

A Mexican Hvy Champ-It Could Happen

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
Tuesday, 08 July 2008 19:00

As far as professional boxing is concerned, Chris "The Nightmare" Arreola (24-0, 21 KO's) is in a unique position to make history. Standing at a stereo-type busting, six foot four inches, he's "the great Mexican hope."

If you believe in such a thing.

I grew up idolizing the little guys, little giants like Salvador Sanchez, Lupe Pintor, Wilfredo Gomez, Roberto Duran, Miguel Canto, Guty Espadas Sr., Carlos Zarate, Alfonso Zamora, and Chavez, Chavez, Chavez! Those were my boxing heroes. The thought of ever rooting for a Mexican or Mexican American heavyweight champion never entered my mind.

Times are definitely changing.

With dominating wins over solid prospects like Damian "Bolo" Wills, Malcolm Tann and Chazz Witherspoon, Arreola has crossed the wide gulf that separates prospects from legitimate contenders. He's one fight away from fighting for what's considered to be the biggest prize in boxing. The heavyweight title means money and fame that fighters toiling in the lighter divisions can only dream of attaining.

"I feel like I'm finally getting there. All those years of going to the gym when I didn't want to go are finally paying off," Arreola said. "I've been going to the gym since I was a little kid, getting my face beat in and it's finally culminating into something big."

His motivations are simple enough. "There's a Spanish word that's called orgullo which means pride," Arreola said. "And I'm proud to represent my people in the heavyweight division. That pride I have is what pushes me forward to the next round and what pushes me to take that extra shot so that I can land my own."

There were plenty of managers and promoters who passed on the raw looking kid who started out in late 2003. His manic style and soft body didn't inspire much confidence. It was Goossen-Tutor Promotions and manager Al Haymon who eventually took the reins and molded the now 27 year old by exposing him to serious boxing camps. It had a profound effect.

"My work ethic has changed a lot. I've been sparring with James Toney. He's so calm in the ring and I learned that from him," Arreola said. "When I trained with Hasim Rahman, that guy trained like a beast. I learned about the kind of work that I needed to put in to win a fight."

His trainer of seven years, Henry Ramirez, agrees. "He's gone through a lot of physical and mental changes. He works very hard in the gym and it shows in the quality of his work," he said. "People are finally starting to believe that he's not just some west coast hype job. And as good as he is right now, he's going to get even better."

A Mexican Hvy Champ-It Could Happen

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
Tuesday, 08 July 2008 19:00

"I came to the conclusion that I was training like an amateur," recalled Arreola of the early days of his career. "I was training just enough to get by. That wasn't good enough in order to compete at a high level."

Arreola has become his own worst critic. Although his performance against Witherspoon was impressive, he still saw many flaws. "I looked at the tape and I could've done better," he said. "I truly believe that. After my fights I'm always looking for mistakes to correct."

But is Arreola ready for the likes of Wladimir Klitschko and Sam Peter? "I'll fight whoever they put in front of me," said Arreola. "If my manager and promoter tell me they have a world title shot ready then I'm there."

According to reports, it looks like perennial title contender, David Tua, will be Arreola's next test. "I don't care who it is," re-affirmed Arreola.

Arreola is at high point in his life. He's learned to appreciate every accolade and bit of attention he gets. The loss of his close friend, Alex Carranza, brought him to the realization that life can be snuffed out when you least expect it. That every second is valuable.

Alex had helped Arreola adjust to living in Riverside after arriving from East Los Angeles at the age of sixteen. It was during Halloween of 2007 when Carranza was shot at a party. "It was by far the lowest point in my life," remembers Arreola. "To be completely helpless in such a situation is one of the worst things that can happen to anyone."

His best friend's memory propels him forward. It inspires his dream of being the first heavyweight champion of Mexican origin. "I don't consider it pressure at all. It's a privilege to be in this situation," Arreola said. "I think about Alex and my daughter Danae and that motivates me to want to make history."

An American world heavyweight champion of Mexican descent?

You better brace yourself. It could very well happen.

It could very well be Chris Arreola.