

Will 2009 Be Ward's Breakout Year?

Written by Raymond Markarian
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There comes a moment for every young boxing prospect to take a step up in competition. For Andre Ward, his time is near. The undefeated super middleweight acknowledges that the ascent of his boxing career has come to an intersection. "I am ready to go to the next level," Ward told TSS "I think it is time."

An opponent that plays the role of gatekeeper is usually the standard barrier for the up and comers like Ward. But at this stage of his career the Oakland native feels little obligation to test the waters against anyone besides the best. Ward says he is prepared to confront the finest combatants the super middleweight division has to offer.

A proposed Jermain Taylor vs. Andre Ward fight was in the works. Dan Goossen, Ward's promoter, spoke with Lou Dibella about a possible scrap between the two former U.S. Olympians to take place in early 2009. Talks were put to a halt between the promoters because Dibella has gone a different route for Taylor. There are rumblings that Taylor might take a bout against Glen Johnson, at a catch weight of 171 pounds.

Meanwhile Ward's next fight is scheduled to be on February 6th in Lemoore, California against Henry Buchanan. Shobox will televise the bout. Perhaps is it not the marquee fight Ward was hoping for in early 2009, but at least it is the main event of one of the few consistent boxing shows on television, a showcase for him to display his talents in the ring.

Another knockout for Andre would make it eight straight. We spoke via telephone on Saturday morning. Andre was fresh off of a six mile run, which suggested to me that there is little hindering effect on the knee injury that required minor surgery in August.

Ward built the strongest momentum of his professional career in early 2008, with knockout victories over Rubin Williams and Jerson Ravelo. He was sidelined for much of the rest of the year with a knee injury that occurred during a pickup basketball game. After a five month layoff, the 24 year old returned to the ring in December and looked stronger. He used superior ring generalship during his easy victory over the rugged Esteban Camou in three rounds.

There is a buzz among boxing insiders that 2009 is an important year for Ward. The 2004 Olympic Gold Medalist has won his last seven fights by knockout. A fighter that lays out his opponents on a consistent basis normally obtains the attention of the boxing public.

Like him or not, a boxing scene searching for young talent to infiltrate the "old boys clubs" of boxing stars could use a fighter like Ward, who has been lumped in with Andre Berto, as one of the next stars in the sport.

No matter, on February 6th, business needs to be taken care of. And Ward professes the need to keep his priorities straight. "You have to beat the best to be the best," Ward said. "I am just going to continue to work hard and when it is my time to shine I will to be ready to go."

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