Michael Katsidis often does his roadwork at 3 a.m. because he believes no one else in his profession – which is the profession of pain – is willing to do so. That’s how he sees boxing really – as a collection of decisions to do what others will not or cannot do themselves.

Visit his website and you can watch Katsidis celebrating this past Christmas morning in a way he believes his peers did not. The video starts with a traditional singing of “Silent Night’’ until, first quietly and then not so quietly, one begins to hear a different kind of Christmas carol.

“Let the bodies hit the floor! Let the bodies hit the floor!’’ the song finally screams out, heavy metal music banging behind the words until your head feels like it’s going to explode.

Those words grow louder as the images of presents under a tree fade and there is Katsidis, stripped to the waist and windmilling punches at his trainer Brendon Smith as if he is fighting for his life. It is an unconventional Christmas Day workout that ends with sweat pouring off the young Australian lightweight as he looks into the camera and says, “Joel Casamayor, here we come.’’

Saturday night Katsisdis will finally be in the presence of the man, a 36-year-old Cuban legend who many in boxing believe may still be the best lightweight in the world. They will not be exchanging gifts or pleasantries at the Morongo Casino Resort and Spa when they do finally meet, unless you consider their ability to cause the other pain with their fists a gift, which frankly it is.

It is a painful one but one that has blessed both and Saturday night they will turn those blessings on each other while trying to decide their own future fate and that of the other man’s. If 27-year-old Katsidis can hold on to the WBO 135-pound title through force of will as much as with his skills he will become one of the hottest names in boxing because his is a style meant for television. If he cannot, experience will have won out over youth as it often does because Casamayor is one of the cagiest boxers in the sport.

This will be slick savagery against the more obvious variety, the latter coming from a young man who lives to fight as much with his heart as his hands. As match ups go, it is fascinating warfare but for Michael Katsidis it is more than that. It is a warrior’s dream: a chance to trade blood and accept pain in exchange for a dangerous shot at glory.

“He’s the most determined fighter I’ve seen in a long, long time,’’ Smith said recently from Venice Beach, where he has been preparing Katsidis for the main event of a HBO Boxing After Dark event that could propel his fighter into the collective consciousness of American fans because he is a throwback to days when everything in boxing was black and white, including the color of blood on the screen.

“His will to win is second to none. Where he finds it from I’m unsure but I know he has the heart

of a lion. Whoever he fights is in for a hell of a fight. He makes me proud, this young bloke.’’

Katsidis is 23-0 with 20 knockouts and, frankly, most of those victories have been one-sided stoppages. But his last two fights have packed within them the kind of danger and visual aids that can, if they continue, do for Katsidis what they once did for Arturo Gatti.

This is his hope and that of HBO executives and the promoter who made the match, Oscar De La Hoya.

“He’s a throwback like Gatti,’’ insisted Golden Boy Promotions matchmaker Eric Gomez, who made the Casamayor fight after first thinking he’d landed Katsidis a unification bout with Juan Diaz only to watch promoter Don King refuse to allow Diaz to face him and then see 36-year-old Nate Campbell batter Diaz to become unified champion.

“There’s not too much defense (with Katsidis). He relies on his punching power. He’s a crowd pleasing fighter. He gets cut. He gets up. He hits like a mule. Fans love the excitement.

“HBO is giving Katsidis this great opportunity to break through and please the public. He’s got the perfect set-up. He’s fighting an aging champion with a big reputation who’s been in a lot of wars. It’s the history of boxing - the young undefeated kid against the old lion. Now it’s up to him to deliver. If he can’t fight he’ll get exposed by Casamayor. If he can he’ll become a star after this fight.

“Excitement wise I’m sold on him 100 per cent. If he can stop Casamayor any non-believers, including myself, will become believers. If he can pull this off I’m excited about all the possibilities for him. Juan Diaz. David Diaz. Manny Pacquiao. Could you imagine a fight between him and Ricky Hatton down the line?’’

Not without a transfusion involved for someone but that is another night. First Katsidis must solve the riddle of Casamayor (35-3-1, 21 KO). Long regarded to be among the best lightweights in the world, Casamayor is coming off a lackluster performance against Jose Armando Santa Cruz in November when he was awarded a split decision few thought he’d earned. He insists that bad night was a result of a 13-month absence from the ring, not any slippage in skills and reflexes, but whether Casamayor is a shadow now of what he once was or whether that performance was indeed the predictable result of too long a layoff, Katsidis could care less about. He has been training for months for this and when the two finally met at the weigh-in Thursday he could not hold back.

The young Aussie stood so close to his elder during a photo shoot that their lips nearly touched. Then he snapped, “You’re nervous.’’ When Casamayor had the Aussie’s words translated he went into a rage but later Katsidis claimed he could “smell the anxiety’’ on Casamayor. Time will tell about that but it was the kind of bold statement that helped make Gatti one of boxing’s most beloved fighters.

But it takes more than talk to replace him in the public’s hearts and Katsidis has given them more than talk and showmanship. He’s given them his blood.

