

Fredo Wants Another Big Fight, At Right Price

Written by Ron Borges
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The road back is always longer and steeper than the original road to success. Former super middleweight title challenger Peter Manfredo Jr. is beginning to understand that.

Last Friday night he packed the house of a small casino in Lincoln, R.I., selling out a room that had been half filled the last time a fight was held there several months earlier. The guy who runs the place said at one point, "We'd love to have Peter fight here every week. He brings in a crowd like no one else."

Once there was a time when this would have been affirmation that the former Contender series reality TV star was on the right road, but when you have fought for the world championship in front of 35,000 people, as he did against Joe Calzaghe 16 months ago, and lost and then fought someone like former super middleweight champion like Jeff Lacy in Las Vegas and lost, as Manfredo did nine months ago, it is not enough any more to be a local hero.

It is comforting and familiar but it is not enough, which oddly is why Manfredo accepted the fight against former Contender series 3 challenger Donny McCrary, who he knocked flat in less than two rounds. He did it because he knows now, after those two losses to Calzaghe and Lacy, exactly who he is. He is a fighter and all he wants is one last chance to prove it to a world larger than the one he now inhabits.

That is a point Manfredo still hopes to make to a national audience before the year is out, a point he wasn't quite sure of himself after that disappointing loss to Lacy last December.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do after that," Manfredo (31-5, 16 KO) said. "I trained in LA. (with Freddie Roach) for a while. I learned a lot. So did my father (who had trained him since he was a young amateur).

"I wasn't sure if I still wanted to be a fighter. I wanted to get my electrician's license, get a job and train at night. I got a wife. I got kids. I had to think about those things.

"It took a while but I decided to come back to Providence and train here and work at being a fighter. I'm at peace now. I know what I want. I'm sure about the direction I'm going. I'm a fighter. I want to do this thing. I believe I can."

What Manfredo still believes is that somehow he will get one last chance at boxing's bright lights in part because of the name recognition he first got from starring in *The Contender* and later from facing Calzaghe and Lacy, even though he lost and in part because he can still pull in a crowd.

He has already been offered \$100,000 to take on former two-time super middleweight champion Anthony Mundine but his father believes it's worth twice that purse to face a tough opponent who doesn't hold a title belt any more after being stripped of the WBA championship

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for his refusal to defend it against former champion Mikkel Kessler (or much of anyone else worthy of the name contender) earlier this year.

Manfredo has stopped three straight nondescript opponents while he waits to see what his next move will be, earning a living and biding his time until another big fight comes. It may be against Mundine or it may be against someone else with a ranking who he sees as an opportunity to advance.

Yet even now that he knows what he wants, Manfredo also understands boxing remains a business as well as a sport so decisions have to be weighed carefully at this stage of his career. One does not simply accept a fight with someone like Mundine (33-3, 23 KO) without careful consideration because every move now has to be thought out from every angle. This is the last walk, after all, so attention must be paid to every step, knowing that the kind of opponent McCrory represents is one form of danger, just as Mundine is another.

“Peter can fight these guys but he can’t lose to one,” said matchmaker Mike Marchionte of McCrory. “Not if he wants to keep going. He cannot make a mistake against one of these guys. There’d be no coming back from that.”

And so he weighs risk and reward, knowing in the end where he hopes to end up, which is inside a boxing ring with a dangerous man across from him. Someone with whom the risk is high but the reward higher.

“I want to move back into the picture,” Manfredo said. “I have to keep winning to do that. I have to beat some top rated guys soon. I know that. I want those fights. But everything has to be right.”

In other words, he has to get a fair payday for the risk, a risk he’s willing to take for the reward of being known again as more than a guy who can fill a casino hall in Rhode Island.