

Day 1: Cayman Islands Notebook

Written by David A. Avila

Wednesday, 18 June 2008 19:00

CAYMAN ISLANDS-It's a big weekend for American heavyweights. Real big.

A number of the best young big punching heavyweights are in critical battles throughout the U.S. and nearby.

First, there's undefeated Chris "The Nightmare" Arreola of Riverside, California who is matched against another undefeated heavyweight from New Jersey, Chazz Witherspoon, at the FedEx Forum in Memphis, Tenn. The fight will be shown on HBO.

Ironically, the newspaper I work for didn't want to send me to cover this fight, though he's a hometown hero and could very well win this fight and move on to a title match in a year or less.

Goossen-Tutor, who promote Arreola, are putting on another boxing card in the beautiful Cayman Islands on Friday June 20, that will feature a former number one heavyweight Fast Eddie Chambers against heavyweight prospect Raphael Butler of Minnesota. It's the semi-main event.

That promotion company asked me to cover the event and the Tourism Bureau of Grand Cayman provided me with travel expenses to cover the event and also put their country in the minds of Americans with tourist plans.

I agreed, so here I am reporting from a pristine hotel called the Westin with a view of a gorgeous turquoise colored sea, white sands and beautiful people walking about with icy cocktails. The temperature is about 80 degrees day and night.

It began on Tuesday. I got a little sleep, awoke at 3 a.m. and drove to the airport for a flight via Continental Airlines. As we drove to the airport I began thinking about Arreola's fight against Witherspoon. I wish I had the money to pay for the flight to go there too, but money is tight in this Bush era.

After going through the now traditional security checkpoints, I began looking for the gate I'm supposed to depart. There standing were two of Arreola's team with their bags packed. They're waiting for Arreola and his trainer Henry Ramirez, the young wunderkind.

Ironically, at 5 a.m., we're all leaving on the same plane to Houston, Texas. As the people begin to board I'm feeling guilty that I can't see one of the fighters from my adopted hometown in action. In fact, like me, Arreola is actually from East Los Angeles but now lives in Riverside, a small city of 230,000 located about 60 miles east of Los Angeles.

We're all on the same plane headed to Bush country. Arreola is about the last person to board. He ends up sitting right on the other side of the aisle of where I'm sitting. He's surprised when he sees me but like the others, seems a little down-trodden that I'm not going to his fight.

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We don't exchange any words the entire flight. I have this superstition about talking to fighters before a big fight. Especially if I know them as much as I know Arreola. I feel like I'm going to jinx them. It stems from my baseball days. You know us baseball players, we're full of superstitions.

I closed my eyes for most of the trip.

In Houston, we walked off the plane and all shook hands. They had to catch a plane to Memphis while I was headed toward the Cayman Islands.

Arreola walks off quietly and confidently.

I watched Arreola spar a few weeks earlier. His punches were snappy and the combinations flowed freely. His engine ran smooth, like my old 1970 blue Plymouth Hemi-Roadrunner.

After this weekend America will know if he or Witherspoon belong among the elite heavyweights.

Three hours later, the Continental flight I'm on landed in Georgetown, Cayman Island. It's a small intimate airport where the locals greet each and everyone landing. It's kind of like what I imagine Jamaica would be like. It's green, green and more green.

Every person at the airport is very friendly and cheerful. It's nice to see.

We take a shuttle to our hotel the Westin. Steve Kim Maxboxing.com is the only other boxing reporter on the shuttle. He arrives a few minutes after me from a plane arriving from Miami. Stuart, who manages Wayne McCullough and his friend Frank are also on the shuttle. About 15 minutes later we arrive at the hotel.

It's impressive.

As we walk into the hotel it's a beautiful elaborate lobby and in the background the sea is visible. Once my registration is complete I scoot to my room, which is very nice. I open the curtains and have a view of the clutter of pools and spas and in the distance, about 50 yards away, is the ocean. It's quite a view.

Kim introduces me to Joe Dwyer, who works for WBC. We eat across the street at a diner. The food is excellent. They make plans to return to the lobby and watch the Lakers play Boston. I return to the room. I'm so tired from only 3 hours of sleep that I awake at 9:30 p.m. The game is over in a wipe out.

I'm not a big Laker fan, so it's not that big a deal for me.

I go to the beach area and watch the small delicate waves run up to the shore. It's about 11:30 p.m. but the temperature is around 80 degrees. There's a light breeze that feels dreamlike. After 45 minutes I return to the room to finish my story and my sleep.

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Before sleeping I think aloud, wondering if Memphis is half as nice as the Cayman Islands?