweather and don't expect anyone to back up. Don't expect many clinches, if any at all. "The first two fights were both fight of the year candidates for 2007 and I don't think the third fight will be the exception," said Vazquez. "This is a fight for greatness and to solidify the economic future of our families. It's what motivates Rafa and I. It's the reason you will see another classic. Expect fireworks and a lot of heart because that's what we're both bringing on Saturday night."

For the Showtime produced fight preview, All Access: Vazquez vs. Marquez III follow the links:

Part 1:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_9LDqK1jhw&feature=user

Part 2:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72K0w7aNrZk&feature=user

Part 3:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YJPBsoeSO4&feature=user

Tickets: Priced at $350, $150, $75, $50 and $25, can be purchased at The Home Depot Center Box Office, or by calling 310-630-2020. You can also order online at www.ticketmaster.com

For more on Israel Vazquez go to: www.espinozaboxingclub.com