

Golden Boy Hoping That Campbell Is Tough, But Not TOO TOUGH, For Ortiz

Written by Ron Borges
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Golden Boy Promotions better hope Nate Campbell looks as old Saturday night as the calendar says he is because if he doesn't they will have asked for a test one of their brightest young prospects cannot pass.

Barely a year ago, Victor Ortiz was the talk of boxing. Glib, handsome, powerful and with a compelling life story, Ortiz was being portrayed by Oscar De La Hoya's promotional company as, well, the next Oscar De La Hoya. Enter Marcos Maidana, exit Victor Ortiz.

Ortiz was supposed to walk through –or over –Maidana as he had everyone else Golden Boy put in front of him and it appeared he might when he sent him to the floor early. But unlike his predecessors, Maidana got up and fought back. Fought back so hard he dropped Ortiz, cut him and convinced him to resign his position that sad night in June a year ago, making clear to him that every night in boxing is not Christmas Eve.

What made it worse was after the fight Ortiz admitted he declined entry into boxing's warrior class, quitting when he could have gone on while alluding to the fact he saw no reason to take a beating at 22.

Those words have become more difficult to erase than that loss itself and Saturday night they will follow him into the ring at the Theater at Madison Square Garden, where waiting for him will be 38-year-old former undisputed lightweight champion Nate Campbell.

Campbell is the polar opposite of Ortiz when it comes to boxing. He is not the product of a successful amateur career, nor has he had the aid of powerful promotional efforts behind him. Instead, he began boxing only after it was suggested to him by a fellow warehouse employee in Florida he give it a try before he was too old to do anything but wonder about what might have been.

He took the suggestion but was already advanced in years for a fighter, not turning professional until he was 27. In the 11 years that followed, Campbell has scuffled and scrambled to make it in the sport, fighting in hotel ball rooms, old gyms and dank auditoriums before his chance finally came.

When it did he was twice stopped by Robbie Peden, but he fought on and when a second chance arrived he took full advantage of it, pounding then undisputed lightweight champion Juan Diaz to a pulp of beaten up humanity two years ago, a stunning upset at the time.

Three years earlier Campbell had done something similar when he slapped around and finally stopped an undefeated Ortiz clone named Kid Diamond, who turned out to be more cubic zirconia once Campbell (33-5-1, 25 KO) put his hands on him.

Since defeating Diaz, Campbell defeated tough Ali Funeka and fought a bloody no contest with

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super lightweight champion Tim Bradley in which Bradley accidentally slammed his face into Campbell's, opening a wide cut along his eye. Campbell then took a furious beating the rest of the round before retiring on his stool claiming he could not see out of the eye.

Many questioned that but the fight was ruled a no contest and it has landed him on HBO's semi main event this weekend under Amir Khan's 140-pound WBA title defense against slick Paulie Malignaggi. He is here for one reason. He is here because Golden Boy believes Campbell is a test for Ortiz but not a pop quiz.

He is, they hope, damaged goods, a guy talented enough to push Ortiz but no longer enough to punch holes in him. None of this is lost on Campbell by the way, who has been the B side of enough fight cards to understand none of that matters once the leather starts flying.

"They hope I'm old," Campbell groused recently, implying with his words that he is not. "What can Victor Ortiz show me that I haven't seen?"

Nothing frankly, but Campbell can show him plenty that he hasn't seen, which is what Golden Boy has to be concerned about.

Since the Maidana loss 11 months ago, Ortiz has won twice, stopping an old friend in Antonio Diaz in seven rounds on cuts and looking less than impressive in defeating a blown up lightweight named Hector Alatorre in his last outing in the 10th round. Neither fight fully answered the questions raised by the Maidana loss and the way Ortiz (26-2-1, 21 KO) reacted that night once he got hurt.

Golden Boy is hopeful Ortiz won't have to answer such questions Saturday night but if Campbell is still the guy who beat down Juan Diaz and went at it with Bradley, who is one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world, they are questions that will be asked.

How Victor Ortiz replies will show him and the boxing world how far he's going to go in a sport that, eventually, reveals all things about you. Now perhaps Golden Boy is right in its assessment of Campbell. Perhaps he is enough past his best that Ortiz's youth, speed and left hook counter will be too much for him.

That is a big perhaps because if they are wrong, Saturday night we'll find out what's right and what's wrong with Victor Ortiz