

David Diaz, Next Fight For Pacquiao?

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
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"I don't feel like I have people's respect yet but it'll come," said WBC lightweight champion David Diaz from his home in Chicago. "I've been overcoming odds for a long time. I wasn't supposed to be a champion. I wasn't supposed to beat Morales but I did. I have to keep proving people wrong."

Less than a year ago, Diaz (33-1, 17 KOs) beat and retired the legendary Erik Morales in defense of his belt. Now, the 31-year old finds himself in the middle of the Manny "Pac Man" Pacquiao sweepstakes.

Diaz will be taking on Ramon Montano (14-3) as part of the Juan Manuel Marquez vs. Pacquiao undercard. If Diaz wins and Pacquiao does his part by defeating Marquez, the young Mexican-American is guaranteed a well paid encounter against the Filipino sensation.

"If it happens, it'll be a dream opportunity," said Diaz. "But we both have to win. I think Manny has a tough road ahead of him. I can't discount a great fighter like Juan Manuel Marquez. He could easily ruin everything."

Diaz looks to be matched safe on Saturday night against Montano who hasn't beaten anyone of note. A quick look at his record on boxrec.com gives one a definitive picture of the fighter: a Mexican tough guy who can't punch but shows up to give guys like Diaz a hard time.

Conventional wisdom would lead one to believe that Diaz will obliterate Montano. The champion isn't looking past anyone.

"Not at all. If there's one thing I've learned is to never underestimate anybody," said Diaz. "I trained very hard for this guy. Just like I always do. Whether it's Ramon Montano, Erik Morales or god willing, Manny Pacquiao, in the future."

Diaz's biggest win to date came at the expense of one of Mexico's greatest warriors when he defeated "El Terrible" Morales. Morales, a former three division champion was considered a top pound for pound fighter at his peak. "It was exciting to fight him. He's given boxing fans a lot. They've always put him on a pedestal because he's been a great champion," said Diaz. "To fight him was an honor and to win at the Allstate Arena where I won my first golden gloves championship was a dream come true."

The hotly contested fight against Morales came down to the final few rounds. "I needed the last round to win and I did it," said Diaz. "In the end I wanted it more. I showed that my desire to win was greater."

Some fans weren't convinced. "A lot of fans gave me praise but some of them came up to me and said they felt I didn't beat Morales. That's their opinion and they're entitled to it," said Diaz. "I think a lot of them were hardcore Morales fans and they just couldn't accept to see one of

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their heroes lose.”

Diaz understands how passionate the Mexican community can be about boxing and their boxing idols. Diaz is the youngest of nine kids whose parents emigrated to “The Windy City” from the state of Guerrero, Mexico. “It’s great to be a Mexican American from Chicago. I love Chicago. I’m also very proud of my Mexican heritage,” said Diaz. “We’ve held on to a lot of our traditional values. I feel like I’m getting the best of both worlds.”

The son of retired factory laborers learned his work ethic from his parents who toiled long hours in order to provide for their large family.

“I would see them go to work even when they were sick,” remembers Diaz. “They knew they had to work no matter what and they were my example. That’s why I’m such a hard worker in the gym.”

The work has paid off since it’s been great conditioning which has saved him on repeated occasions. His back and forth battle against Armando Santa Cruz in his title-winning effort was a prime example. Behind on all scorecards, Diaz kept pursuing and managed to land a picture perfect punch that meant the beginning of the end for Santa Cruz.

“We thought we could win in the later rounds,” said Diaz. “We saw tapes and noticed that he would tend to fade later in the fight. My trainer said we needed a knockout to win so I went out there and made it happen. That’s when I landed the uppercut right on the button and went on to stop him in the tenth round.”

It was that rousing victory for the WBC interim lightweight title that led to the fight against Morales. The win against Morales helped to put him in an enviable position as the leading candidate for the big money “Pac Man” sweepstakes. “I want that fight badly. Pacquiao is the top dog,” said Diaz. “Beating him would be a great achievement. I know I’d be the underdog like always but there’s no quit in me. I’ve proved it in the past. I think you’d see a good old fashioned war.”

Even though Marquez is a fellow Mexican, Diaz is no fool. Big money fights are every boxer’s big dream. “Yes. Of course I’ll be rooting for Pac Man,” said Diaz. “If he beats Marquez, he’s coming up to 135 and I’ll be there waiting to welcome him. I’m just hoping Marquez will cooperate.”

The Top Rank/Golden Boy promotion, Unfinished Business: Juan Manuel Marquez vs. Manny Pacquiao will be televised on HBO Pay-Per-View on March 15 from the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas.