Growing up in Texas as a person of African-American and Mexican-American descent you're bound to get some people talking. "There were some racist comments made towards us because of us being black and Mexican," James De La Rosa remembers. "Sometimes my brother and I would end up getting into fights."

It was during one of those schoolyard brawls at the age of seven that his father, Pete, first witnessed James' natural quickness and strength. "I got into a fight and won pretty easy so my dad started encouraging us into going to the gym so we could learn the sport and to keep us from getting into problems," he recalled. "We were crying at first but it was the best thing that ever happened to us."

The sport he was once scared of has now become his passion.

De La Rosa (19-0, 12 KOs) wants to be the welterweight champion of the world so much that he dreams about it just about every night. The bright lights and the adulation of the fans are powerful draws to young men like the Harlingen, Texas native. "I have a lot of love for this sport. Boxing is a part of me now," De La Rosa said. "My goal is to be a pound for pound great. I want kids to look up to me as a fighter and a person."

With the added encouragement of their grandfather, Pedro De La Rosa, James and his brother both flourished and learned some important lessons. "My grandfather taught us to be proud of who we are but to be respectful of our opponents," De La Rosa said. "If we ever showed any disrespect he would step in and let us know that he didn't approve and that's how we keep his memory alive by always showing respect to others."

Up until his final days, their grandfather predicted that both James and his brother, former "Contender" series participant, Juan a.k.a. "El Gallo Negro" would be champions but that he wouldn't be there to see it. He passed away six years ago. The brothers both wear a picture of him around their necks when they go into battle in tribute to the man that shaped their lives. "He helped build the desire in me to be a champion," De La Rosa said. "He's the one that motivated us to go to the gym. Before we played, we had to do our work outs."

Previously trained by his father, the 21 year-old has been training in Little Rock, Arkansas with Danny Smith, where he's learning a different facet of the sport. "I feel real comfortable with Danny. I've gained a lot of knowledge from him. Especially about defense," De La Rosa said. "I think we're a real solid combination but I still have a lot of work to do. I need to keep my hands up a lot more. I also need to work on my punch output."

It was after his explosive knockout of undefeated Abel Perry on January 2008 on the "Solo Boxeo" boxing series that De La Rosa got the fight world buzzing. Perry was tough and cocky. The fight started off competitively as Perry tried his best to bully his younger opponent, who boxed in and out as he waited patiently for an opportunity.

Perry started showboating and motioning the Texan to bring the fight to him. He should've thought twice. Ten seconds into the second round, De La Rosa caught Perry with a blazing fast right hand that put him out in spectacular fashion. He dropped face first onto the canvas upon impact of the punch. "I think he underestimated me because of the nine year age difference. What he didn't realize was that I've been against some of the best when I was an amateur," De La Rosa said. "When a fighter showboats it's because they get hurt so I knew I must've gotten him good but I still took my time to finish him off."

De La Rosa soon found himself on Showtime against the also undefeated Tim Coleman. He earned a hard-fought unanimous decision that answered a lot of questions about the south Texan's resilience. Coleman posed some problems in the beginning but it was during the second part of the fight that De La Rosa turned on the after-burners and pulled away with the win. "I learned a lot from that experience. I knew I'd eventually figure him out," he said. "Whatever my opponent brings, eventually I'll find a way to adjust to his style. That's what a good fighter does."

The former WBC Youth Welterweight champion, he's currently ranked #24 by the WBC and #14 by the WBO in a division that's deep with talent. With Miguel Cotto and Shane Mosley ruling the division along with Andre Berto and Joshua Clottey, it's going to take a super human effort to climb the rankings and win the title. "I know that there's a tough road ahead of me but I feel like I'm going to make it. I really do," De La Rosa assured. "I have a lot of very close people behind me on this journey and the way I see it, you can accomplish just about anything with the support of your family."

To see "King" James De La Rosa against Abel Perry: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmnzX1ertUQ