

Arthur Rules Squared Circle, Not Round Table

Written by Phil Woolever

Monday, 29 September 2008 19:00

DUSSELDORF- This Saturday, a short hop away by the 250+ kilometers per hour ICE (inter-continental express) train, undefeated IBF middleweight champ "King" Arthur Abraham looks to put rejuvenated challenger Raul "El Diamante" Marquez on a different, colder kind of ice for his eighth title defense, at the JAKO arena in Bamberg.

After taking the belt with a fifth round stoppage of Kingsley Ikeke around three years back, Germany's Abraham has taken a slow but sure pounding path to the top of the game.

Despite far less global hype than Euro counterparts like Joe Calzaghe or Ricky Hatton, Abraham has emerged as arguably the top pound for pound fighter among the European boxing elite.

In fact, while it's still not very likely, Abraham, 27-0 (22), could end up getting a big payday break against Calzaghe or Kelly Pavlik. At this point, a more realistic next step looks like Winky Wright.

Millionaire marketability wise, Abraham still has some seasoning due.

It was a big step last June when he walloped (and quite possibly ruined) Edison Miranda in four rematch frames that erased any questions from their brutal, controversial first encounter.

Other challengers like Shannon Taylor and Kofi Jantuah had legitimate recognition, but names like Sebastian Demers, Khoren Gevor, Wayne Elcock, and Elvin Ayala may be semi-respectable on a resume, but they're no big thing to the average fan or network executive.

Despite coming in at a hard travelled 37 years old, 1992 US Olympian Marquez, 41-3-1 (29) could well be Abraham's toughest opponent to date.

Marquez is a plenty rough diamond, who earned the shot with an upset surprise against then unbeaten Giovanni Lorenzo on the undercard of Abraham-Miranda 2 in a fight meant to showcase Lorenzo.

Abraham and Marquez exchanged press release volleys last week based on Marquez's assertion that Abraham was looking past him toward bigger buck engagements.

"Abraham's people are looking beyond me," said Marquez. "I'll spoil all the talk about his next fight."

"If I was ignoring him I'd be laying on the beach," responded Abraham. "Eight weeks of preparation at two sessions a day tells a different story. This wouldn't be my eighth defense if I looked past any of my opponents. Marquez isn't the mandatory for nothing."

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"Still, there's no chance he'll beat me."

Thanks to promoter Sauerland Event's PR whiz Johannes Berendt, The Sweet Science was able to touch translated base a bit with Abraham about his outlook on Marquez and the future.

"I was warming up for my fight against Miranda so I did not watch the (Marquez-Lorenzo) fight live," said Abraham. "But of course we have closely analyzed the tape. I have a lot of respect for Marquez. He is an experienced, accomplished fighter. He deserves to be the mandatory challenger after a tough fight against Lorenzo."

"Marquez is tough, fast, and tactically clever. In other words, he is a very good boxer. I expect a hard fight. Of course I will try to catch and stop him, but if it doesn't happen then I will win on points. He is a tough guy and it will be a very difficult task for me."

"I want to return to the USA as soon as possible," said Abraham regarding what's next. "I will fight Pavlik everywhere he wants. It is my goal to become super champion. Pavlik has two belts and I want them. My management is working hard to get the fight done in the USA."

"There is nothing like fighting in the United States. This is where famous boxers are made. It is the place to go for every fighter. My first fight in America was a very successful one as I stopped Miranda. After the Marquez fight I intend to come back there as soon as possible and make even bigger fights."

Abraham closed with a message for our Sweet Science readers.

"I would like to send my best regards to your readers, and I hope to see them at my next fight in the US!"

To me, Marquez had as much potential as anyone, including Oscar de la Hoya, on the '92 squad. There's a very good chance he's faced far better opposition overall than Abraham.

But those were other times, other places. The gut says Marquez will be lucky to get past eight rounds this weekend in Germany, a substantial, growing kingdom for Arthur Abraham.