

Gamboa Looking To Gain Entrance To PPV Vault

Written by Ron Borges

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It may not lead immediately to where he hopes to end up but Cuban-born WBA featherweight champion Yuriorkis Gamboa well understands he will be at the WaMa Theatre at Madison Square Garden Saturday night for reasons in excess of simply defending his portion of the 126-pound title he now holds.

That will be his first objective, of course, but the other goal is to continue to make the kind of noise that will allow him to follow quickly in the footsteps of little big men like Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales, Juan Manuel Marquez and the walking cash machine, Manny Pacquiao, who all have preceded him into the vault that one gains entrance to as a successful pay-per-view attraction.

All of them managed to fight their way to million dollar paydays in weight classes that historically were as fiscally lean as the men who populated them. With the rise of the Hispanic fight fan, who is now the most loyal supporter of boxing, has come the opportunity for lower weight class fighters like Gamboa to earn the kind of money few would have thought possible a decade or so ago for featherweights; but to do it two things are necessary – a crowd pleasing style and the willingness to accept challenges like the one Gamboa hopes will be headlining this Top Rank-promoted show.

That is WBO junior featherweight champion Juan Manuel Lopez, a miniature KO machine who defends his title against a poor unfortunate named Rogers Mtagwa in the main event. By the time it begins it is expected the undefeated Cuban defector Gamboa will have long been done with Whybar Garcia in a way that will lift him closer to the kind of popularity that could convince Lopez to come up four pounds to challenge him. If so, Gamboa is on his way toward possibly becoming the first big box office draw to emerge out of the Cuban boxing machine that produces fighters and defectors at shocking rates.

“I do not lose focus in preparation for this fight because I know that without winning this fight I can't get to the bigger fight, Juan Manuel Lopez being one of them,” Gamboa (15-0) said last week. “I am completely focused on training for this fight and I am going to do everything possible to keep moving along and keep my record going.

“I am going to be able to show off my skills, talents and abilities to the world. If I were him, I would want to take notice.”

“Him” was more Lopez than Garcia, who by all accounts is simply the kind of necessary evil young fighters on the rise like Gamboa have to fight their way through before they are where they want to be – which is on the receiving end of lucrative paydays and more exciting, and hence more dangerous, matches.

Lopez (26-0) would certainly be that. He is a powerful predator who seems to have little concern for who he fights. Gamboa is much the same way, talking one minute about Lopez and

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the next about the undefeated WBA featherweight champion Chris John (43-0-2). Actually the stylishly boring John has now made several appearances in the U.S. and though a highly skilled boxer his approach to the sport is not crowd pleasing and hence not the kind that makes for big office.

Gamboa-Lopez, on the other hand, is the kind of fight that could make fight fans reach in their wallets. Gamboa understands this and so does his promoter, Top Rank. But the latter also understands there is a time for everything and right now the time is right merely to float the idea out there and see what happens.

“Gamboa has very much a Trinidad-esque charisma,” said Todd duBoef, president of Top Rank. “He’s in a weight class that, if he delivers in, there are going to be lots of riches for him. Now we have to start working on the marketing side of it. Good doesn’t mean everything. You have to be marketable and amenable to the fans so the fans want to see you.”

Whether Gamboa fully understands marketing is debatable but he understands concussions and how to deliver them and that’s a skill that still can be marketed these days, even by the people who have run boxing into the ground. What he also understands is that appearing at Madison Square Garden is a step that, if properly handled, will bring him that much closer to the reason he abandoned his country to seek his fortune in the freer fistic world that exists beyond the reach of Fidel Castro’s island fiefdom.

“I have satisfied every goal that I have set for myself but my problem is I have many more goals to accomplish and I won’t be fully satisfied until I reach all of them,” Gamboa said.

“I know the significance of Madison Square Garden and the story of it and what it means to a Latin fighter and not just a Puerto Rican fighter (like Felix Trinidad and Miguel Cotto, who became major stars fighting at the Garden because of strong Puerto Rican support).

“There have been many instances where non-Puerto Rican fighters have fought in the Garden and received that same support from Puerto Ricans or any Latinos alike. I am very aware of it.”

He’s also aware of Lopez, the young Puerto Rican who brings with him both the fighting style and the fan base to turn a fight with Gamboa at the Garden into a box office bonanza when Puerto Rican Day in New York arrives next June for both of them if, and it’s a big if, each guy can deliver the kind of explosive action on this card that will get fight fans demanding to see the two of them attack each other.

“I think that any fan of boxing, and I include myself a fan as well, can see he has God-given ability,” Gamboa said of Lopez. “You can’t deny that. He became world champion because of those attributes. I recognize those skills and I think a fight between JuanMa and me would make for a great fight.

“I want to make a name for myself at 126 and once I make a name for myself in this division I will seek to go up a weight class or two. Chris John is a name that interests me, I saw him fight against Rocky Juarez and I know that he just beat him and is considered a super champion by

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the WBA.

“If Rafael Marquez (brother of Juan Manuel) ever wants to consider a move up like Juan Manuel Lopez is, I think that would be a great battle between Rafael Marquez as well. Any champion that has made a name for himself and wants to challenge me or me to challenge them, I am here for the task.”

To get the job, of course, Yuriokis Gamboa first has to get by Garcia, which frankly shouldn't be much heavy lifting. Then he has to cheer on Lopez, who is in much the same boat with Mtagwa. After that the cheering stops and the talking starts.

How soon it leads to fists flying between them remains a mystery, as are so many things in boxing, but one thing is clear – they are not both fighting in New York on Oct. 10 by accident. They are at the Garden to make a statement...about themselves and about each other.