

Las Vegas Journal Part 3: The Big Fight

Written by David A. Avila

Wednesday, 18 November 2009 19:00

Waking up the morning of the big fight is usually pretty exciting. Not this morning. All night long my dreams seemed to remind me that Z Gorres was in the hospital after collapsing in the ring.

It was easy to get up and get ready.

First I picked up Liz Parr and Francisco Salazar and we headed to the Mandalay Bay for the Sugar Shane Mosley and Andre Berto press conference after some coffee. Though the fight is a big fight I expected attendance to be lukewarm because the Boxing Writer's Association is holding a meeting almost at the same time. But around 300 journalists and maybe 400 spectators surround the conference.

Leading the press conference was Oscar De La Hoya, now fully grounded into his role as a promoter. As the head of Golden Boy Promotions he opened the press conference and talked about how as a youngster he often avoided amateur boxing tournaments that he knew Mosley was entering.

"Let's not fight in that one," De La Hoya admitted saying to his coaches as an amateur.

Of course De La Hoya and Mosley later fought twice and almost three times with the Pomona speedster winning once convincingly and another rather controversially, but nobody knows each other more than these two Southern Californians.

"He's still young, fresh and motivated," said De La Hoya about his Golden Boy business partner. "He fights for his legacy which is very rare nowadays."

The fight between Mosley and Berto has been talked about for more than a year. Ever since the two fought on the same fight card at the Home Depot Center in Carson, Ca. That night Mosley looked rather ordinary against Nicaragua's Ricardo Mayorga. Berto had it easier against Steve Forbes who was too small. Many felt Berto could beat Mosley after watching them both do their work that night.

But when Mosley ambushed Antonio Margarito with speed, power and stamina, it surprised many. Some still think it was an aberration. Berto does.

"His time off might help me a little bit," said Berto about Mosley being off for a year when they finally meet in Jan. 30, at the Mandalay Bay.

After grabbing some one-on-30 interviews, my friends and I walk over to the China Grill where the David Haye conference is being held. There's already about 100 people inside the small restaurant. I grab that first empty chair for myself and my two journalistic comrades.

Flashbulbs go off as Haye enters with his team. A few minutes later, De La Hoya and his

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entourage set off another series of camera flashes as he enters. The East L.A. former prizefighter stops by each table to greet the reporters in English and Spanish.

Raul Jaimes, who is vice president of Operations, stops by to chat with me about some things that are going on with Golden Boy. The new high school built by De La Hoya is causing a stir in East L.A. It's the first new high school built in more than 50 years. He also mentions that it's good to be back in California. Puerto Rico had been home to the former champion and though it's beautiful, it's not home. And home means going to Mexican restaurants and fast food places like King Taco, Lupe's 12 Kinds of Burritos and so forth. It makes me hungry just talking about it.

Richard Schaefer, the CEO for Golden Boy, also stops by to say hello. He's the brains behind the many new things that the company has implemented to draw interest to the sport. He thinks outside the box better than anyone in the business.

Haye speaks a little about his goals and De La Hoya talks about what their plans are for the speedy heavyweight. His victory over Russia's Nicolai Valuev garnered him the WBA title.

"I'm an athlete," says Haye.

Golden Boy wants to match the British fighter with one of the Klitschko boys. That might be difficult now after canceling against both earlier in the year.

When it's all over the three of us head to my car and drive over to the MGM Grand for the big fight. I'm starting to get that adrenaline feel again.

You can always gauge how big a fight it is by the crowd near the back entrance where the reservation desk is situated. The harder it is to squeeze by them the bigger the fight. The walk to the media center is pretty zigzaggy as thousands of people mill around hoping to get a peep of one of their heroes.

As we open the doors to the media center a whoosh of air goes by us from the vacuum of people and noise inside. Immediately Parr grabs a seat near the big screen. She sets up her computer and prepares to cover the fight from that seat. She does a great job despite the many distractions inside. She's very focused, just like when she was a fighter.

