The sharp Irish breeze stung the Mexican fighter's face as entered the National Stadium in Dublin. While the bitter wind drew grimaces from the arena's security personnel, Luis Ramon Campas remained expressionless; his resolve hardened by over one hundred professional fights.

Despite entering his twenty-first year as a pro, this quintessential prizefighter neglects the attire of the modern-day boxer. He is absent of jewellery and believes tattoos are unnecessary to reflect his toughness; he wears that on his face. A thick moustache does little to draw attention from his reassembled features. Jagged lines of scar tissue rest above his droopy eyes; his nose is curved where it should be straight and flat where it should be curved.

The 36-year-old Campas arrived in Ireland last week with a distinguished record of 91-11 with 73 knockouts, but he had lost three of his last six outings and was brought over to beef the resume of rising middleweight contender Matthew Macklin on Saturday.

It has been 14 years since "Yory Boy" Campas was considered a potential star. He amassed an eye-catching streak of 56 wins without a loss against mostly nondescript opposition prior to his bout with welterweight sensation Felix Trinidad in 1994. But a savage knockout loss to the Puerto Rican and a stoppage defeat to Jose Luis Lopez exonerated the novelty value of Campas's ledger.

Still, he battled back to claim a portion of the 154-pound world title from Raul Marquez three years later, but give it up after quitting midway through his 1998 clash against the exceptional Fernando Vargas.

Campas fought on; absorbing blows as his aggressive style saw him overcome journeymen but lose to the elite.

His Mexican heritage and still-impressive statistics landed him a bout with Oscar De La Hoya on Cinco de Mayo 2003. Ramon again displayed his exceptional punch-absorbency, but lost another punishing encounter. Since then he has engaged in less glamorous affairs, but has performed with pride against an assortment of 160-pound prospects, with many onlookers deeming him unlucky to lose a decision to John Duddy in 2006.

However, in his most recent outing last February, against former European champion Amin Asikainen in Finland, Campas showed worrying symptoms of excessive wear and tear. After six rounds the bout was considered even, with Campas appearing sprightly despite his advanced years. Asikainen is not known as a power puncher, but when he landed a right cross in the seventh Campas suddenly seemed sapped of strength. Ramon leaned on the ropes, hands held low, as Asikainen flailed with righthands, prompting the referee to halt the contest.

Campas's hitherto remarkable punch resistance apparently disintegrated, but his appetite for

the fightgame was unscathed. Joe Frazier once described the profession as “the only sport you can get your brain shook, your money took and your name in the undertaker book.”

Such words do not deter “Yory Boy”.

“[I’ve had] a great career,” says Campas. “I’m blessed to be here, blessed to have these skills and the support of a wonderful family and compatriots in the world of boxing.

“The world championship is my destiny; I never stop working for it.”

His single-mindedness draws parallels to Evander Holyfield’s ongoing quest for championship glory, and like the former heavyweight titlist, Campas has never expressed self-doubt. In his mind, the losses were due to external factors.

“Against Trinidad, I lost because I went into the bout with a fractured nose,” he explains. “Against Lopez, I had to lose six to seven pounds in the final days to make weight. By fight time, I had nothing left.”

And the defeat to Asikainen?

“The referee stooped the fight too soon.”

Campas seems resolute in his mission to claim another world title, but his manager Joe Diaz would suggest other reasons for fighting.

“[Campas] didn’t expect to be in the game this long, but he’s got a family to feed,” said Diaz last August. “I don’t want to go into it now, but he’s been cheated a lot along the way. He started fighting when he was fifteen and didn’t have anyone looking out for him.”

Matthew Macklin’s purpose for fighting is not monetary. Born in Birmingham, England in 1982 to Irish parents, Macklin studied law at Coventry University before turning professional at 19 after a successful amateur career. His good looks and articulate manner earned him instant exposure on the Sky Sports network.

Macklin won his first nine contests in impressive fashion, scoring a number of striking knockouts. But he struggled against the awkward Brendan Ingle-trained Andrew Facey, losing a narrow ten round decision for the vacant English 154-pound title. Macklin subsequently teamed up with famed British trainer Billy Graham and adopted a more aggressive fighting style.

The relationship worked well until Macklin lost a brutal brawl against British champion Jamie Moore, suffering a devastating tenth round knockout in one of the best fights of 2006. After three subsequent outings against ordinary opposition, Macklin felt he needed a change and left Graham to link up with the renowned Buddy McGirt in Florida.

McGirt, a former two-weight world titlist, won unanimous praise as a trainer after effectively transforming Arturo Gatti from a hot-headed brawler to a classical boxer. Macklin hopes McGirt

can repeat that success.

"I want to get back to boxing a bit more as that side of things was neglected a bit when I was with Billy Graham," explained Macklin earlier this month. "People forget that I was a very good amateur boxer and I need to get back to using those boxing skills and I think Buddy is the perfect trainer for that."

