

Forrest Sees Career At Midpoint

Written by Rick Folstad
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Retirement? In your dreams, pal. Maybe in five or 10 years. Stepping away is for those other guys, those thirty-somethings with the long list of wars behind them and nothing left to show, nothing to spend. Want some truths in life? You don't hit a guy when he's down, you don't walk across the street without looking, and you don't quit when you're still the best, not in the fight game anyway.

That's where Vernon Forrest is. He's at the front of the line. At the top. King of the hill. And at 37, he might as well be 27. He's not thinking about retirement. He's thinking about his next fight. He's thinking about unification. About undisputed championships. He'll tell you there's a lot of time left in his career despite what anyone says or writes.

"Right now, there are still things I want to do in boxing," he said from his training headquarters in Vero Beach where he's being trained by Buddy McGirt. "My career is at the middle of the road. Not at the end of the road. I want to keep chugging on until I accomplish what I want."

But first, there's Sergio Mora.

Forrest (40-2, 29 KO's) fights Mora (20-0-1, 5 KOs) this Saturday at the Mohegan Sun Casino in Uncasville, Conn. The fight (SHOWTIME) will be Forrest's second defense of the WBC super-welterweight title he won last July against Carlos Baldomir.

"I'm expecting a lot from Mora," Forrest said "He's a guy with the opportunity to be a world champion. That means he'll be at his best. And he won 'The Contender' didn't he? I expect him to be 10 times better than he's been because this is an opportunity of a lifetime for him. I expect him to raise it to another level."

That's where Forrest has been spending his time. At another level. His resume includes two wins over Sugar Shane Mosley. But he brushes those victories off like they happened in another lifetime.

"I beat Mosley six or seven years ago," he said. "That doesn't apply."

Then maybe his only two defeats - back-to-back losses to Ricardo Mayorga in 2003 - shouldn't apply, either.

What does count is his attitude going in against Mora, whose biggest claim to fame is his "Contender" title.

As a world champion - past and present - Forrest knows what the title brings. He knows the confidence that comes with the belt, how it takes a fighter to a higher plane. It's an intangible that separates the champ from the contender. Forrest knows how it feels, what it can do, how it makes a difference.

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“Absolutely. When you become champ, you just fight better,” he said. “But you have to fight better because the guys are gunning for you. And they're going to be at their very best. You can't think you're the No. 2 guy, because you're not. Owning the title gives you so much confidence.”

Asked what his biggest asset as a fighter was, Forrest said it's his boxing IQ, his ability to read another fighter in the ring. Analyze and take advantage.

Yeah. He also has a little pop in both fists.

Looking back on a career that still has a ways to go, Forrest said the fight that has meant the most to him was last year's win over Baldomir. It came during some rough times in his career when a sting of injuries kept setting him back.

“The Baldomir fight was so important because of what I had to go through to get back to that point,” he said. “There was so much anguish before that. It was a very special fight for me.”

He's pretty sure he's got a few of those left.