The final press conference for the Andre Ward vs. Rubin Williams fight on Thursday, in San Jose, Ca, took place in the Kings Boxing Gym on Monday afternoon.

Although the press conference was one sided, since Ward's opponent was not there, the Olympic gold medalist was a gracious host, and spoke with candor about how he feels going into the fight.

There was a genuine quality coming from the Oakland native, as he says all the right things a future champion should.

Ward 14-0 (9 KOs) has his own ideas about why he believes the ultimate goal of winning a championship is around the corner.

"I respect the game of boxing," he said. "I believe that is part of the reason why I am successful. I continue to work on my craft and stay in shape in between fights. Hopefully by the grace of God, I will become a world champion."

The skeptics have spoken clearly and loudly about Ward's rise to the championship level. The pace has been too meaaured, they've said. But the fighter keeps on punching the clock everyday.

"I am very happy with my pace. We continue to put in work and just keep the ball moving. You know, my job is to win. I let the critics worry about time tables," Andre said, sporting a red Jordan long sleeve shirt and gray sweats.

In Andre's eyes, winning a gold is an honor but it is also target for criticism.

"Just because I won the gold medal, many people think that I don't have that drive to be the best anymore. So they try to test you. You know, there is a lot of talk about me being a gold medalist and other fighters coming after me but I am used to it. I had a successful amateur career as well so I have been preparing for this. No one could be an overnight superstar. It takes time, work, and dedication. I am excited to go out and execute our gameplan.

His opponent, Rubin Williams, is no flash in the pan. He will be there to win. Moreover, "Mr. Hollywood," is by far Andre Ward's toughest test in his now almost 4 year professional career. The 31- year-old Williams, 29-3 (16 KOs) lost to Allan Green in his last fight, fought Antwun Echols to a draw, and lost to Jeff Lacy in a 7- round slugfest.

There are many boxing purists that view this fight for Ward as a barometer to future success.

Ward was asked about how he reacted to the reports that Williams was speaking of putting

Ward to sleep on Thursday night.

Ward responded firmly: "Well they all say that don't they? Every other fighter has said that too. That is what they are supposed to say. I am not going to do any talking. All of my words will be spoken on Thursday night."

When asked about who or when he plans to fight after this one, Ward said, "I could not even tell you right now. The only thing on my mind is Rubin Williams."

Care to predict a KO, and round? "I predict a win," Ward said. "I am going for the win."

Dan Goossen had a clearer outlook of the future for the Bay Area boxing favorite. Goossen said, "Andre has all the ingredients to be what anyone of us would want to be at 24 years old. He continues to grow and mature as a fighter and a family man. If Andre wins this fight, God-willing, I want to get him back into the ring in June. With each fight, providing that we are successful here on Thursday night, we will go up another notch."

NEW GOOSSEN PROMOTION
Making exciting fights is important for this sport. But rewarding the fighters that risk their lives in the ring is probably more significant. Many times in boxing, a fighter will give his all in victory but get little fanfare or financial gain.

(Who can ever forget the image of Rocky Balboa sitting by his locker next to Spider Rico collecting his $60 purse?)

It's always a difficult task building up a prospect, particularly one with no Olympic pedigree. A prospect knows rewards come when they ascend up the ranking ladder, so that they can finally secure a title shot, and some real money. Until then, a fighter has to engage in exciting fights, if they want to build a rep, but also guard that golden 'O' in the loss column.

I once had a boxer tell me, "Rankings do not matter to boxing fans, only exciting fights," and I believe that contention rings true. In that vein, Goossen Tutor Promotions and "The American Metal & Iron Fight Night at the Tank" have come up with a concept to encourage fledgling pros to turn it up a notch, with a financial kick behind it.

Dan Goossen, the promoter of the upcoming boxing event on March 20th featuring Andre Ward, spoke with TSS about his attempt to show appreciation to the best 4 round fighters in boxing with "You Be The Judge."

"You Be The Judge" is a contest that lets the crowd decide the most exciting 4 round fighter of the night by allowing the fans to choose which winner of the 4 rounder fights brings the most entertainment. The winners of the 4 round fights will be brought to the center of the ring before the main event and the one that gets the most cheers gets a $500 check.

"Let me just put it to you like this. When was the last time you wrote a story about a 4 round fight?" Goossen said. "You Be The Judge was created to allow the fans to have a voice. Four

round fights do not get very much interest. But some of the best fights out there are the four rounders. The fighters are always hungry, want attention, and seem to want to please the crowds. Many times, these four round fighters don't get more than about $2,000 for a fight. But "You Be The Judge" is a way for them to make some extra money and build a fan base."

Goossen seemed proud to show gratitude to the 4 round fighters and speaks of the idea as a victory for the sport of boxing.

"Everybody is a winner," Goossen said. "People get excited about the bouts, the fighters get a $500 bonus, and it engages the fans. The best part about it is that it gives the four round fighters a platform."

The winner of the "You Be The Judge" contest will be chosen before the main event of Goossen's next promotion that showcases Andre Ward vs. Rubin Williams in San Jose, Ca.

Francisco Santana 8-0 (4 KO's), a fighter on the under card of the show this Thursday was a past winner of "You Be the Judge" and has gained more extra support in the San Jose area because of the contest.

Goossen said, "That is what this challenge can do for young boxers, it attracts people around them. We've seen the same thing with American Idol, the fans' input counts. "You Be the Judge" allows the boxing fans to be the judge."