

Answer To Those Who Ask: Why Forbes, Oscar?

Written by Ron Borges
Tuesday, 29 April 2008 19:00

In the opinion of some, Oscar De La Hoya is not fighting the right man Saturday night to prepare him for his Sept. 20 rematch with Floyd Mayweather, Jr. Well then, exactly who would that be?

If Mayweather is what most people in boxing think then nobody can truly prepare you to fight him. Not Steve Forbes and not anybody else. That being the case, De La Hoya is doing the right thing to the best of one's ability, which is to say he's fighting somebody before he takes on Mayweather a second time.

A year ago he faced the pound-for-pound best fighter in the world after a 364 day layoff. While it may be unclear how best to prepare for Mayweather, it's obvious how not to prepare for him – which is to take a year off.

Timing is everything in boxing. This is especially true with someone as fast, quick, defensive-minded and ring savvy as Mayweather. Anything that can slow you down, either mentally or physically, will haunt you badly if you're in with Mayweather and spending a year on vacation is one of those things.

So regardless of how one views Forbes – and frankly most people give the former super featherweight champion no chance against a guy who has spent the last seven years fighting at junior middleweight and middleweight – the fact that De La Hoya is in with anyone indicates he is taking as seriously as a multi-multi-millionaire man can the challenge waiting for him five months down the road.

What he hopes Forbes provides is a less dangerous version of Mayweather. The fact that he has only nine knockouts in 38 fights makes him safe but the fact that he's been trained by all of the Mayweather brothers who at one point or another worked with Little Floyd makes him a laboratory test of a sort for what De La Hoya knows he'll be up against stylistically in September.

That doesn't mean Forbes does anything with the speed or even the accuracy of the man who beat De La Hoya by split decision last year but he does do similar things and so there is a purpose to this exercise out at the Home Depot Center in Carson, CA. and it is to test some of what De La Hoya has been working on against a canvas that to as much of an extent as possible will remind him of Mayweather.

“My focus is obviously Stevie Forbes but the main goal is to beat Floyd Jr. and so having that in mind, having that mindset, I'm going to be in tremendous, tremendous shape,” De La Hoya claimed. “We've been talking about my performance, my last performance, almost every day. We go through it every single day.”

The “we” De La Hoya was referring to was himself and Floyd, Jr.'s father, the mercurial Floyd Mayweather, Sr. The latter is the man who claims to have taught his son everything he knows

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about boxing. He is also the man who refused to train De La Hoya to beat his son – unless, of course, \$2 million was on the table. In boxing, exceptions can be made even for family ties if the price is right.

Now, apparently, it is and so he and De La Hoya are back working on this project, one that is very much a two-fight deal. The first half is Saturday's practice run with Forbes, a fight that may make little sense to outsiders but which to the two of them is like Tony Stewart or Jeff Gordon bringing their cars in for a qualifying run at Indy before the real race on Memorial Day.

"I'm still fighting because I want to be on top again," De La Hoya said. "I'm still fighting because I want to be champion again. The competitive side of me chose this fight. The champion side of me chose this fight. Chose the trainer. I'm doing what's best for me inside the ring.

"I've been training so hard for this fight like it was the most important fight of my life. And it is! It is because I don't feel like a champion. I'm not a champion. I feel like a contender. That's how we're going to fight.

"With the Felix Sturm fight (which was supposed to be a similar tune-up before facing Bernard Hopkins) I did look past him. I did not train for him and was sluggish and slow. I didn't feel like a winner in that fight, you know? I felt like a loser. It's a hard lesson to learn but I'm glad it happened back then instead of now because I'm ready to have a big year this year."

To do that he first has to have a big night at Forbes' expense because to do anything less will be to defeat the purpose. Fighting Forbes is a two-pronged exercise. First De La Hoya wants exposure to some of what he will face stylistically from Mayweather and test out ways to negate it against Forbes. Second, he wants to work on some of the things he has been preparing for Mayweather to see how they fit him when the bright lights are on and if he will revert back to older, more comfortable ways in the heat of the moment.

If things go well it guarantees De La Hoya nothing against Mayweather but if it doesn't, it foreshadows something he'd rather not think about. What that means then is while the boxing world may be looking at this fight as little more than an afterthought, Oscar De La Hoya understands he cannot see it that way.

"With Stevie having Floyd, Jr.'s style, not quite that similar but to a certain extent, I can work on some things," De La Hoya said. "Stevie Forbes stays right in front of you. He moves his feet quite a bit and stays in the center of the ring but he'll stay in front of you and fight, too (as Mayweather sometimes does). So I think it's going to be very beneficial when I step inside that ring with Steve. This fight is going to benefit me a lot."

It better because that's the reason he took it.

Forget all the palaver about giving back to the fans by bringing the fight to L.A. with reasonably priced tickets, although that was a nice gesture. Forget the stuff about fighting on free (as in non-pay-per-view) HBO as another way to reward loyal boxing followers, although that's something viewers with thinning checkbooks may appreciate.

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Forget all of that because Oscar De La Hoya is fighting Steve Forbes for one reason and one reason only. He's fighting him for himself. He's fighting him because he believes it will help him beat Floyd Mayweather, Jr. on Sept. 20. Frankly, that's reason enough to suit me.