The inhabitants of Larissa, a sparsely populated Greek town recognized as the birthplace of the ancient hero Achilles, know a thing or two about great warriors. So it was no surprise when a crowd of 3,000 flocked to show their appreciation for a modern day fighter renowned for bloody combat.

The arrival of Michael Katsidis to Larissa sparked rare excitement in the area, and it was wholly justified given the boxer's relentless fighting style.

Katsidis was born in Australia to a Greek father who hails from Larissa, and the 29-year-old fighter has ardently embraced his heritage. Having adorned his back with a tattoo of the ancient Greek symbol of the Vergina Sun, Katsidis also sports a Spartan helmet to the ring for inspiration before his battles.

Likening his fights to war is only mild hyperbole, as he habitually finishes contests with a swollen visage and a shattered opponent. Since making his overseas debut in a multi-knockdown brawl against Graham Earl in London three years ago, Katsidis' indomitable approach has earned him fame among the global boxing community. His 26-2 (21 KO) record boasts four outings that were consensus candidates for Fight of the Year honors, and his two losses were competitive distance bouts against Juan Diaz and Joel Casamayor in HBO-televised events.

"I'm an instinct fighter, I work on how to react to things when they happen, says Katsidis in his typically unassuming manner. "It just so happens that every fight I've had has been a real war.

On Saturday, Katsidis will return to London in an effort to blemish the perfect record of local 135-pound starlet Kevin Mitchell. The bout will be staged at the Upton Park soccer stadium in front of an expectedly partisan crowd that figures to test the site's 30,000 capacity.

Mitchell, 25, turned professional at just 18 under the guidance of the prudent Frank Warren, and has been matched carefully in amassing a 31-0 (23 KO) slate. He has featured regularly on the British Sky Sports network and was labelled a potential star on his debut. Mitchell's self-assured, boxer-puncher style and predominantly soft opposition have aided his profile, while his strong London following has made him a marketable commodity.

There is a sense that Saturday's matchup is merely a high-profile showcase for Mitchell, with many British sports writers already touting a future clash with his compatriot Amir Khan. Mitchell himself has spent plenty of time talking about the fantasy matchup.

"If [Khan] fancied a fight [with me] it would have been on by now, claimed the assertive Mitchell last week. "Hes fighting [Paulie] Malignaggi [on Saturday] - that says it all. Malignaggi is made for him because he doesnt punch. Khans brilliant but is vulnerable in certain areas. Anyone who can catch him has got a half decent chance. Ive been told Khan is getting $1.1 million for the

fight - thats crazy money because theres no risk involved. Ive definitely got a much harder fight and that shows what Im about and that Ive got the nerve to pick the tough fights.

Mitchell will earn about $100,000 for fighting Katsidis, while the Australian, who holds a piece of the lightweight world title, will earn just over $400,000. Saturday's promotion is set up for Mitchell to showcase his skills on a big stage against a notable opponent. Warren, who has formerly steered the careers of Khan, Joe Calzaghe and Rick Hatton, doesn't take risks with his charges, and likely estimates that Katsidis may have engaged in one brawl too many.

Local oddsmakers William Hill make Mitchell the 8/15 favorite, while Katsidis is listed at 11/8. The broad hypothesis dictates that Mitchell's home advantage, in addition to his superior speed and technique will overcome Katsidis' heavier punching and experience.

Mitchell's high-class skills were evident when he soundly out-pointed Khan-conqueror Bredis Prescott in December. Prescott, who has been exposed as a one-dimensional power-puncher, was unable to trouble Mitchell, as the confident Brit made full use of the ring to avoid any damaging blows while peppering the Colombian with combinations for 12 rounds.

In theory, the same sharply-executed gameplan should serve as a template for victory against Katsidis, whose inferior speed was highlighted in his defeats to Casamayor and Diaz. At times Katsidis gets carried away with offense and leaves himself open to counters; something that Mitchell should exploit over the 12 rounds.

Yet Katsidis can boast more guile and big-fight experience than any of the Briton's previous opponents. He has rallied from apparent defeat against Earl, and worn down the likes of Jesus Chavez, Czar Amonsot and Vicente Escobedo. Mitchell has never had to withstand an incessant attack like Katsidis figures to inflict, and it is unclear how he will react to the pressure of a large, expectant crowd. Moreover, while Mitchell seems to have thoughts of a showdown with Khan, Katsidis remains entirely focused on his imminent task.

"Ive not considered anything beyond this fight, insists Katsidis. "There are no plans for the future. Every fight Ive had has been a war and I cant see this being any different.

And any notion that a hostile London environment will upset the Katsidis can also be dismissed. Despite residing in Las Vegas, the Australian has spent three months training in Thailand, where local violence has escalated to the verge of a civil war. But Katsidis maintains that the harsh environment has added to his mental fortitude.

"Where we were in Thailand is a very hard place, it's a war zone, he asserts. "The only two losses I had were when I was training in America. But [in Thailand] there is a line of people at the door waiting to spar you. Fighting is all part of the lifestyle out there.

"People kept asking me if I was afraid of getting shot but it wasnt too bad. It was a little bit rough but its no easier in the ring.

It will be a difficult night for Katsidis on Saturday, but that's the way a true warrior likes it.

Etcetera:

• Inventive Irish promoter Brian Peters has conjured up an unusual way to get his Cuban heavyweight, Mike Perez, some publicity. The unbeaten prospect, who hasn't fought since February 2009, will look to shake off the rust by competing in two bouts on the same card in Limerick, Ireland this Saturday. The talented Perez plans to fight against two journeymen shipped in from Eastern Europe, but the bouts will be several hours apart.

• "I think its a great idea, said Perez. "When Brian Peters suggested it I jumped at the opportunity because I have had over a year out of the ring with an injury so I am looking to keep as busy as possible now and it doesnt get any better than having two fights in one night.

• Headlining the event will be Andy Lee, as he faces the faded Mamadou Thiam. It seems a long time ago since the Emanuel Steward-trained Lee was being heralded as a future opponent for then-middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik. Lee, 25, has spent the two years since his upset loss to Brian Vera treading water in Europe and doesn't seem particularly upbeat about the current state of his formerly promising career.

• "It's time to get back in the mainstream instead of having these fights in Ireland on the fringes, Lee, 20-1 (14 KO), told The Sunday Times last week. "Hopefully we can get back fighting in the States again and push my career.

• The 38-year-old Thiam was once highly rated by the many sanctioning bodies, but has never scored a notable victory over a world-class opponent. Lee aptly summed up Saturday's contest: "If I don't win this fight I can forget the whole thing.

• One man who definitely has retirement on his mind is Danny Williams. The Briton, who defeated Mike Tyson in 2004, has mentioned retirement several times over the last five years, but never before a big fight. Williams, who meets unbeaten heavyweight Derek Chisora on the Katsidis-Mitchell undercard, bizarrely declared, "Im 100% finished. Im going to have this fight and then thats it for me.

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