The recent rejuvenation of Irish boxing has lost some of its lustre in recent months with its most famous practitioners all suffering significant setbacks. Last August, Dublin's unbeaten European super-bantamweight champion Bernard Dunne was stopped inside a round by the obscure Kiko Martinez. In February, John Duddy's hopes of a middleweight title shot were diminished when he labored to an unpopular points win over the crude Walid Smichet. And last Friday Emanuel Steward's blue-chip prospect Andy Lee was stopped by Brian Vera in a startling upset.

Macklin needed to produce a noteworthy performance on Saturday if the Irish public were to be convinced that the recent celebration of the country's boxing talent was more than just ticket-selling hype.

Campas doesn't have much of a reputation in the Emerald Isle, but his remarkable record was enough to attract nearly two thousand fans to the National Stadium. Moreover, his shaky performance against Asikainen was sufficient evidence to convince the promoters that a crowd-pleasing knockout would be in store.

Campas, a member of the Navojoa Indian tribe, has never commanded a large fanbase in his native Mexico and last year relocated to Phoenix, Arizona, so it was fitting that his ringwalk on Saturday would be accompanied by the strains of Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.".

The veteran seemed relaxed as he made his way past a section of partisan Macklin supporters. Draped in rosary beads, Campas looked into the crowd and then fixed his eyes on the approaching Macklin. "Yory Boy" was aiming to intimidate the relative neophyte, but when Macklin disrobed, the 25-year-old's broad frame and muscular physique was palpable.

The adopted Irishman began the bout with a 20-2 (16) record and looked to utilize his long jab from the offset. Campas forced the action, intent on pressurizing Macklin. Any time the two fighters got close, the Mexican would look to dig to the body, employing his great experience to catch Macklin with sneaky uppercuts on the inside.

But Macklin's constant movement and jab kept Campas at bay, while a succession of one-two combinations snapped back the veteran's head. As the scheduled ten round contest entered the middle stages Macklin began to land with increased frequency. Campas's legs still appeared sturdy and he grinned whenever his opponent landed flush shots, but that was also the case against Asikainen.

Cheered on by his close friend Ricky Hatton, Macklin looked to press the action, but he couldn't force Campas onto the back foot. The fighters began to trade as Macklin became more

aggressive, but Campas would unleash hooks to the body and head that drew concern from Buddy McGirt.

“Get back to the jab Matt! Stick, stick!” cried the trainer.

Campas was landing enough jabs of his own to cause noticeable swelling above Macklin’s left eye and his punch resistance was infallible.

“Campas is like a sponge,” remarked Irish middleweight Jim Rock.

As the fighters met in centre-ring for the final round, Campas wore a broad grin and hugged his opponent. Macklin sought to raise his punch output for the remaining three minutes, but Campas responded with combinations of forceful hooks and uppercuts. The fighters kept up an intense pace, with Campas enjoying his most successful round. A stinging right cross from Macklin in the final ten seconds sent Campas to the ropes for the first time in the bout, but the Mexican immediately fired back as the bell sounded. Both fighters seemed ready for another two rounds of battle.

There could be no disputing that Macklin had won the contest, but Campas’s cornermen clambered into the ring to congratulate their visibly jubilant fighter. The celebrations were akin to when Campas won his world title eleven years earlier, but this time the rejoicing marked a sense of relief rather than victory. In essence, Campas had proved that he could still compete with a naturally bigger man who was eleven years his junior. And the plaudits were shared equally between the hometown favorite and the battling visitor.

“You have to admire Campas,” said former Irish amateur champion Mick Dowling. “He comes from a proud fighting nation and he should be proud of himself tonight.”

“Campas proved that he can still fight,” added Buddy McGirt.

Likewise, Macklin showed that he can box for ten fast-paced rounds against a wily practitioner and referee Emile Tiedt’s official scorecard of 98-95 for Matthew was probably a little generous to Campas.

Whereas John Duddy engaged in a torturous struggle with “Yory Boy”, Macklin maintained his composure to out-box his dangerous foe.

After the fight, Macklin was left with lumps around both eyes, while Campas’s battle-hardened skin was virtually unmarked save for some redness around his already-compressed nose.

Macklin can now look forward to some more experience-building fights as he continues his education under McGirt.

“I beat him well, he took plenty of punches,” reflected Macklin. “It was a tough test. Now we’ve got this one fight under our belts, I’m sure myself and Buddy will click even more. He’ll get the best out of me.”

Conversely, the future for Campas is less certain. Before Saturday's contest he spoke of working towards another world title, but his joy at finishing the bout on his feet indicates that he will be content to test his resilience against younger fighters for some time to come.

As Campas left the scene of fight number 103 and neared his dressing room a fan in a "Macklin's Army" shirt approached.

"Good fight," he offered, while patting the fighter's shoulder.

"Thank you," replied Campas.

"Take care Yory," said the fan.