Written by David A. Avila
Monday, 12 September 2011 14:19

One is a virtually unknown contender and the other is a rather untested prospect but questions will be answered on who moves forward when Riverside's Josesito Lopez battles Las Vegas's Jessie Vargas on Saturday.

It's the opening act for the Floyd Mayweather and Victor Ortiz match but don't be surprised on Sept. 17, if Lopez (29-3, 17 KOs) and Vargas (16-0, 9 KOs) steal the big boy's thunder. The MGM Grand hosts the fight that will also be televised on HBO pay-per-view.

Both junior welterweights are tall and look like they could be brothers. But don't look for brotherly love inside the ring. On paper, they're very similar in physical attributes, but Lopez thinks he has Vargas beat on two accounts.

"I'm better looking," joked Lopez. "He hasn't seen what I've seen in the ring."

Maybe Lopez has a point, but not in Vargas' eyes.

"Jose is a good fighter and is experienced but I'm going to beat him," said Vargas, who strongly resembles Lopez in physique and facially when standing side-by-side.

Vargas trains out of Mayweather's gym and was formerly trained by Roger Mayweather until recently passed to Roberto Alcazar. He's a younger version of Lopez not just physically but

fighting-wise. Their styles are similar but Vargas seems to have better footwork. Lopez has fought better fighters.

It's a toss up fight that could delay the progress of Vargas at least a couple of fights should he lose, or label Lopez a gate-keeper if he suffers a defeat. Neither feels they're going to be defeated.

Vargas's team has the same attitude that prevails in Mayweather's gym and with an undefeated record who can blame him?

"Jose Lopez is a good experienced fighter, but Jessie Vargas is an excellent fighter," said Alcazar who trained Oscar De La Hoya and also trained the late Edwin Valero. Before the Venezuelan southpaw died a year ago, he sparred numerous rounds with Riverside's Lopez and Alcazar remembers well.

So does Lopez.

"Valero taught me I could hang in there and beat a lot of these top 140 pound fighters," said Lopez, recounting those sparring sessions with the fearsome Valero who never lost a fight and all achieved all of his wins by knockout. "With Valero you had to be smarter. I had to be the veteran fighter making the decisions at the right time."

Another advantage Lopez believes he has is the constant supply of quality sparring in the Riverside area that's wealthy with junior welterweight prospects, contenders and former world champions.

Timothy Bradley, Julio Diaz, Antonio Diaz, Mauricio Herrera and Jose Reynoso are among those who roam the Riverside area landscape and exchange sparring.

Lopez knows he has experience on his side but doe not underestimate the youthful and dangerous Vargas.

"He likes to come forward and I like to come forward," says Lopez whose last win was by knockout in handing Mike Dallas Jr. his first professional loss. "I'm expecting a very, very hard fight. We'll both have to go through some tough moments."

That's where Lopez feels he has a big advantage. Vargas does not.

"He's a good fighter," said Vargas. "But I'm a better fighter."

On Saturday night, somebody will move forward in the crowded junior welterweight landscape.

Comment on this article