

Searching For The New Oscar

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
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Everyone's searching for the new Oscar de la Hoya. Including Golden Boy Promotions' Oscar himself.

The L.A. based promotional company took a step towards fulfilling that goal by signing three promising young fighters from the southern California boxing circuit. Lightweights Luis Ramos (11-0, 6 KO's), Carlos Molina (7-0, 3 KO's) and featherweight Ronny Rios (5-0, 2 KO's) all signed on board at Oscar's offices in downtown L.A. on Tuesday.

What are some of the qualities a young prospect needs to have in order to have a shot at becoming the next "Golden Boy"? First, he must have an impressive amateur pedigree. Second, he should demonstrate a high level skill-set as an up and coming professional. Third, he must be clean-cut and lastly, being fluent in Spanish and English is also an important requirement. Oscar has all those qualities and many within the California boxing scene feel that at least one of these three, Ramos, Molina and Rios are similarly blessed.

"It's like a dream come true," Ramos said after signing. Growing up, the 21 year old from Santa Ana, California always admired his new boss. "Oscar has been an inspiration to me since I was a little kid. Being part of his stable is an honor and I plan to do everything I can to make Golden Boy proud that they signed me." Ramos had an outstanding amateur career with a record of 120 wins against 16 losses. The titles he won are too numerous to mention. Suffice to say that he won just about every major amateur championship.

Carlos Molina hails from Norwalk and trains in Commerce. "I'm excited and flattered that such a big time promotion company signed me," the 22-year-old Molina stated. "I would say that it's the beginning of a dream. I'm just getting started and now I've got the right promoter behind me to take me where I want to go, which is the world title." Molina had a solid amateur career and has been impressive as a professional. Even as an amateur, Molina possessed a "pro" style that's pleasing to watch.

Ronny Rios is also from Santa Ana and trains at TKO Boxing Gym along with Ramos. At 19, his performances have garnered rave reviews. "This is a big deal for me. It's going to open a lot of doors. Being signed by Oscar is unbelievable. He's someone whose career I've always followed," Rios said. "I plan to get better every time out. More than anything, signing with Golden Boy just makes me want to train harder than I usually do." Rios was one of the most decorated amateur fighters ever. He was a two time national amateur champion who fights with a tight guard, quick hands and swift footwork.

All three fighters are part of the Espinoza Boxing Club which is headed by well known manager Frank Espinoza. Currently, along with Abner Mares, four of Espinoza's undefeated prospects are part of De La Hoya's promotional group. "I think it's an important day for a lot of reasons," Espinoza said. "These kids are respectful, talented, and they're humble athletes that other kids can look up to and they deserve to be promoted by a great company like Golden Boy. I think

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they'll all be champions. I believe in their talent."

Hector Lopez is the trainer for Ramos and Rios. He's a no-nonsense type of guy who constantly ket tabs on the young men he's been training since they were about eight years old. He is, for all intents and purposes, their second father. "You're not going to see any tattoos or piercings on my fighters," the 39-year old Lopez commented at one point during a conversation. "I'm old school like that." He smiled when he said it, but one got the sense that he truly meant it.

A national audience will get a chance to see all three prospects as part of "Fight Night Club" on the Versus television network on July 30th. The card is taking place at the Nokia Theater in downtown Los Angeles. The trio has developed quite a following that will likely make up a large part of the audience at "the Nokia" which is considered to be one of the nicer boxing venues in California.

Oscar is a tough act to follow, there's no argument there. He single handedly re-energized boxing in the 90s when the sport was truly dying. No other fighter ever logged as many pay per view sales or sold as many tickets. But it takes more than just flashing a million dollar smile in the direction of the HBO cameras. Ultimately, it takes talent, desire and the ability to win major fights against dangerous opponents.

Reaching Oscar's superstar level, well, that's a bit more complicated. It's divine intervention at work, it's the planets aligning with perhaps some karmic retribution. Ramos, Molina and Rios are special talents hungry for the spotlight and success. They have a top rate promoter and manager. The team is in place. The stage is set. Now it's all up to them.

Programming note:

I shot a video of Luis Ramos during one of his training sessions at the TKO Boxing gym in Santa Ana. I interviewed him and his trainer and got some great footage. Here's the link. Hot Prospect: Luis Ramos <http://www.thesweetscience.com/boxing-video.php#top>