

Kelly Pavlik & Ponce De Leon Love KOs

Written by David A. Avila
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So what do Kelly "The Ghost" Pavlik and Daniel Ponce De Leon have in common?

Both love to win by crushing knockouts.

Middleweight champion Pavlik defends against Wales' Gary Lockett while Mexico's Ponce De Leon defends against Puerto Rico's Juan Manuel Lopez at the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. Both fights will air on HBO.

This will be Pavlik's first fight after winning a doubleheader against former champion Jermain Taylor and now he gets Lockett, whose record says he can punch too. That will be good for the fans.

Because if there is one thing that Pavlik does is go forward like one of those big Cat land-movers and swinging those arms churning out those punches like an oil rig churns the black liquid. Lockett likes to hit too.

Pavlik's had 33 pro fights and he's beaten every opponent using the same style learned under his trainer Jack Loew in the blue-collar town of Youngstown, a former steel-producing burg. It's a form of blue collar fighting that can be traced to fighters of another era like Tony Zale, the former middleweight champion of the 1940s who was known as the "Man of Steel."

On the other side is Lockett, a hard-hitting middleweight trained by Enzo Calzaghe, father of new light heavyweight champion Joe Calzaghe. Can he withstand the punching power of Pavlik?

"He's a great technically sound fighter," said Loew of Lockett. "I don't know if he can physically hold up against Kelly."

It's always difficult to estimate fighters from Europe who only fight in that continent. For many years Calzaghe was seen more as a curiosity than a legitimate challenge to American fighters. But after beating several American fighters the world realizes that there no longer is a gap in talent.

"It's going to be a very, very interesting fight," said Enzo Calzaghe who prepared Lockett for this fight. "It's going to be hard for Kelly and hard for Gary (Lockett). He's the underdog."

Weight can be the single most factor when the middleweights collide.

Pavlik dropping back down to the 160-pound division after fighting at 164-pounds against Taylor last February could pose a problem.

"There's always trouble with (losing) the last two pounds," said Pavlik (33-0, 29 KOs) during a

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telephone conference call. "But losing the weight has been going great."

If you need proof, look at what happened to Chris Byrd who competed with gigantic heavyweights. Though he was able to lose more than 25 pounds to make light heavyweight, once inside the ring, his legs were gone and he was stopped in the ring.

Could Pavlik suffer the same fate?

"I'm eating foods I was eating in the first Taylor fight," said Pavlik, who survived a knockdown to eventually knock out Taylor in the seventh round of their first fight that occurred on Sept. 29, 2007.

A win by Pavlik could lead to a fight with Lockett's stablemate Joe Calzaghe.

Top Rank's Bob Arum believes it's a prelude to a showdown between Pavlik and Calzaghe. He smells a mega fight brewing but wants to focus on the upcoming fight.

"It's going to be a terrific fight," says Arum, who believes Pavlik has the makings of an Oscar De La Hoya type of box office attraction. "Both guys (Lockett and Pavlik) are real bangers."

Ponce De Leon

Mexico's Ponce De Leon is a no nonsense kind of guy who truly believes he's the strongest junior featherweight in the world. Now he faces a young stud from Puerto Rico Lopez (21-0, 19 KOs) with a glittering record and many knockouts too.

He merely shrugs, as does his trainer Joe Hernandez.

"I think Juan Manuel Lopez is a good young prospect with a lot of natural skills, a good technician in the ring, has heavy hands and knockout power, but he's a little too green for Daniel," said Hernandez who trains and manages Ponce De Leon.

Lopez, 24, has knocked out 19 out of 21 opponents. The last time the left-hander faced a good Mexican opponent he stopped Hugo Dianzo in 10 rounds last year in August 2007.

Ponce De Leon loves the challenge.

"My experience, my power and my strength will be the key to me leaving the ring with my belt around my waist Saturday night," stated Ponce De Leon (34-1, 30 KOs) after his workout in the city of Vernon last week. "I've trained really hard for this fight."

Hernandez, a Puerto Rican who knows about the Mexico-Puerto Rico rivalry, trains the fighter from Chihuahua, Mexico.

"The rivalry motivates Ponce De Leon," said Hernandez, who's witnessed firsthand many of the classic battles between the two countries. "He's never done anything spectacular. This might be

the fight that brings that out of him.”

If Ponce De Leon can survive the challenge of Lopez, an even greater contest could come from either Rafael Marquez or Israel Vazquez in the near future. Both are in his weight division and could be explosive match ups for Ponce De Leon. If none of those fighters are able to fight, then a rematch with Panama’s Celestino Caballero could be exciting. It was the tall Caballero who handed Ponce De Leon his only loss several years ago.

Demetrio Soto

Boxing trainer/manager Hernandez swears he has the next Antonio Margarito in Demetrio Soto (3-0) of Los Angeles.

The tall junior welterweight slugger is scheduled to fight on the undercard and is undefeated at only three fights, but he does have the same seek and destroy style that the Tijuana Tornado has.

Soto’s fight won’t be televised but those people attending the fight at Boardwalk Hall will get a chance to see for themselves if he’s the next great fighter from the Los Angeles area.

Usually Hernandez is spot on with his assessments. In the past Hernandez spotted and signed Francisco “Panchito” Bojado, Mighty Mike Anchondo, current WBA titleholder Edwin Valero and current bantamweight challenger Abner Mares.

That’s a pretty impressive list for any boxing scout. He insists that Soto might be the best of them all.

“He’s a natural fighter, kind of slow, doesn’t have the finesse, but he’s just a natural individual with God-given power, awesome power,” Hernandez says of Soto. “He’s another Antonio Margarito.”