

Vicente “Chente” Escobedo’s Final Test

Written by David A. Avila
Tuesday, 19 May 2009 19:00

Is it soup yet for Vicente “Chente” Escobedo?

The heralded former Olympian enters the ring again with renewed confidence spilling all over his square jaw and chiseled features.

Once a second coming of the Golden Boy the Sacramento-based prizefighter has returned after two years of re-loading under Mexico City’s boxing guru Nacho Beristain with banners flowing once again.

“It’s good to be home again,” said Escobedo.

With renewed vigor after two pivotal battles Escobedo (20-1, 12 KOs) faces probably the last test against former world champion Kevin Kelley (60-9-2, 39 KOs) at the Arco Arena on Thursday, May 21. The fight card will not be televised but onlookers will keep a steady eye on the Internet for results.

Escobedo needs this last fight before entering full bore into the crowded dwelling of the talented lightweight division where the likes of Edwin Valero, Joan Guzman, Michael Katsidis, Juan Diaz, Amir Khan, Joel Casamayor, Urbano Antillon and fellow stable mate Juan Manuel Marquez normally reside.

Beristain, who also teaches Rafael Marquez and Abner Mares, is quite confident in his pupil’s status.

“He’s not hesitating any more,” said Beristain, after Escobedo’s last win against former world champion Carlos “Famoso” Hernandez. “Fighting is coming naturally for him.”

All that is due to confidence. For a couple of years the once rock solid confidence of Escobedo was a taken for granted. But a loss to Daniel Jimenez in 2006 seemed to spiral the Sacramento fighter into fog.

When Escobedo first emerged from the 2004 Olympics in Greece he was seen as one of those young boxers that had all the qualities to be the next Oscar De La Hoya or Fernando Vargas.

At the time Escobedo met Jimenez on a Sacramento fight card, the Olympian who flashed a lethal left hook and savage quickness had nine knockouts in nine bouts. He seemed unbeatable. But that night he was dropped by the hard-hitting Puerto Rican and lost by split-decision.

The next two years Escobedo vaguely resembled the confident but not cocky wunderkind who was going to follow De La Hoya’s footsteps. He moved from trainer to trainer until he was placed in the hands of Mexico’s master teacher Nacho Beristain.

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It took some prodding by De La Hoya himself for Beristain to accept the pupil, but only under the condition that Escobedo and another Golden Boy fighter Abner Mares move to Mexico City. Both did without hesitation.

That first training session took place in May 2007 when De La Hoya fought Floyd Mayweather in Las Vegas. During the workout Beristain had Escobedo go through some boxing drills and adjusted little things like his glove placement and the arm angles of his left hook.

Now, two years later, Escobedo seems to be another pure fighting machine like the Mexico City trainer’s other prodigies Juan Manuel and Rafael Marquez.

In that fight with Hernandez, he thrice knocked down the first world champion from El Salvador but discovered that only inspired the fighter more.

“He’s a former world champion and I knew he wouldn’t just give up,” said Escobedo, who engaged in 10-round slugfest with the smaller but more experienced Hernandez. “I’ve always been a fan of Famoso and I knew how tough he could be. He was.”

Before the Hernandez fight, the Sacramento area fighter had another close call against fellow California prospect Dominic Salcido. Though behind in that fight, Escobedo waited for an opening before ending it by technical knockout in the sixth round.

These last two wins have propelled him to top 20 status in the lightweight division. His next opponent Kelley, who turns 42 on June 29, is a southpaw with power who has twice held a world title.

“Kevin Kelley is a boxer with slick fighting skills,” Escobedo said of his opponent. “He gave David Rodela a good fight.”

Escobedo has returned to favor in the boxing world. He wants to keep it that way.

“I know that every fighter I face is going to give me his best,” Escobedo said. “I have to be prepared for that.”

But one of the key ingredients is back in Escobedo’s corner: confidence.

Like any athlete confidence is probably the most important ingredient whether you’re trying to hit a 98-mile-an-hour fastball that moves, or hitting a 20-foot jumper on the move with two seconds on the clock, the mental capacity to believe in yourself is more important than superb talent alone.

“I’m excited to show what I can do,” Escobedo says.

On Thursday, Golden Boy Promotions and the boxing world will know if he’s ready for the monsters of the lightweight division.

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BOXING CHATTER

Melinda Cooper

The female Las Vegas prizefighter's world title bout against New Mexico's Monica Lovato was postponed for the third time in three months. This last time was for good, but both female bantamweights were reportedly paid by Roy Englebrecht Productions.

"Yes, we received the money," said James Pena, who trains and advises Cooper.

Cooper is now scheduled to meet Mexico's Irma "La Guerita" Sanchez (13-2-1) in Mexico City in mid-June. The winner of that fight will then possibly meet another proposed fighter for the WBC bantamweight title in Cancun, Mexico in July.

"Everything is slow up here," says Pena who is based in Las Vegas. "That's why we're going down there."

Sanchez is originally from Guadalajara and has only fought in the state of Jalisco. Cooper has never fought in Mexico but is friends with former world champion Miguel Angel Gonzalez who fought both Oscar De La Hoya and Julio Cesar Chavez in his prime.

San Diego

Carlos Molina (6-0, 3 KOs) meets veteran Anthony Martinez (21-29-3) in a lightweight contest on Thursday May 21 at the Hard Rock Hotel in San Diego. For tickets and information (858) 229-6669.

Las Vegas Friday

Former heavyweight world champion Oliver McCall (51-9, 36 KOs) fights John Hopoate (11-2, 11 KOs) in a heavyweight match at Orleans Casino in Las Vegas on Friday May 22. For tickets and information (702) 365-7075.

Morongo Casino

The 12th annual Battle of the Badges takes place on Saturday at Morongo Casino. Fourteen bouts are planned between the various law enforcement and fire prevention agencies. Money raised goes toward several worthy organizations such as Cops For Kids and Communities. First bout begins at 6 p.m. For information (888) MORONGO.

Primm, Nevada on Sunday

Junior welterweight contender Dmitriy Salita (29-0-1) faces Raul Munoz (20-11-1) of Kansas in a 10-round match at Buffalo Bills Resort and Casino in Primm, Nevada on Sunday May 24. For more information (800) FUN-STOP.

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Venice Beach Punchout

A 20-bout amateur boxing card will be held on 1 p.m. Sunday May 24, at the Venice Recreation Center located at 1800 Ocean Park Walk in Venice, Ca. Featured will be a number of university boxing teams such as UCLA and USC plus many other amateurs from Southern California and beyond. The event is sponsored by Pro Fight Supplements.

Victor Ortiz tickets

Tickets go on sale Thursda, May 21 for the interim world title fight between Oxnard’s hard-hitting Victor Ortiz and Marcos Maidana that takes place at the Staples Center in Los Angeles on June 27. Also on the card will be a rematch between Rocky Juarez and WBA featherweight titleholder Chris John of Indonesia. Their first clash ended in a draw. For information (800) 745-3000.