

## Inland Empire Jr. Welter Mauricio Herrera Is Battle Ready

Written by David A. Avila

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Not many people know that junior welterweight Mauricio “El Maestro” Herrera fights in the Inland Empire, one of the major hotbeds for his weight division.

On any given day he can spar Timothy Bradley, Jose Reynoso, Josesito Lopez, Julio Diaz, Artemio Reyes Jr., Steve Quinonez or Antonio Diaz to name some. And that’s not including nearby Los Angeles or San Diego where more junior welterweight prospects reside.

People across the country may not know these boxers but the boxers know who they are.

Now the rest of the country gets to measure Herrera (15-1, 7 KOs) against a proven junior welterweight contender in Ruslan Provodnikov (17-0, 11 KOs) on Friday at the Cox Pavilion in Las Vegas. ESPN2 will televise the event.

Herrera knows he’s the underdog.

Before embarking to Nevada the soft-spoken Riverside boxer exchanged rounds with hard-hitting speedster John Johnson at the Jurupa Valley Boxing Gym in Rubidoux. The exchanges were quick and hard as both tried to implement their styles.

“He’s very skilled and has a lot of stamina,” said Johnson, who’s also very skilled and powerful. “He doesn’t hit hard but he hits you a lot. It takes its toll after a while.”

That’s been Herrera’s trademark since bursting on the pro scene at age 27. His former trainer did not want him boxing professionally so out of loyalty he stayed an amateur. Finally, his amateur trainer relented and Herrera began showing audiences in Southern California that another junior welterweight had arrived.

It has never been easy.

After showing Thompson Boxing Promotions his talent, they in turn quickly matched him with more experienced and polished pro fighters. Because of Herrera’s age there was no time to soft pedal the Riverside boxer. It’s a system that Thompson Boxing has worked to near perfection with Colombia’s former bantamweight champion Yonhhy Perez, current junior welterweight champion “Desert Storm” Bradley and contenders like Juan Carlos Burgos of Mexico.

Herrera doesn’t mind. In fact, he relishes the challenge.

“We’re both right there trying to get to the top,” said Mauricio Herrera (15-1, 7 KOs), a junior welterweight. “It’s not going to be an easy fight.”

Herrera’s only loss came to former junior lightweight world champion Mike Anchondo, an experienced veteran who won by split decision in front of a national television audience. The

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dent in his record angers Herrera.

“It was around this same time of the year and I was sick with the flu,” he said. “My legs weren’t there and I still thought I won.”

That single loss dropped him to the back of the line after he had won 14 consecutive pro fights against talented opposition. All were tough fighters that Herrera needed to vanquish to move up the ranks quickly.

Herrera faces the rock solid Provodnikov who has not faced anyone who could deal with his strength and pressure. Knockout victories over Emanuel Augustus and Mexico’s Javier Jauregui were proof of his strength and tenacity.

Ken Thompson, president of Thompson Boxing Promotions, says that the Herrera brothers can’t afford to waste time.

“They’re both in their biggest tests,” Thompson said.

Alberto Herrera, the younger brother of Mauricio, fights former US Olympian Demetrius Andrade (11-0, 8 KOs) on the under card. The junior middleweight knows he faces a very seasoned boxer who has an abundance of assets including, speed, height, extensive amateur experience and he’s a southpaw.

“More than anything I’m mentally ready,” said Alberto Herrera (7-1-1, 5 KOs) who fights at junior middleweight. “People were saying I didn’t want to fight Demetrius (Andrade) but I want to fight him. I want to be the first to beat him.”

Younger brother Alberto Herrera started boxing professionally nearly two years ago and has the same eagerness to test out more experienced fighters. Three months ago he lost to San Diego’s unorthodox southpaw Chris Chatman by technical knockout.

“I really want this fight,” says the younger Herrera.

Willy Silva, who trains the brothers, predicts that they will surprise their more celebrated opponents.

“Nobody gives them a chance but nobody knows them and what they can do,” Silva said.

Both Herrera’s feel confident that they’re ready for anyone in the world, especially Mauricio Herrera who spars with some of the best 140-pound fighters in the world.

“I’m nobody right now,” said Mauricio Herrera. “But after the fight I’ll get some kind of attention.”

### Fights on television

Fri. ESPN2, 5 p.m., Mauricio Herrera (15-1), vs. Ruslan Provodnikov (17-0).

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Fri. Telefutura, 11:30 p.m., Brandon Gonzalez (13-0) vs. Lester Gonzalez (11-1-1).

Sat. Televisa, 10 p.m., Ganigan Lopez (15-4) vs. Armando Torres (15-7).

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