

## Boxing Good Guy Carlos Hernandez Returns

Written by Jake Donovan

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Work like you don't need the money. Love like you have never been hurt. To most people, it's little more than a catch-phrase. For Carlos "Famoso" Hernandez, it's how he prefers to live his life.

Anyone who has seen the former junior lightweight champion in action knows that what he may lack in skill, he will always make up for with will and heart. From his pro debut twelve years ago to his hard-fought points loss to all-time great Erik "El Terrible" Morales this past summer, Famoso has always left it all in the ring, ensuring that everyone who paid to see him fight always got their money's worth.

This Saturday night in Las Vegas (HBO PPV, 9PM ET, live from Mandalay Bay), Famoso (40-4-1, 26 KO) returns for the first time since his July loss to Morales, as he faces former three time world title challenger Juan Carlos Ramirez. It will be the first time in two years that he enters the ring without a world title around his waist. No matter to Hernandez, though. After all, it's not the belt that makes the fighter a champion. At least not at heart.

"There is nothing more satisfying to me than finishing a fight knowing that I invested every last bit of energy in winning, or at least trying to win," says Hernandez, in looking back at his career to date. "I know that I'm not the most skilled fighter in the world, but nobody can ever claim my heart in the ring. My fans know this, and identify with me because of it."

Carlos is quite easy to identify with. He's not your typical athlete, who is all about the money first and respect lagging somewhere in the background. Whereas most athletes – particularly fighters – believe that smack talk is the best way to market one self to the public, Famoso simply prefers to be himself. Like it or not, he is a blue-collar worker - both in and out of the ring - and dedicated family man. What you see is what you get. To date, it got him a world title, and more importantly, the love of more than one nation.

"The love I get from El Salvador (where Hernandez' family comes from) has always been out of this universe. And it's not that I expect it, being that it's where my roots are. But for most, your largest fan base is where you are from. But along with El Salvador, I also get endless support from the Mexican fans as well. Even going into my fight with Morales, I would hear from many fans in Mexico how they love the way I fight. It makes me feel good, and it inspires me to train hard."

So far, it has inspired him to fight hard for twelve years and counting.

Most people in America would spend their 21st birthday celebrating the fact that they are legally old enough to drink. Carlos spent it in a boxing ring, making his pro debut in Irvine, California, less than a half hour from the Bellflower area where he was born and raised. A testament to his toughness would be served that night, as he wound up with a draw after the first four rounds of his professional career.

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Never one to give up at anything in life, Hernandez went back to the drawing board, righted some wrongs, and returned back strong. So strong, that he would win his next twenty-two straight fights over the course of the next three years.

After suffering his first loss in the pro ranks – a ten round decision to Aaron Zarate – Famoso would run off another four wins in a row, one of which came against former featherweight champion Gregorio “Goyo” Vargas. In addition to facing the toughest test of his career in the ring, Famoso would also have to deal with adversity outside of it.

Earlier in the day, Famoso’s longtime trainer and manager Jackie McCoy passed away after a long battle with cancer. Rather than postpone the fight and mourn his death, Famoso elected to fight one, as he believed that’s the way Jackie would have liked it. He must have, as Hernandez fought as if someone up there liked him, scoring the biggest win of his career in decisioning Vargas.

Two wins later, Famoso would face another famous Hernandez – Genaro “Chicanito” Hernandez, who earlier in the year beat the legendary Azumah Nelson to start his second reign as world champion. The world title shot was the first for Famoso, and he made the most of it. The fighting Hernandez’ went to war, delivering one of the best fights of the year, highlighted by a time capsule-worthy ninth round which many considered at the time to be a top contender for round of the year. In the end, Chicanito was still champion, but Famoso had captured the hearts of many.

Despite failing to bring home a world title, Famoso was treated like royalty in returning to El Salvador, where he had spent many of his summers as a child. The country named Famoso it’s top sportsman for the first of three times, and the city of Soyapongo named him as their greatest son.

To repay the nation, Famoso fought his next fight in Cuzcatlecas, San Salvador, defeating Roberto Avila in front of 15,000 rabid fans. Hell of a way to make a comeback, wouldn’t you say?

After putting together an eight-fight winning streak, Famoso would receive a second shot at the WBC title that he had craved his entire fighting lifetime. “Ever since I was a little kid, I always wanted the WBC title.”

Now being a 30-year old kid, Famoso’s second shot at his favorite alphabet strap would come against one of boxing’s best, undefeated Floyd Mayweather, Jr. Floyd himself was coming off of the biggest win of his career, a ten-round thrashing against undefeated murderous-punching Diego “Chico” Corrales. Carlos knew that he had a huge task at hand, especially with the fight taking place in Grand Rapids, MI, where Floyd was born and raised.

