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The first time I met Abner Mares he had competed in the 2004 Olympics in Greece, just turned 18 and was at the new Golden Boy Promotions headquarters with two other youngsters seeking to become world champions.

That was in December 2004 and Mares signed a contract to fight for the company owned by East L.A. fighting legend Oscar De La Hoya.

Since that time he's worked with a variety of famed boxing trainers and now hopes to put all of their wisdom together when he fights IBF bantamweight titleholder Joseph "King Kong" Agbeko (28-2, 22 KOs) on Aug. 13 at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. It's the finals of the Showtime Bantamweight Tournament.

Mares (21-0-1, 13 KOs) has worked with Joe Hernandez, Floyd Mayweather Sr., Nacho Beristain, Joel Diaz and now Clemente Medina. All are renowned for their ability to groom world champions. But sometimes going from one trainer to another can be more confusing than advantageous.

Then there are some boxers that soak up knowledge like a sponge and are very capable of bringing it all together.

Mares, now 25, talks a little about what all of those famed trainers brought to the table.

The Trainers

“I learned a lot from all of them,” says Mares.

From Hernandez, who also trained former world champion Daniel Ponce De Leon, he learned intense physical training.

“He really got a fighter into condition,” Mares said.

From Mayweather, who also trained multi world champion Oscar De La Hoya, he learned the importance of defense and speed.

“He likes to work on rapid punches and head movement,” Mares said of Mayweather. “He also instills in you a sense of cockiness. He makes you believe you are the best.”

With Beristain, a Mexico City-based trainer who guides world champion Juan Manuel Marquez and many others, Mares says he learned technique and repetition.

“He drills in you that for every punch another fighter throws there is a counter move,” Mares said of Beristain. “He makes you work on punch technique over and over.”

Recently Mares lived in Coachella where he worked under Diaz.

“Because he’s young still, Joel (Diaz) has so much energy,” said Mares about Diaz. “The whole gym has a lot of energy and there is always loud music and great fighters to spar. I even sparred with Timothy Bradley.”

Now Mares trainers under the guidance of Clemente Medina, who formerly guided Daniel Ponce De Leon and Alfredo “Perro” Angulo, among many others.

“Clemente doesn’t try to change me at all,” says Mares who traveled with Medina to Guadalajara for three weeks at the beginning of training camp. “He even likes me to use the stuff the other trainers taught me…he’ll say ‘throw the Juan Manuel Marquez combination’ (jab, left hook, uppercut and body shot with the left hook).

Despite all of the changes in trainers Golden Boy Promotions has remained staunchly behind the Montebello, California resident.

“He’s very important to us,” said Eric Gomez, vice president and matchmaker for Golden Boy Promotions. “Abner was one of the first amateur fighters we signed.”

The fighter Mares reminds me most of his Mexico’s Marco Antonio Barrera, who could slug it out or box an opponent out of his shoes.

Another influence on Mares has been the “Golden Boy” himself, De La Hoya.

“Oscar has always brought it up that I was his first fighter from scratch,” says Mares, who is managed by Frank Espinoza. “All the people at Golden Boy are like family to me.”

During Mares’ fight with Vic Darchinyan in the state of Washington a Golden Boy Promotions fight card was occurring in Las Vegas. When Mares was knocked down early in the fight Golden Boy vice president Eric Gomez was sullen as he heard the news. A half hour later he was jumping up and down from the announcement that Mares had won by split decision.

I had never seen that before.

Mares believes that his long successful road through various trainers and pit stops has brought him to this point.

“All of these great trainers have helped me get to this point,” Mares said. “I’ve learned so much over the years.”

Boxing influence

Now Mares is guided by Medina where he prepares at Elite Mixed Martial Arts Academy located in Santa Fe Springs. On a daily basis his sparring sessions are watched by the dozens of MMA practitioners anxious to witness an elite boxer.

“It’s kind of cool,” says Mares. “I’ve never had people just drop by and watch me train before.”

Owner Steve Rodarte says that many of his students are wrestlers who want to become MMA fighters. He insists that the wrestlers learn boxing which puzzles them at first.

“Once they see someone like Abner Mares in the ring doing what he does then they understand,” says Rodarte. “They’ll be training and as soon as Abner begins sparring they’ll stop to watch. It helps them understand how an elite fighter looks.”

Fights on television

Fri. ESPN2, 6 pm., Tim Coleman (19-1-1) vs. Vernon Paris (24-0).
Sat. pay-per-view, 6 p.m., UFC 133 Rashad Evans (20-1-1) vs. Tito Ortiz (17-8-1);
Victor Belfort (19-9) vs. Yoshihiro Akiyama (13-3)

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