Andre Berto gets it. That doesn't mean he's got the Big Fight Saturday night because he doesn't but if he keeps going the way he has been when he does get it – as it seems he surely will eventually - he'll be a lot better prepared for his close up than Norma Desmond was in the last scene in "Sunset Boulevard.''

Berto is set to defend the WBC welterweight title against a tough, conscientious super lightweight champion named Juan Urango on HBO's Boxing After Dark. That is not who he would prefer to be fighting or when he'd prefer to be fighting but it is where he would prefer to be fighting at least – which is under the brightest lights in boxing. These days those lights belong to HBO and to appear regularly on their network, as he has recently been doing, is to build a name for yourself the old fashioned way…slowly.

That is the best way to learn the hard trade Berto has adopted, so in an odd way he is benefiting by being held back by the politics and business of prize fighting. Boxing is a skill that requires training, timing, fitness and exposure to a multitude of different styles and challenges. That is how fighters were built for generations. It is a tried and true formula for long-term success, assuming you have talent, which Berto does in abundance.

In recent years, as the sport itself began to decline in popularity, the long view of the apprentice was replaced by short cuts, safe routes and young fighters reaching a certain level and then going into the equivalent of a four-corner offense to try and avoid any further challenges and stall their way to a big payday by waiting until one fell in their laps. The flaw in that thinking is that more often than not when it arrived the guy was ill prepared to win, which still remains the aim of this exercise.

To be fair, sometimes it worked, but most times it didn't, at least not if your intention was to not only become a belt holder but become an actual champion with some longevity at the top of your weight division.

In a sense, Berto has thus been aided in his maturation by the present logjam in the welterweight division. While he is part of it, he is a small part that no one yet has to deal with because he is not as well known as the men in front of him. But probably he is at least as dangerous as many of them.

It is that kind of circumstance that can impede a fighter's progress toward the big paydays for some time and so it seems it is for Berto. The difference is that he appears to understand the situation he's in and is choosing to benefit from it rather than rail against it by testing himself against guys like Urango, the well-respected Luis Collazo and a slick but aging veteran like Steve Forbes.

Unlike many young fighters trapped in similar circumstances, Berto is patiently facing the kind of tests that, if passed, will improve his skills and allow him to learn the many things a young

fighter of 25 cannot yet know.

Once there was a time when fighters like Berto, young champions or contenders on the rise, squared off against tests like Urango (21-1-1, 16 KO) regularly because boxing is a trade that must be learned through trial and error. Real improvement comes only when reasonable risks are taken, the kind that can produce struggles, confusion and a night when you do not look as good as you might like, as Berto did not for a time in his last outing against Collazo before pulling the fight out with a furious finish.

That performance caused some to question if he will reach the potential everyone in boxing once felt for him; but at 24-0 with 19 knockouts, Berto remains on schedule and a fighter who is being brought along the old fashioned way, which is to say correctly.

Ahead of him in the division sit Miguel Cotto, Joshua Clottey, Shane Mosley, Antonio Margarito (who has been banned in the U.S. for at least a year for allowing his gloves to be tampered with before he lost to Mosley), Collazo and Carlos Quintana. That's before you even get to Floyd Mayweather, Jr., who is making his comeback in July, and Manny Pacquiao, who seems able to fight and win in whatever weight class he feels compelled to compete in.

That's a lot of well-known iron in front of him, although Cotto faces Clottey on June 13 at Madison Square Garden so that will clear some of the road ahead. Berto's promoter, Lou DiBella, has talked of his willingness to match Berto with Mosley but the aging Mosley finally seems smart enough these days to realize his next big payday will come facing Cotto, Mayweather or Pacquiao and he doesn't need to risk that against a young lion like Berto.

Both Berto and DiBella seem to understand the situation they are in and after his close shave with Collazo, Berto admitted he had not prepared as fully as he normally had in the past, having allowed the hype around him to subconsciously convince him he could win on reputation alone.

Lesson learned by a fight he pulled out in fiery fashion at the end, thus making a few more fans for himself among people who understand every fight should not be a walk over. Saturday night at the Seminole Hard Rock Arena in Hollywood, Fla. we will see if he truly learned from that experience because if he has not the deeply religious Urango will push him to his limits. If he has, he should be in with the kind of aggressive guy he can look good against while at the same time not simply having a punching bag in front of him.

Mayweather, Pacquiao, Cotto and Mosley all seem disinclined to face Berto and for good reason. Margarito feels the same way and has bigger things to worry about at the moment anyway. Unlike Berto, they have all mastered their trade and need not take the kind of risk he poses until the money is right. For that to happen, Berto has to further develop both his skills and his name with fights like the Urango match.

Perhaps after that he gives Collazo a rematch, which would be a popular television fight, or he gets lucky and gets a shot at Mosley if he can't come to some kind of an equitable financial settlement to fight Cotto (which seems unlikely, frankly).

Pacquiao is quite rightly inclined to wait for the Mayweather-Juan Manuel Marquez winner and take him on late in the year, thus pushing the hard-punching Berto back to 2010 at the earliest.

All Andre Berto can do about that is what he's been doing – win fights against opponents who are challenging enough to be bought by the cable networks who now fund the sport while making himself better known and gaining a deeper knowledge of the mysteries of the most difficult game in the world to master.