

Is Devon Alexander Merely A Take-Home Test For Juan Urango?

Written by Ron Borges
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When Juan Urango enters the ring at the Mohegan Sun Arena tomorrow night he will be the IBF junior welterweight champion but more important he will be The Test. That's how the people around undefeated WBC champion Devon Alexander are looking at him at least and, in a sense, it's how he's looking at himself. The difference is Alexander's people see him as a take-home exam while Urango considers himself a pop quiz.

Alexander is many things, including fast, talented and confident. What he is not is battle tested, an issue that will be at least partially resolved by the time he's through with Urango. Or, if he doesn't pass that test, Urango is through with him.

The Colombian strong man is the kind of boxer who can be easily minimized these days by the public, dismissed as a journeyman even though he is a two-time world champion. Much of that perception comes from the fact he's twice been beaten, even though the losses were decisions to Ricky Hatton and WBC welterweight champion Andre Berto when he made the mistake of trying his hand at the 147-pound class only to learn that as strong as he is he's not a welterweight.

What he might yet be however is a test for Alexander (19-0), a fighter who has been called Alexander the Great dating back to his amateur days in St. Louis. Certainly his hand and foot speed are superior, so much so they have made him a world champion at 23. But Urango's resume is littered with more challenging opponents, like Hatton, Berto and power-punching Randall Bailey, whom Urango defeated in a slugfest, and so he would argue he is the more proven commodity.

Last week Alexander and his trainer, Kevin Cunningham, made note of Urango's hard night with Bailey, using it to question the IBF champion's abilities. Fact is, it is those kind of fights that test your abilities and your mettle and allow you to prove yourself. Tomorrow night, Urango wants nothing more than to provide young Alexander with the same kind of concussive learning opportunity.

"He's battled a lot of great fighters at this weight, including that classic war he had with Randall Bailey...so we're very, very excited," said Urango's promoter, Leon Margules. "We believe that Juan is the biggest, strongest and best puncher in the division and if Devon can hang out and hang in there with Juan Urango for 12 rounds then Devon may be the guy that (promoter) Don (King) thinks he's going to be.

"But we believe that our experience and our strength and our perseverance will prevail and at the end of the day Juan will add the WBC belt to his IBF belt and become the unified champion."

Alexander conceded Urango (22-2-1, 17 KO) is the best fighter he's faced as a professional but he argued he had too much youth, skill and speed for the brawling, plodder, who Cunningham

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disparagingly compared to Hatton.

“Ricky Hatton reminds me of Juan Urango,” Alexander said. “Both of them are tough fighters but neither one of them have any skill...and skill is what pays the bills. That’s what’s going to be the difference on March 6th.”

Cunningham might very well be right but not if Urango can pressure his fighter on the inside and turn a boxing match into a street fight. That is when Urango is at his best – when the two are trading on the inside and he is pressuring his opponent relentlessly. At his best, Urango is capable of putting more pressure on Alexander than he has ever felt, the kind of heavy-handed pressure that can suck the life out of you if you are not fully prepared to not only respond to it but also withstand it mentally as well as physically.

“Tell your boy not to put track shoes on,” Urango’s trainer, Pete Fernandez, snapped at Cunningham at one point. “March the 7th I’ll shake your hand and I’ll kiss you and hug you. March the 6th, it’s war.”

If it is, Devon Alexander will have what he’s never experienced as a professional. He’ll have his hands full. He’ll also have a test you can’t take home. The kind of test Juan Urango wants to give him.