

Israel Vazquez Primed For Return

Written by Ralph Gonzalez

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"It feels good to get back in the ring after a year and a half layoff," two time junior featherweight champion Israel Vazquez proclaimed after some brisk training under the watchful eye of trainer Rudy Perez. Vazquez (43-4, 31 KO's) is set to make his long awaited comeback this Saturday against Angel Priolo at the Nokia Club in downtown L.A. The bout will be televised on Fox Sports en Espanol.

It was eighteen months ago that Vazquez waged brutal warfare for a third time against Rafael Marquez in what capped off a trilogy of fights that many boxing pundits believe is on par with the Ali-Frazier trilogy.

Unfortunately, every war has collateral damage. In Vazquez's case it was his eyesight that was compromised. Vazquez realized a few weeks after his first surgery to repair some post fight damage that there was still something wrong. "I was doing some light training and I was having a problem seeing out of my right eye. I immediately contacted my manager Frank Espinoza," Vazquez remembers. "He took me to several doctors and arranged the additional surgeries."

He added, "Going through three surgeries was traumatic but necessary in order to make sure my eyesight returned to normal. It's been a slow recovery but this Saturday I'm going to prove that I'm better than ever and ready to resume my career."

Vazquez will now be campaigning as a full fledged featherweight. There's a natural tendency to question a fighter's move up in weight. Will it slow him down? Will his punching power be diminished against bigger foes than he's used to facing?"

Trainer Rudy Perez doesn't feel four more pounds will be an issue. "I don't think it'll have an effect on his speed or power," Perez said. "He's at the point in his career where he needs to move up in weight and he's been looking great. I've been pleased with what I've seen in the gym."

The fact that he's been training since June and kept his weight at a manageable level makes the process of returning to the ring much easier. "He's been very disciplined outside the ring and that's made all the difference in the world," Perez agreed. "The fans are going to see Israel in excellent form."

And what about Vazquez vs. Marquez IV? Will it ever happen?

"Fighting Rafael Marquez for a fourth time is something I still think about. It all depends on what happens against Priolo. I want to prove to myself that my body can take another grueling fight against Marquez," Vazquez said. "If God willing, everything goes well, I don't see why we can't make a fourth fight happen. And if that fight goes well then maybe we can make a fifth fight too."

There are those who question the need for a fourth confrontation. Some say that both fighters

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have already damaged each other to the point that a permanent injury is likely to occur. Vazquez disagrees. "This is a sport and it's one of the toughest sports of all. We're warriors. We know what the risks are every time we step into the ring," Vazquez said. "The fights were all really close. I won twice but just barely. I think a fourth fight is what the fans want to see."

Manager Espinoza believes there's a good chance the two "little giants" will face off again. "I've heard all the arguments about how they shouldn't fight each other," Espinoza said. "But how do you tell two fighters not to fight if they're healthy enough to face each other? This is their profession. This is what they want."

Like every smart fighter, Vazquez knows not to look past or underestimate Priolo. "I would never do that. Every fighter's dangerous at any given time," Vazquez said. "I'm never over-confident. I want to win by knockout but if I have to box to win, I'm prepared to do that too."

Although Vazquez is a likeable personality, it's his relentless fighting style and heart inside the ring which has made him fans around the world. He tells his followers to expect more of the same. "On October ten you're going to see a very hungry and explosive Israel Vazquez," he stated. "The fans will definitely be satisfied with my performance. I want people to know that I'll always remain the exciting warrior they've grown to appreciate."

He has one last message for his supporters. "I want to thank the fans who've been following my career for so many years," the Mexico City native said. "We only get a few chances in life to be great and I still have work to do. I want a world title in the featherweight division. It's been a goal of mine for a long time and I'm going to try my hardest to achieve it and be a good example for my fans. I want them to know that just like me, with dedication, faith, goals and hard work, great things can happen. Whatever your struggle is, you can conquer it."

The card will also feature undefeated hot prospects Carlos Molina and Ronny Rios.

Programming note:

Originally scheduled to air only on HBO Plus, Fox Sports en Espanol announced on Wednesday that it would be carrying the event live throughout the United States. HBO Plus is available only in Latin America.

Steve Graciano of Fox Sports en Espanol said that the network jumped at the opportunity to broadcast Vazquez vs. Priolo. "We were excited when the opportunity to air this fight presented itself," said Graciano. "Israel Vazquez has a strong following in the Hispanic community and we are happy to give viewers a chance to see him on our network."

On a personal programming note:

I've released a new video I produced on Israel Vazquez. It's now live on the front page of The Sweet Science. You can also access it via this link:
<http://www.thesweetscience.com/boxing-video.php>