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Sunday, 27 April 2008 19:00

The glamorous side of boxing will be on display at the Home Depot Center on Saturday when superstar Oscar de la Hoya returns to the welterweight division to sharpen his skills against Steve Forbes. Three days earlier on April 30 a former 147-pound sensation will attempt to remind observers why he was once heralded as a future star.

As Joel Julio climbs into the ring with Ishe Smith in Vancouver the world will not be watching, but for the Columbian native it is a chance to display the talent that won him acclaim as boxing's brightest prospect in 2005.

A surprising lopsided points defeat to Carlos Quintana nearly two years ago saw fans abandon the Julio bandwagon, but the fighter has kept faith in his own ability.

"Everybody has a bad night and I had a bad one against Quintana, but this is my year," he says. "I will become champion of the world in 2008."

Joel was born in Monteria, Columbia, but moved to the country's capital city of Bogota at 14 after a divorce between his parents resulted in the teenager being taken into care by a pediatrician named Oscar Gomez. Life in the bustling city offered stability for Julio, enabling him to concentrate on his love of boxing, and twelve months later he made the decision to enter the professional ranks.

In the space of three years Julio rattled off eighteen victories, going the distance on just one occasion, prompting his manager Tuto Zabala to bring Joel to the U.S. Despite a record that had been built against obscure opposition, Julio immediately attracted interest on his Stateside debut with a three round demolition of Antonio Soriano.

"I watched the fight and I watched him beat this kid impressively," said Carl Moretti, who was matchmaker for Main Events at the time. "It wasn't who he beat but more how he beat him."

Julio's brute strength and heavy hooks convinced Main Events to sign the fighter and the promotional company arranged for his relocation to Miami so he could work with the renowned Buddy McGirt.

"I got into boxing to knock people out," explains Julio, whose amiable personality belies his ruthlessness inside the ring. "I am a dog and I am going to attack."

There were concerns that Julio's career was being moved too fast when he was matched with the experienced Carlos Wilfredo Vilches in April 2005. Ten months earlier Vilches went the twelve round distance with Ricky Hatton in Manchester and brought a 43-5-2 record to the bout with Julio.

But the relative neophyte wasted little time silencing the doubters and bullied Vilches until the

Argentine was rescued after nine minutes. Three more knockout wins that year helped Julio earn recognition as the ESPN.com Prospect of the Year.

"Julio is arguably the hottest prospect around," said boxing writer and broadcaster Steve Farhood in 2005. "He is very fast and has natural knockout power. [Against Vilches] Julio sent a message that he could be dominant."

The 5'10 welterweight seemed to have the perfect physique for his weight class and his raw power seemed capable of rendering any opponent unconscious. But physical attributes do not guarantee success in the sweet science as Julio learned against Quintana.

Despite an unbeaten 22-0 résumé, Quintana was largely unheralded entering the contest, but his steady stream of southpaw jabs and crosses soon forced Julio onto the back foot. It was probably the first time that Julio had ever contemplated taking a backward step in a boxing ring, but he managed to absorb Quintana's accurate strikes on route to a unanimous decision loss.

"[Julio] found himself in over his head against an opponent who quite simply was a fundamentally better boxer," wrote Graham Houston. "Julio had been doing a good job blowing out the opponents who had been placed in front of him but we were not going to know how good he really was until he faced someone who was capable of standing up and hitting back."

Julio's team were expecting him to rebound strongly four months later against the veteran former world title challenger Cosme Rivera, but another lethargic display from the 21-year-old saw him scrape a split decision that drew derisions from the boxing media.

"Christmas came early for Julio this year," said Zach Levin in his postfight analysis. "In the last four months Julio's stock has fallen faster than Kripy Kreme doughnuts."

Julio bore little resemblance to the fighter that bludgeoned through respected opponents in 2005. He was unable to sustain his trademark vicious combinations and at the end of the twelfth round a bloody nose and mouth reflected his deteriorating reputation.

Joel's handlers credited his jaded displays to weight-making difficulties and since the Rivera bout he has shown flickers of his former promise while campaigning between 149 and 153 pounds.

Even though Julio has not fought since an eight round knockout of Cornelius Bundrage nine months ago, his lengthy inactivity has managed to enhance his standing. In that period Rivera gave hot prospect Andre Berto a torrid test, Quintana defeated the streaking Paul Williams for a piece of the world welterweight title, and last month Bundrage outpointed the popular Kassim Ouma.

Tuto Zabala believes timing has played a key role in Julio's career.

"Thank God we lost to Quintana [when we did], and it wasn't for big money or nothing like that," he told ESPN. "It was just an experience, you know? It's better to do it now than when you're

blowing away two, three million dollars. It's better to learn."

Ahead of Wednesday's bout with Smith, Julio has been working with Roberto Quesada, who has taken over from McGirt. Quesada has been part of Julio's team since the Columbian's arrival in Miami and has been putting particular emphasis on defensive techniques during their training camp.

Julio, 32-1 (30), will need to show some extra dimensions to his aggressive game if he is to convincingly overcome Smith, a natural 154-pounder who has quick hands and a slick style.

"There are times when Smith has shown flashes of brilliance," remarked Graham Houston last year.

But numerous fallouts with promoters have stalled the career of the former Contender alumnus, who holds notable points victories over Alfonso Gomez, David Estrada, Randall Bailey and Norberto Bravo.

A close decision loss to Sechew Powell in 2007 saw Smith, 19-2 (9), remain idle for twelve months as he struggled to secure another big fight. But the 29-year-old "Sugar Shay" knows that a victory over Julio is vital if he hopes to revive his once-promising career, and he seems confident about the task.

"The [Julio] fight is really important to me," said the Nevada native after stopping journeyman Carlos de la Cruz last February. "I can face any fighting style. My résumé is a lot better than Julio's. He's fought Carlos Quintana and that's it. He is the only name Julio has fought.

"People might see my record and see that I don't have a lot of knockouts, but I was facing guys bigger than me, fighting middleweights."

Julio is aware of Smith's tough reputation, but believes he has a strategy that can dent his opponent's resolve.

"[Smith] can take a lot of punches," says Julio ahead of the contest that will be screened on ESPN2. "He doesn't hit hard. My plan is to castigate his body, punish him hard. That's what the crowd is gonna watch; Joel Julio nailing Ishe Smith's body.

"My fans can expect a renovated Joel and I will not disappoint them."