

Undefeated Michael Franco Back From Eye Scare

Written by David A. Avila
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In Hollywood's best boxing films it always comes down to a fighter having problems with his vision like James Cagney's *City for Conquest* when a corner man puts a chemical that blinds him during a fight. Or what about Sylvester Stallone begging his trainer "cut me Mick" to improve his eyesight from eyes swollen shut.

Eyes are essential for a prizefighter.

Riverside's Michael Franco's young budding career was nearly cut short after a physical examination by a doctor found damage to one of his retinas. That was two months ago and now he's returning to fight Adolfo Landeros (20-15-1, 9 KOs) at Four Points Sheraton in San Diego on Friday.

Franco is ready to test his eyes after surgery.

In boxing terminology Franco fits the brawler category. The undefeated 23-year-old prefers to blast away in a style that might be described as a human wrecking machine. Only five of his 16 previous opponents escaped being knocked out. Defense was an after thought. Not any more.

"I'm training more on head movement," said Franco (16-0, 11 KOs) who previously was willing to take a punch to give a punch. Strength is a major asset. But you can't work out the eyes to sustain damage.

Last August 19, the day before Franco's scheduled fight with Landeros in Tucson, a doctor informed the likeable boxer that an abnormality with the eye had been detected.

"I have to admit there was a little fear when he told me," said Franco, who's known for his strength and power inside the ring. "At first I thought that maybe my career was ended."

The doctors prescribed surgery and Franco immediately followed their advice and underwent laser surgery to repair one of his retinas.

"A green light sends a laser that strikes your eye," says Franco chuckling about the surgical procedure. "It's like they're punching your eye. It feels like it."

The second phase involved the hardest part of the surgery...he had to refrain from any physical activity for three weeks.

"That was the longest I've ever been off," said Franco of the inactivity that including no running, no sudden movements or any kind of physical activity. "I couldn't go outside. I had to wear sunglasses all of the time."

In the past eye injuries were even more serious than today. Champions like Sugar Ray Leonard

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actually retired a few times because of similar injuries, though he did return later to fight. Israel Vazquez recently was another champion who obtained surgery for his eye before returning. He's since retired.

When Franco was finally able to return to the gym he admitted feeling a little tentative.

"I was worried at first about getting hit," he said about sparring in the gym with other boxers. "But you just got to continue and get over it."

Franco heads to San Diego knowing that he's healthy and is anxious to resume his face for a title opportunity.

"I hope I can get something by next year," said Franco.

I see.

San Diego's Gesta

The main event on the card is Filipino sensation Mercito Gesta, 23, a speedy left-hander originally from Cebu, Philippines. The undefeated lightweight boxer faces rugged Mexican fighter Ivan Valle (28-9-3, 24 KOs) out of Los Mochis who has seen better days. Still, he packs a wallop as his record shows. But Gesta (19-0-1, 9 KOs) has knocked out eight of his last 10 opponents. The only one to escape was veteran Cristian Favela a Mexican boxer with tremendous experience and an iron jaw to go with it. They fought twice with Gesta winning by decision each time.

For more information (619) 743-0698.

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Fights on television

Fri. Telemundo, 11:30 p.m., Jesus Pabon (15-1) vs. Antonio Pitalua (50-4).

Fri. Telefutura, 11:30 p.m., Mercito Gesta (19-0-1) vs. Ivan Valle (28-9-3).