

Amir Khan: The Next Manny Pacquiao?

Written by David A. Avila

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Great Britain's flashy Amir Khan brings his talent to the gambling and boxing capital of Las Vegas for the first time in his career.

Khan, one of the most spectacular prizefighters in the world, defends the WBA junior welterweight title against Argentina's Marcos Maidana at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. HBO will televise the Golden Boy promoted fight.

Ever since electrifying viewers with his explosive speed during the 2004 Olympics the British subject has garnered supporters and detractors. Fans either love him or hate him, but they do want to see Khan.

"In the beginning people said I was not that great a fighter," said Khan (23-1, 17 KOs). "They said I was arrogant."

Some say Khan with his lightning reflexes, speed and power has the tools to be the next Manny Pacquiao. With Freddie Roach in his corner to shore up the boxer's defense, can the British speedster replace Pacman when he retires?

In England there are still many who say Khan is vastly over-rated. But in the U.S. where he regularly trains at the Wild Card gym under Freddie Roach, the boxers who see him and spar against him say he's even faster than Manny Pacquiao.

"Right now my attention is fully on Marcos Maidana," said Khan who trained for several weeks with Roach and Pacquiao in the Philippines. "He's a dangerous puncher."

Maidana burst on the Southern California fight fan consciousness with a spectacular knockout win over feared puncher Vicious Victor Ortiz. Despite getting knocked down three times the Argentine boxer rallied to stop Ortiz and now here he is looking for another upset win.

It would be the biggest upset of the year.

"I'm prepared for any style that Khan is going to bring," said Maidana (29-1, 27 KOs). "My boxing skills are not valued but I can punch. I'm preparing myself to try to catch Khan."

Khan, whose only loss came to a puncher similar to Maidana, says he learned not to underestimate anyone.

"When I wake up in the morning my ambition is to fight the best of the world," said Khan who avoided talking about fighting Floyd Mayweather or others out of respect for his current opponent Maidana. "One punch can change a fight and you have to be very careful"

On the same fight card on the semi-main event Victor Ortiz (28-2-1, 22 KOs) faces Lamont

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Peterson (28-1, 14 KOs) in another junior welterweight clash.

Ortiz has roared back into contention with four consecutive wins including knockouts over Vivian Harris and Hector Alatorre. A win over Peterson could vault Ortiz into a title fight with the winner of Khan and Maidana.

“I see myself as the best of the division,” says Khan.

It’s a pretty good fight card. Also participating will be undefeated local Las Vegas talent Jesse Vargas (12-0, 7 KOs) a very aggressive boxer-puncher trained by Roger Mayweather. He’s a very good junior welterweight. Former world champion Joan Guzman was scheduled to be on the fight card on press time but no opponent had been decided. Sharif Bogere, a speedy lightweight training in Las Vegas, is also on the card. Golden Boy prospects Jamie Kavanagh, Frankie Gomez and a rising heavyweight from Maryland named Seth Mitchell are also on the Las Vegas roster. Middleweight contender Daniel Jacobs returns after losing by knockout in a world title bid during the summer.

The large fight card gives boxing fans a healthy dose of the future.

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutera, 11:30 p.m., Luis Cruz (16-0) vs. Wilfredo Acuna (14-7).

Fri. Telemundo, 11:30 p.m. Antonio Pitalua (50-4) vs. Ed Paredes (25-3-1).

Sat. HBO, 6:30 p.m., Amir Khan (23-1) vs. Marcos Maidana (29-1); Victor Ortiz (28-2-1) vs. Lamont Peterson (28-1).

Sat. pay-per-view, 7 p.m., UFC 124 Georges St. Pierre vs. Josh Koscheck (22-2); Joe Stevenson (36-11) vs. Mac Danzig (20-8-1); Stefan Struve (24-4) vs. Sean McCorkle (10-0).

Sat. Showtime, 9 p.m., Yonhhy Perez (20-0-1) vs. Joseph Agbeko (27-2); Abner Mares (20-0-1) vs. Vic Darchinyan (35-2-1).