

Ponce De Leon Vows To Return

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
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It was the perfect punch.

Unfortunately for Daniel Ponce De Leon it landed on his chin, delivered by opponent Juan Manuel Lopez on June 7th. Lopez would stop the Mexican and strip him of his WBO Super bantamweight title in unexpected fashion, with a round one TKO.

The former Sydney 2000 Olympian was known for his brutal punching power and granite chinned whiskers. But now he'd been stopped in emphatic fashion. This time, his aggressive nature worked against him as he was picked off while hurling one of his reckless bombs.

He experienced some luck in the beginning of the round as he teed off a couple of times on Juan Manuel. Then De Leon stepped in pushing a left hook. He was countered beautifully by a powerful right hand that put him down for an eight count. He got up on wobbly legs only to be nailed and dropped again moments later by the Puerto Rican. He rose to his feet but the damage was done. His woozy condition prompted the referee to wave off the bout.

"I realize now that I was too aggressive. I went in and landed some punches that I felt were getting to him. I got confident," De Leon remembered. "I should've taken my time and studied him more. He connected first and I give him all the credit he deserves. Now I plan to work my way back to being a world champion."

Like it does for every proud fighter, the loss stings at some level. "A rematch with Lopez would be ideal but I'm not going to obsess on it," De Leon said. "But if not him, I'll fight a couple of times and then I'll take on any of the other champions. Israel Vazquez, Celestino Caballero or Paul Molitor. Getting a world title back is very important to me. I have the backing of my promoters at Golden Boy. I know they're going to do their part to get me a title shot. Now I have to do my part. I have to win every time I step into the ring."

De Leon's attitude remains positive about the loss to Lopez. "It was a hard loss but I learned a lot from that fight," De Leon (34-2, 30 KO's) said. "And there's no shame in losing the way I did. The fight lasted only one round. If we had gone more rounds and I was totally dominated that would've hurt more. But this was one round and one lucky punch."

Now, he says, "It's time to move forward." He's offering some of his former victims a chance for retribution. "I know that Rey Bautista and Gerry Penalosa have both asked for rematches," De Leon said. He defeated Bautista by first round knockout in August of 2007. Penalosa, who is the current WBO bantamweight champion, lost to De Leon by a close decision in March of the same year. "Anytime they want. I'll fight them in the Philippines if I have to. That's what I have to do to get back in the mix."

Major changes have taken place in the Chihuahua native's camp. Normally based in Los Angeles and trained by Joe Hernandez, he's now moved to Las Vegas where he's training

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under the tutelage of Fernando Soto at Johnny Tocco's gym. Hernandez is now acting solely as his manager. "I thought it was time for something different," De Leon said. "Joe is busy with other projects that he's got going and I need someone that will teach me more about technique."

Talk about a gargantuan task for Soto. Teaching De Leon about technique at this point in the 28 year old's career is like teaching ballet to a hippo. We've seen the scenario before. Bangers like Arturo Gatti who tried their hand at learning "technique" only to revert to brawling when the action gets heated. De Leon assures his fans that won't be the case with him. "You'll see a more technically intelligent fighter in my next fight," he said. "The changes are going to surprise a lot of people."

His first fight back since the loss of his belt is scheduled against Colombian Angel Priolo on October 24th at the Morongo Casino near Palm Springs. "It's a good place to fight because it's close to Los Angeles where I have a lot of fans and friends," De Leon said. "It's good to have your people around. Especially since I feel like I'm starting out on a new journey."

He has a message to those that have followed his career. "To the fans that have watched all my fights and supported me, I'm coming back stronger than ever," De Leon said. "I'm going to use what I learned from the fight against Juan Ma and it's going to show in my next performance. You're going to see a much more improved Ponce De Leon. Don't lose faith. I'm going to make you proud again."