As I sit and talk to some of my companeros, I see Winky Wright who waves at me. I suddenly realize he has a fight coming up in Puerto Rico against Oklahoma's Grady Brewer.

Several writers immediately come over as Wright talks about why he's still fighting.

"That wasn't the real Winky," says Wright about his performance against Paul Williams last April. "I saw the openings and I couldn't do anything about it. I was one second late every time."

Wright says he realizes that taking too much time off hurt his timing against Williams who ran over him that night.

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“I’m not taking nothing away from Paul Williams but that wasn’t the real me,” said Wright.

After talking to Wright, I looked at the time and noticed the first fight was about to start. So I head out the door and run into Floyd Mayweather Sr. and some of his friends, we say hi.

A few feet before walking into the big arena, I see Larry Merchant, Emanuel Steward and Harold Lederman who asks me about Z Gorres the night before. A lot of journalists were unaware of the injured fighter so I gave the trio the summary of what occurred and his current condition. They all nod that it’s a sad moment.

The first fight pits Abner Cotto against some other young kid. They both fight their hearts out to only several scattered folks maybe totaling 200 people in the vast stadium. Press row goes back maybe 12 rows, but for the first fight only about 15 writers are in their seats covering the first bout. ESPN’s Dan Rafael is there, Rich Marrotta, Doug Fischer and even Nick Charles, who is battling cancer, is there. It’s great to see the announcer. The bulk of the writers won’t be inside the arena until the pay-per-view portion begins a few hours later.

Once again it’s sad that many boxing writers and photographers feel it beneath them to cover the undercard. These are fighters who are risking their lives, giving their heart and soul to the sport and for almost nothing in return. Just a few paragraphs on a newspaper or web site is all they ask for.

The fights come and go quickly. Before the main event the best are Alfonso Gomez, Jesus Soto Karass, Yuri Foreman, Daniel Santos and the Russian kid Matt Korobov. The worst is Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. who would probably get ruined by Korobov if they fight despite the fact Chavez has 40 pro fights and Korobov only nine.

Everyone sitting near me in press row has something funny to say about Chavez. I’ve known the kid since he was 14 and attending high school in Riverside along with his brother Omar. But the boxing fraternity is getting tired of seeing him untested and protected. We want Korobov!

OK, it’s only I that wants Chavez to fight Korobov. Heck, Alfredo “Perro” Angulo would probably annihilate Chavez. (Ed. Note: I vote for "definitely" annihilate!) That’s a fight that fans would love to see.

When the main event finally arrives the crowd is fever pitched and screaming on all cylinders. Stars are all over the arena and chants spring out throughout the crowd.

It gives you chills.

A Puerto Rican journalist sitting next to me named Jorge asks who I predict for the 50th time in the last three days.

“I got Pacman in 11,” I answer.

He says “Cotto by decision.”

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Of course it looked like a good pick in the first round. Everyone gave Cotto that initial three minutes as he jabbed crisply and countered too. Then the roof caved in with blows from the Filipino pocket destroyer named Manny Pacquiao.

By the ninth round I'm hoping Cotto's corner has enough sense to stop the fight. They don't or they're afraid to stop it. I'm afraid Cotto will end up in the hospital like Gorres the night before. Thankfully it doesn't occur. Cotto is stopped two rounds and 55 seconds too late, but at least he's healthy.

It's a terrible sport in some ways and it's beautiful in others. The way the fans poured their hearts and vocal chords with so much passion and emotion is something that you feel for days afterward.

The big fight, that's what I love to feel.

After punching out a deadline story to my newspaper, I head out to the post fight press conference to gather my writing partners. I say goodbye and head out to the parking lot to get in my car and head back home to California. I arrive at 5 a.m. All the way home I think of the fight. Before sleeping I say a prayer for Z Gorres and the thousands of fighters who give their blood, sweat and dreams to the boxing public.

It's an honorable profession. It's prizefighting.