For the second time in four years, Famoso fell short of realizing his dream as he dropped a wide unanimous decision to Mayweather. He did gain a moral victory, as to date he is still the only fighter to score an official knockdown over Pretty Boy Floyd – even if Floyd never went down from a punch. Well, actually he did – he was punching Famoso and injured his hand so

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bad, that he was forced to take a knee and the ensuing eight count.

As with his previous world title loss, Famoso returned back to San Salvador to get back in the W column. He did just that, forcing Juan Angel Macias to quit on his stool shortly before the start of the ninth round.

After a pair of wins in 2002, the biggest break of Famoso's career would come along. IBF junior lightweight champion Steve Forbes was forced to give up his crown when he weighed in over the limit for what was to be a title defense against David Santos in August 2002. Had Santos won the fight, he would have won the title. He didn't, but would get a second chance when Forbes was stripped immediately after the fight.

Forbes and Hernandez met in the co-feature of promoter Bob Arum's inaugural "Latin Fury" pay-per-view show. The series was designed to give additional exposure to the lower weight Latino fighters. Famoso took full advantage of the opportunity, outfighting Santos in a closely contested battle. A nasty gash caused by one of the bout's many headbutts forced Santos to be at the mercy of the referee, who stopped the contest after eight rounds. To the joy of many in the crowd, particularly El Salvador President Francisco Flores, Famoso had put enough rounds in the bank to secure a unanimous decision, thus becoming the first fight of Salvadorian descent to win a world title.

They say you always remember your first, no matter what that first may be. Famoso still remembers as if it were yesterday.

"The thrill of having so many fans from my hometown was exciting enough. But to not only win your first world title, but have the President of El Salvador personally congratulate you... I mean, how do you ever top that in life?"

You go ahead and defend your title, which is exactly what Famoso did eight months later. His first defense was against Forbes, who still believed that he was the rightful owner of the title since he never lost it in the ring. Hernandez took care of that, overcoming a rocky start to dominate from the middle rounds on, behind the strength of a relentless body attack. For the second straight title fight, a cut would bring a premature halt to the bout. Well, that and a little bit of drama from renowned cutman Miguel Diaz, who could be overheard at the end of the tenth round yelling, "Oh I can't fix this." It was enough to draw the attention of referee Pat Russell, who shortly thereafter decided that the fight should be stopped.

Once the scorecards were read, Hernandez was the rightful owner of the IBF crown, whether Forbes liked it or not – and he didn't, as he filed a protest days later. As suspected, the bid was unsuccessful.

While waiting out the winner of the scheduled February 2004 fight between WBC titlist Jesus Chavez and Erik Morales, Hernandez would find new cause to celebrate. In December 2003, Carlos and his wife Veronica – who also serves as Famoso's manager – gave birth to a baby boy, Christian.

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That moment – more so than any fight – remains the defining moment in Hernandez' life.

“I don't care what I will go on to achieve in the ring, in life, anywhere – there is no greater joy in my life than being a proud husband and father.”

Unfortunately, he could not provide a win in the biggest fight of his career, a unification showdown against Morales this past July. Despite an incredible display of courage and determination throughout, Hernandez rarely had answers for Morales, as he lost a wide unanimous decision and his IBF crown. Not to mention losing a fight with the WBC title on the line for the third time in his career. For the first time in his career, losing was a bitter pill to swallow.

“About two months” is the amount of time Hernandez says was needed to emotionally recover. “Obviously, I was feeling pretty sad – not just for me, but for my countrymen. But afterward, I was inspired to come back by my many fans.”

It was that love that brings him back this Saturday night, where he prepares for Ramirez (33-6, 13KO) in his first fight since July. It's not the dream fight he clamored for, at least not a month before his 34th birthday. But it's still another day where he gets to practice his trade, which is always a good thing.

“More than anything else, I'm happy to be on this show and this pay-per-view card. It's a pleasure to be on a great card like this (with WBC heavyweight champion Vitali Klitschko facing Danny Williams in the main event), especially after my gereat pay-per-view battle with Erik Morales. I am coming back to do battle against Juan Carlos Ramirez and I plan to do best – win.”

At least do what he does best in the ring. As he has already proven that as good of a fighter he is, Carlos is even better at being a family man.

“People got on my case for having my wife and son in training camp for the Morales fight. But I still wouldn't change a thing even if I had the chance. My choice to have my family there allowed me to train and still see my son in the beginning stages of his life. That is so important to me. Had I left them behind, it may have made me a better fighter. But it wouldn't be worth it – I would rather be known as a better father and husband.”

And for that, he is still known as a hero to everyone else.