

Nate Campbell: They Call Me Champ Now

Written by Rick Folstad

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This is the kind of fighter your dad was talking about when he mentioned guys like LaMotta, Basilio and Tiger.

Nate Campbell doesn't ask who he's fighting, he just wants to know when and where. He'll be there, his new world title belt draped over his shoulder, ready to put it on the line against anyone in the crowd who thinks they can take him in 12.

When Campbell beat undefeated Juan Diaz in March, not many outside the Tampa Bay area knew who he was. They might have heard rumors about Campbell, the tough guy with the strange, misspelled nickname who would fight Godzilla if they could find trunks to fit him.

But beat Diaz? Yeah, right. When pigs fly. When hell freezes over. In your dreams.

The Campbell fight was supposed to be a warm-up for Diaz, something to keep him busy and keep the rust off until the big-money names showed up.

But no one told Campbell he wasn't supposed to win, and suddenly his name is being added to party lists and strangers want to shake his hand. People are asking who is this new world champ and how did he come up with the crazy name Galaxy Warrior?

Barring the very possible intrusion of Hurricane Ike, Campbell (32-5-1, 25 KOs) will be in the spotlight again when he puts his IBF, WBA and WBO lightweight titles on the line for the first time. He's scheduled to face two-division world champion Joan Guzman (28-0, 17 KOs) of the Dominican Republic on Saturday at the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino in Biloxi, Miss., on SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING.

In the co-feature, WBC junior-welterweight champ Timothy Bradley (22-0, 11 KOs) of Palm Springs, Calif., will take on the No. 6 contender Edner Cherry (24-5, 12 KOs) of Wauchula, FL.

For Campbell, it's been a long, hard ride. At 36, you don't win your first world title. You retire.

"People call me champ now, but everything is the same in my life," Campbell said on a recent conference call. "I still train hard and get no breaks in the gym. For me, this is just another hard fight. I want to fight this fight like I'm not the champion, so expect me to be the same Nate Campbell."

The same Nate Campbell says that being a world champion is still just sinking in. But he never lost the faith, never thought he couldn't win the title if he got the chance.

And respect? Maybe now he's getting some. When they start calling you champ, people stop and notice.

"Before I fought Diaz, he was a god," Campbell said. "Now that I beat him, he was over-rated."

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Accolades are nice to have, but I'm here to do damage to whoever they put in front of me to keep what's mine."

Campbell likes to say he came up the hard way, not many easy fights and a few tough losses. He calls it the old-fashioned way, some heartaches and heartbreakers. He says he's not mad at anyone, but it's time he got what he deserved: some respect and an opportunity to defend his title. He doesn't care who it's against.

"Anyone could have gotten a shot at my title," he said. "One thing about me, I've never turned a fight down."

Yeah, but Guzman for his first title defense? There were easier names to pick from, but that never occurred to Campbell.

"The WBO made him my mandatory," Campbell said. "I'm the world champ. Everyone wants to fight me, and Joan is as good as anyone to make my title defense against."

Guzman, moving up in weight to take the fight, said the WBO gave him the option to vacate the 130 pound belt he owned and become the No. 1 contender at 135. He calls it an opportunity he couldn't pass up. It made sense to move up and fight Campbell at 135.

"We have quickness on our side and a great defense on our side," Guzman said through a translator. "We're going to give him a hell of a fight."

As for the nickname Galaxy Warrior, Campbell said he got it from one of his favorite hangouts.

"Galaxy Boxing was the name of my gym," he said. "Up front, the name of the place was Galaxy Computers. In the back was a Gym called Boxing at the Galaxy. It's not me trying to be (a big shot) with the two X's. That's just the way it was spelled."

In the co-feature, Bradley will be making his first title defense since winning the belt from England's Junior Witter in May in a fight in England.

He expects a tough night against Cherry.

"I've just got to use my head, be smart in the ring," Bradley said. "I know (Cherry) has a lot of experience. I've seen his videos. He does a lot of (things). But I'm still a work in progress. I just want to show the world who Tim Bradley is."

Cherry said he doesn't expect any surprises from Bradley.

"I've fought a lot of good fighters and Tim Bradley won't bring anything new," Cherry said. "He's a great fighter. He went to England and to Junior Witter's backyard and beat him. There's nothing you can take away from him. But on (Saturday) we'll get it going."