Joe Hernandez has the eye. These days he also believes he has his eye on his next great fighter, a kid with only three professional bouts but ones he won so impressively that he's been touting him to some of the sport's biggest promoters.

Whether or not Demetrio Soto ever becomes the kind of fighter some of Hernandez' other discoveries like Edwin Valero, Daniel Ponce De Leon and Mike Anchondo are remains to be seen but Friday night young Soto added to his resume of rapid-fire knockouts by stopping George Garcia at 1:19 of the first round on the undercard of the Mike Alvarado-Michel Rosales main event at Isleta Casino in Albuquerque. It was a third barely seen step taken by a lanky, young welterweight from Los Angeles who has now stopped three guys in two rounds or less. As starts go, it couldn't be much better but for Hernandez it's not simply those fights that have him believing this kid will be like Valero and Ponce De Leon rather than like the discovery who broke his heart, Fernando "Panchito'' Bojado.

"He has been working at our gym since he was seven or eight,'' Hernandez said. "The Dad brought him and a couple of his brothers. He's the only one who developed. He's smooth, natural in the ring. I felt he had such natural ability that he belongs with one of the top promoters. So I made calls.''

The first was to Eric Gomez, matchmaker at Golden Boy Promotions, Oscar De La Hoya's highly successful company. The next was to Top Rank, Bob Arum's promotional company. As yet he has not signed with either but Top Rank's head matchmaker Bruce Trampler was at ringside Friday night scouting him out and has said Soto will audition for him again on the undercard of middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik's defense against Gary Lockett next month.

Although Trampler remains noncommittal on whether Top Rank will sign Soto or not, he knows well Hernandez's reputation for having a keen scouting eye for boxing talent.

"Joe was always a good handicapper (of fights),'' Trampler said. "He's a pretty discerning guy. He doesn't throw stuff at the wall. We'll take another look at him on the Pavlik card and see what happens.''

Not even Hernandez can say for sure what that may be because he never had a prospect he was more sure of than Bojado and he failed miserably after a 168-15 amateur career that landed him on Mexico's 2000 Olympic team and then with a lucrative promotional deal with Main Events and multi-fight contract with SHOWTIME.

By his 10th professional fight however Bojado had lost for the first time, a 10-round decision to Juan Carlos Rubio. Although he would avenge it he would soon after be beaten again by 37-year-old James Leija as weight problems and a lack of inspiration dogged him into a three-year hiatus from boxing.

When he returned in 2007, Golden Boy signed him but he failed to make weight for his second fight under their promotion and in his third he was beaten by Steve Forbes seven months ago and hasn't been seen since. Bojado, who Hernandez remains convinced should have become a star, is now 18-3 and seemingly lost in the boxing wilderness.

"He was the biggest disappointment of my life,'' Hernandez said. "He had all the talent. His only problem was discipline. Bojado could have become one of the biggest names in the sport but he fell in love and he thought that was more important than boxing.''

Whatever the cause, Bojado does not appear likely to become what Hernandez still believes he could have been. So how can he be sure about Soto?

He can't. Boxing is the sport of blind hope and the denial of harsh reality but even in that world it is also a place where there are things the eye can see…if you have an eye like Joe Hernandez.

"Discipline, that's the key,'' Hernandez said when comparing Soto to Bojado. "We've known Demetrio since he was a kid. I've seen the family's dedication for 12, 15 years now. He's a kid going to college (East L.A. College). He trains hard every day. He's special.

"He has the discipline, the respect for people and for the sport. You can see that natural ability to slip punches. He rolls with them and comes back throwing and he can really crack. He's "explosivo.''

"He controls the pace of a fight and then he explodes. What that tells you after a few fights is there's a lot of God-given ability in him. Now we have to see if he can take a shot. If he can take a shot in a very short time everyone will hear of him. If he can take a shot, he can go all the way.''

Certainly if Soto can land an association with Top Rank or Golden Boy for Soto it will make the road less steep. If he continues to destroy opponents of higher caliber in the same way he has rid the ring of his first three equally untested opponents someone will begin pounding the drum for him, using the same promotional model to create stars like welterweight champion Miguel Cotto, one of the biggest names in boxing.

"Bruce and Top Rank are on the lookout for future champions. They have confidence in my judgment. Once they see him fight they'll know he's a future champion.''

Perhaps so but they would have to look quickly to see it thus far. Soto dropped his first opponent, Khadaphi Proctor, in 44 seconds of the opening round and then stopped Mike Ramos, a southpaw with over 200 amateur fights, at 1:38 of the second round after sending him to the floor three times.

Garcia fared no better Friday night in Albuquerque, lasting only 79 seconds with Soto. In the grand scheme of a career those kinds of early wins mean little because while he won easily, he also seemed wide open to be hit and his punches came from wide angles that leave him

vulnerable to a smart fighter throwing straight punches. But to someone with the unfailing eye of Joe Hernandez they speak to him of what might be if Demetrio Soto remains disciplined in his daily workouts at Cache Gym in Vernon, Ca.

“He could be like (two-time welterweight champion Antonio) Margarito,’’ Hernandez said of the reigning IBF titleholder at 147 pounds. “This kids nearly six feet all. He’s similar to his style. He’s relaxed, he’s calm, he’s aggressive and he executes his plan.’’

Not to mention his opponents.

“As an amateur you couldn’t tell about his ability because he had more of a pro style,’’ Hernandez said. “He didn’t have that God-given footwork you need in the amateurs but after his first pro fight you could tell he was special.’’

How special, if he’s special at all, remains to be seen but Demetrio Soto may be a name to look for. Why? At this point because Joe Hernandez says so.