Written by David A. Avila
Friday, 12 August 2011 19:38

NOTE: Agebko was over weight, at 118.2, and used an hour to make 118 on the dot. Mares was 117.5 on Friday.

LAS VEGAS-IBF titleholder Joseph “King Kong” Agbeko softly expressed at the final press conference in the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino on Thursday that the world title is his and that it’s only step one of his goal. “It may be Mares' dream to become world champion but my dream is to become number one pound-for-pound in boxing. A loss on Saturday would not give me that chance, so my only option is to win,” Agbeko said. It’s the final confrontation of Showtime’s Bantamweight tournament and many expect a crackling ending as Agbeko (28-2, 22 KOs) faces Mares (21-0-1, 13 KOs) on Saturday Aug. 13, at the Hard Rock Hotel. Showtime will televise. The tournament began last December with four of the five best 118-pounders in the world. It should have ended this past spring but a back injury suffered by Ghana’s Agbeko forced a postponement and here we are now. “This is a fight that I’ve looked forward to. I want to be the

best bantamweight," says Agbeko who defeated Colombia's Yonnhy Perez to reach the final. California-based Mares has fought under the radar for a number of years but boxing experts have long-realized that the former Mexican Olympian has world champion potential. Now is the time for the Golden Boy Promotions bantamweight to prove that talent. "I am totally ready for this. There's no way I can lose. The thought of defeat is not in my mind. I am ready for a war," said Mares, who seeks to become Golden Boy's first boxer to begin with the L.A.-based company and win a world title. "From day one, I knew Abner had the makings of a champion. Joseph Agbeko is one of the best in the world, but on Saturday we are going to see the coronation of boxing's newest superstar," said Frank Espinoza, who manages Mares. Mares surprised many by advancing past feared slugger Vic "The Raging Bull" Darchinyan. "That was a tough fight but he got through it," said Espinoza, who formerly managed bantamweight greats Israel Vazquez and Martin Castillo. "Abner has that ability to adapt." It was his ability to change strategies in mid-fight that allowed him to defeat Darchinyan and it's what Mares plans to utilize against Agbeko on Saturday. "I figure out the fighter there and then in the ring," said Mares. "We've been sparring fast guys, slow guys, boxers and sluggers." Both Agbeko and Mares are only focused on their confrontation and no one else. Not even the looming specter of Donaire can make them deviate. "This fight everybody is watching…it's the best bantamweights in the world," said Agbeko, who is promoted by Don King. "I want to be the best in my weight class and I want people to watch me." Southern California flavor Several top notch prizefighters from the Southland are also on the Las Vegas fight card at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. Santa Ana's undefeated southpaw Luis Ramos (19-0, 8 KOs) was forced to cancel after being injured from a mugging on the streets of Santa Ana. He had a 10-round engagement with Oxnard's David Rodela (15-4-3, 6 KOs) but was forced to cancel after suffering a head injury from his rumble with three thugs. In another lightweight fight Norwalk's undefeated Carlos Molina (14-0, 7 KOs) will engage with last-minute opponent Juan Montiel (5-4-2) of Mexico City. He's had to prepare for the unknown. "I don't like studying opponents anyway," says Molina, who is also managed by Espinoza. "I like figuring them out in the ring." Heavyweights and more bantamweights Texas heavyweight Eric Molina returns to Las Vegas to show his skills to the boxing world once again. Molina fights Warren Browning in a scheduled eight round bout on the under card. "I love being here in this kind of big-fight atmosphere. When I started boxing, I could only dream of this kind of opportunity," said Molina, who fights under Don King Productions. "I'm well-prepared and ready for a war." Browning says he's not a softie. "I'm not cocky, just confident. I am really looking forward to Saturday. Bring it on," exhorted Browning. Former flyweight world champion Eric Morel is also on the fight card, but now does his trade as a bantamweight. "I'm extremely happy to be involved in this event. I want to fight the winner of Agbeko-Mares and win another world title," said Morel. Tickets are still available for the event. Fights on television Fri. ESPN2, 6 p.m. Kermit Cintron (32-4-1) vs. Antwone Smith (20-2-1). Fri. Showtime, 8 p.m. MMA Jorge Gurgel (14-7) vs. Joe Duarte (9-2). Fri. Telefutura, 11:30 p.m., Antonio Diaz (46-6-1) vs. Ernesto Zepeda (39-14-4). Sat. Fox, 6 p.m., Teon Kennedy (17-0-1) vs. Alejandro Lopez (21-2). Sat. Showtime, 7 p.m., Joseph Agbeko (28-2) vs. Abner Mares (21-0-1).