

Oscar De La Hoya Retires For Good

Written by David A. Avila
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The Golden Boy era is over.

Oscar De La Hoya, who grew up in the barrios of East Los Angeles, announced with moist eyes that he was calling an end to his record-breaking professional boxing career after 17 years.

“These last four months have been very difficult for me,” said De La Hoya, 36, at the new LA Live entertainment center in front of several hundred people across the street from the Staples Center where he participated in the first pro boxing match ever held in that arena. “I’m announcing my retirement because I’ve been doing this since I was five years old and it’s just the love of my life for boxing is my passion and it was what I was born to do. And when I can’t do it any more and come in at the highest level, it’s not fair to me, it’s not fair to the fans, and it’s not fair to nobody. I’ve come to the conclusion that’s it’s over.”

Dressed in a bluish gray suit and flanked by City of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and several members of the Golden Boy Promotions and HBO executives, De La Hoya said his decision was based on a lot of considerations.

“You’re always thinking you can try one more time, but this decision was based on making sure, first of all, that I do not disappoint anyone when I step inside the ring,” he said somberly. “I want to make sure that I have a life where I can continue to be involved and help the sport of boxing.”

The end was not unexpected especially after meeting with a few reporters in Las Vegas this past weekend and other reporters in Tucson, Arizona. More than a few hinted that De La Hoya’s very poor performance last December against Manny Pacquiao was a shocker and pointed decidedly that he no longer possessed the skills that had vaulted him to be considered the best fighter Pound for Pound in 1999 after beating Ike Quartey.

His father Joel De La Hoya Sr. was tearful as his son announced his retirement.

“Thanks to God for this moment,” said the father.

The mayor of L.A. said that De La Hoya had given Latinos in the city and especially those raised in East L.A. a sense of pride.

“Little brother, we’re proud of you,” said Villaraigosa who grew up in City Terrace, a hilly section of East Los Angeles.

De La Hoya thanked his wife Millie, who had abhorred boxing at first but gained respect for the sport as the wife of one of the most recognized boxers in the world.

“We’ve been through a lot of things together,” said Millie. “I really love this man for who he is.”

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Mark Taffet, an HBO executive, said that De La Hoya holds the record of 32 appearances and accumulated more than 14.1 million pay-per-view buys when he fought.

“They may never be broken,” Taffet said.

Taffet recalled that George Foreman first pointed out De La Hoya’s talent before anyone had seen him perform on the big stage.

“George Foreman said ‘that is the future of boxing,’” Taffet recalled. “A one-man franchise.”

After De La Hoya won the gold medal in the 1992 Olympics held in Barcelona, Spain, he captured the WBO junior lightweight title against Jimmi Bredahl in 1994 at the Olympic Auditorium, the same venue where his father had fought many years before. He proceeded to win a total of 10 world titles in six weight divisions.

The last world title De La Hoya held was the WBC junior middleweight crown gained by stopping Nicaragua’s Ricardo Mayorga in six rounds. Then he lost that title to Floyd Mayweather Jr. in 2007. That was followed by a win against Steve Forbes in May 2008. Finally, his loss to the much smaller Pacquiao forced him to realize that he no longer possessed the physical tools needed for the elite level.

“It’s a tough decision knowing that I’m never ever going to compete for the rest of my life. It’s a tough, tough decision,” De La Hoya said. “I feel there’s a legacy I can leave outside the ring. That to me is just as important.”