Just over a year ago, he was battering a brave Brit named Graham Earl so obsessively that Earl’s corner finally threw in the towel. Unfortunately for Earl, referee Mickey Vann was braver than they were and he threw it back out. Distracted for a moment, Katsidis let his guard down and Earl lashed out with a sweeping hook that wobbled him so badly Vann had to give him a standing eight count. It looked likely to become one of those odd reversal of fortunes that belong to boxing alone until Katsidis held on long enough to clear his head and roared back with a vengeance, dropping Earl twice and leaving him so listless in his corner after the fifth round that they stopped the fight before Vann could argue otherwise.

That bout was nominated for Fight of the Year and round 2 was selected by many media outlets as the Round of the Year even though it had not been widely seen outside of devotees of You Tube. More importantly it led to a July 21 fight for the WBO interim lightweight title against Czar Amonsot in Las Vegas that turned into the kind of a bloodbath that creates crimson-encrusted legends.

Katsidis and Amonsot were supposed to be preliminary entertainment before Bernard Hopkins and Winky Wright squared off at the Mandalay Bay Events Center but what they did to each other over 12 rounds was so startlingly gruesome it made the main event a walkout bout.

That night, Katsidis sustained a terrible gash over his left eye that bled like a waterfall for much of the fight. He had similarly deep cuts around his right, both above and below, and by the end of the night looked like someone had spilled a can of red paint on his face between rounds.

Yet he kept coming forward through the blood and the half-blindness, constantly pressing Amonsot until he dropped him twice and earned a unanimous decision so brutal that Amonsot may never fight again after suffering a brain bleed. When it was over, the crowd stood and roared. As their approval washed over him, Katsidis held his fist aloft, a gladiator bloody but unbroken who had paid a gory cost for glory.

“I said I was going to bring new blood into boxing and you certainly saw a lot of it tonight,’’ he said after it was over. That is the kind of flippant ignoring of the pain of victory that endeared Gatti to the boxing public for so long and it did not go unnoticed, which is why he and the Roman gladiator’s helmet he dons in the locker room before every fight will be on a big stage Saturday night in the biggest fight of his life.

“A fighter is something born within someone,’’ Katsidis (23-0, 20 KO) said. “Things have been against me a lot in life but something in me just says to get up and fight. I’m realistic. The reason I’m here now is I got up and made sacrifices other fighters might not make. I don’t blink. Every fight is the fight of my life.’’

Although Gatti won world titles and made millions, the price he paid was often assessed in the emergency room at the Atlantic City Medical Center or at Valley Hospital in Las Vegas. He understood the price he was likely to pay yet it never prevented him from accepting the same consequences the next time he fought until, late last year, his body finally gave out and he was badly beaten by young Alfonso Gomez to end his career the way it had to end – by being carried out on his shield with his face split and bloody.

Few fighters willingly seek to follow such a route despite the rewards but Katsidis is one. He does not go to the arena looking to come away bruised and bloody but he accepts it willingly, lightly really, as the cost of doing business.

That is why the gladiator’s helmet he wears into the ring, which would be little more than a prop for most men, tells his story. When he slides it on before he leaves the locker room he feels he is transformed. He is a Greek warrior back in the shadow of Mt. Olympus, where his family once lived before migrating to Australia.

“The moment I put on the helmet I don’t care if I get carried out,’’ Katsidis said. “That becomes my mindset. That’s why I hated the amateurs. They’re all running and dodging and slapping and moving about. Real fighting is what I was born to do. Nobody pointed me to this. Boxing was something that chose me.’’

On Katsidisthegreat.com, his website, there are an assortment of clips that show him in battle but the most chilling is one in which the voice of a phony Australian “gladiator,’’ the actor Russell Crowe who won the Academy Award for his portrayal of such a man, is heard to say in a low, rumbling voice “Now they will know why they are afraid of the dark. Now they will learn why they fear the night.’’

On the screen, in black and white, flash the faces of some of boxing’s best fighters – Floyd Mayweather, Jr., Diego Corrales, Miguel Cotto. After them comes the Australian gladiator who is stalking them. After them comes Katsidis, with fists and blood flying.

“Once you get in the ring there are no lies,’’ Katsidis said. “If you cut corners you know the difference. If you don’t want to be there I can see it.

“I’ll be proud to fight someone like Joel Casamayor. He’s a legend. He can do everything. I’ll have to fight the fight of my life. I’m ready to do that. I’ve been waiting for this all my life.’’

Now it is here. If Michael Katsidis can handle it he may become more than a champion. He may become a star.

“I’m honored and flattered to be compared with Arturo Gatti,’’ Katsidis said. “If it takes people relating me to someone else for them to follow me, then it’s all well and good, but I’m at war here. Arturo Gatti won’t be in the ring with me. I’ll be in there alone. I made the sacrifices. This is my religion.’’

One that, like many of the religions of old, demands bloody sacrifices be made at its altar. Michael Katsidis has no problem with that. None at all.