

Barrera Says He Has Gas Left In The Tank

Written by Ron Borges

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Frank Warren, like most promoters, believes in overstatement disguised as bombast, but Wednesday afternoon he may have been on to something while discussing the March 14 fight in Manchester, England between young Amir Khan and old Marco Antonio Barrera.

“For once, for all the BS that goes on in boxing, this is the start of one man’s career in boxing and end of the other’s,” England’s leading promoter said. “Is Amir Khan what we think he is? Is Barrera finished?”

Warren, of course, left out the worst of the possibilities which is that Khan is not but Barrera is, which would make for an ugly evening at the M.E.N. Arena. Such a possibility is not beyond the realm of possibility but it is of course of no interest to Warren, who promotes Khan, or Don King, who now handles the affairs of Barrera. They were both speaking of their respective fighters to flog the promotion, which has already sold over 15,000 tickets in Manchester, proving once again that while boxing may be struggling in the U.S. it’s alive and well in the U.K.

Khan’s career is not, however. The former silver medalist in Athens had been the latest in a line of hot commodities to come out of England recently when he first turned professional but his chin has grown ever more suspect, finally proving a dangerous liability against a little known opponent named Breidis Prescott, who knocked him cold in 54 seconds last September in the very same building in which he will try to rebuild himself at the expense of the 35-year-old Barrera.

Barrera has been hired by Warren and offered by King as a sacrifice to the altar of the New Generation after having appeared to slip badly 18 months ago when Manny Pacquiao won a lop-sided decision over him in the opinion of two of the three judges at ringside. It was his second straight defeat, having already been beaten just as handily by Pacquiao’s great Mexican rival, Juan Manuel Marquez, six months earlier, a defeat that cost Barrera the WBC super featherweight title.

It was 13 months before Barrera returned to boxing, having indicated he would retire after the Pacquiao loss. By the time he came back he was without his promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, with whom he was also supposed to be a business partner.

Apparently that only lasted until it appeared Barrera could no longer do any big business in boxing, which is how he ended up with King. King is to boxers what Jesus was to Lazarus – a good friend when you’re in need of a resurrection.

He has resuscitated fighters in all weight classes for most of his career so doing it again with Barrera is nothing new nor all that remarkable if he pulls it off. He got him a win in China, where few people outside the Middle Kingdom got to see what Barrera had left against Sammy Ventura but it reportedly wasn’t much. That is what got the wheels turning inside Warren’s head.

This has led to getting him in the ring with Khan on March 14 despite Barrera having suffered

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what many claim was a severe cut on Jan. 31 in a tuneup fight against Freudis Rojas in Jalisco, Mexico, not far from Barrera's hometown.

Rojas was disqualified but the more serious issue was the gash over Barrera's left eye. It briefly put the Khan fight in jeopardy but only for as long as it took to get Barrera in front of a doctor in Florida selected by King.

After examining him his diagnosis was "No problem." No surprise, although people familiar with Barrera claim his brother was adamantly and vocally opposed to fighting next month.

"I don't want to get into my cut," Barrera (65-6, 43 KO) said. "Amir Khan should not be worried about that. He should be worried about the fact I'm coming for him. I'm coming to win the fight. I'm not coming to be a step (stepping stone). I'm coming to win."

King has promised the winner a shot at 36-year-old lightweight champion Nate Campbell, who he also promotes and who may be the right age for Khan to benefit from such a pairing despite Campbell's skills. For Barrera, if he survives Khan, this would give him an opportunity to become the first Mexican fighter to win world titles in four different weight classes (122, 126 and 130 already), a bit of history he claims to be fixated on.

Of course, if Golden Boy Promotions thought there was a chance in hell of that happening he'd still be under contract to them. But he is not and so you wonder.

You wonder also because Warren is a man who takes few chances with his meal tickets. If it was up to him, Joe Calzaghe would not yet have fought Bernard Hopkins or maybe even Mikkel Kessler. After all, why fight those guys if you can get paid to wrestle around with local heroes like Carl Froch and Clinton Woods?

So would he take a risk with Khan if he felt for a minute Marco Antonio Barrera still had a pulse? Perhaps young Khan has the answer to that question.

"Why would I take a fight if I didn't think I can win?" Khan (19-1, 15 KO) said. "I'm confident. My team is confident. Even if he didn't have the cut I know I can beat him. He's made for my style."

At that point Warren jumped in to remind anyone who might have forgotten that this is the same Barrera who replaced Chavez in the hearts of Mexican fight fans and is considered a legend regardless of what else happens in his career. That doesn't mean he's the same Barrera who won those nights against Erik Morales and Naseem Hamed and both Khan and Warren are praying he isn't because if that's the case we can stop right now and tell you whose career is set to end at the M.E.N. Arena next month.

"We're not looking for excuses," King said. "We're looking for results. I wouldn't put Marco in if he wasn't (physically) ready (surely not). He's in it to win it! He can't give up and he won't give in! Barrera is READY. The more handicapped they think he is the more ready we will be."

Time will tell on that but truth be told this fight has been made because Barrera is desperate for one last shot at a championship and can only get it by facing down some young gun like Khan so he and King have found a guy who at least clearly has a serious flaw Barrera might exploit –

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a fragile chin.

That may not make a difference if the Barrera who arrives in the UK is physically flawed himself, both because of the cut and the high cost of 72 professional prize fights, many of them wars. That is what young Khan is counting on. Or at least what Frank Warren is counting on.

This match is a repeat of a similar calculated gamble Warren took a three years ago when he matched rising Ricky Hatton against fading IBF junior welterweight legend Kostya Tszyu in the same building. Tszyu was better preserved than Barrera but Hatton was probably a tougher fighter than Khan so the risk evens out.

What happened that night was that Tszyu gave Hatton problems early but eventually faded and was forced to quit on his stool after the 11th round. That gave Hatton an inflated victory off of which he's made millions while becoming a national celebrity.

Now Warren is hoping to pull off the same feat at the expense of Barrera, who laughed off that possibility Wednesday saying, "I have a lot of respect for Freddie Roach (who trains Khan) but don't make yourself bigger than you are. At the end of the day, I'll be alone with Amir. He better get his kid ready.

"I know who I am. If they don't know who I am I will show them on March 14."

Frank Warren is counting on knowing precisely who, and more importantly what, Marco Antonio Barrera is these days. He is betting he's a shadow with nothing left to advertise himself but a resume. If he's right, 22-year-old Amir Khan will have fulfilled a ritual of boxing. He will have advanced his career at the expense of a great champion tottering on his last legs.

But if he's wrong, it won't be Barrera's career that will end in Manchester. It will be young Khan's. That's a bet an old gambler like Warren wouldn't take lightly. The fact he chose to make it leaves you thinking Marco Antonio Barrera is all done. Or at least soon will be.