INDIO, CALIF. (Nov. 9, 2012) – The transition from amateur to professional in sports is a rite of passage for nearly all athletes who earn pay for play. For many Olympic athletes, however, there is added pressure due to real or perceived expectations of them as professionals. Such is the case with Olympic boxers the world over who don't have the luxury of turning professional in low-profile fights.

Those high expectations come with good reason as from the 1976 Olympics through the 2004 Games, 41 percent of U.S. Olympic boxers went on to win at least one world title as a professional.

On the eve of **"Night of Olympians" tonight**/**Friday**, **Nov. 9**, on ***ShoBox: The New Generation*** live on **SHOWTIME**® (10 p.m. ET/PT, delayed on the West Coast) from **Fantasy Springs Resort Casino** in **Indio**, **Calif.**), six past U.S. Olympians, all of whom would become world champions, looked back at their pro debuts and their mindsets going into those fights.

Here's what **Oscar De La Hoya**, **Howard Davis**, **Raul Marquez**, **Russell, Jr**., **Antonio Tarver** and **Andre Ward** had to say:

OSCAR DE LA HOYA, Gold Medalist, 1992

(Pro debut: De La Hoya registered three knockdowns en route to a 42 second, first-round knockout win over **Lamar Williams** at the Great Western Forum in Inglewood, Calif. on Nov. 23, 1992.)

“Because I was a fighter who was brought up fighting as a professional-type style I was actually really looking forward to my pro debut. I’d been sparring and training with pros like **Joey Olivo** and
Paul Gonzales
since I was 13, so I wasn’t nervous at all. Actually, I couldn’t wait. Just the fact I would be wearing eight-ounce gloves without headgear for the first time excited me.

“Once I got that first fight out of the way, I knew I was on my way.”

HOWARD DAVIS, Gold Medalist, 1976

(Pro debut: Davis outpointed **Jose Resto** over six rounds at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas on Jan. 15, 1977.)

“The fight was nationally televised. I was disappointed because I wanted to fight in front of my hometown fans at the Nassau Coliseum. **Ray Leonard** got to turn pro in front of *his* hometown fans. Instead, the fight was in Vegas, and only a couple of hundred, maybe 500 fans showed up.

“I was very nervous and the nerves didn’t go away until my second pro fight, but I beat him silly every round and didn't let him hit me. He had no neck, and every time I hit him, I felt like I was breaking my hand.”

RAUL MARQUEZ, 1992

(Pro debut: Marquez stopped **Rafael Rezzaq** in the fourth round at the HemisFair Arena in San Antonio, Texas on Oct. 3, 1992.)

“It was a big night for me. There was pressure because I was supposed to be one of the U.S. Olympians who would go on to win a world title. I was nervous, but I was nervous before every f

ight. There were a lot of friends and family from Houston and Mexico there.

“I fought a tough guy. I kept knocking him down and he kept getting up. I don’t even remember how many knockdowns I scored. I’ll tell you this, he was much tougher than I had expected for an Olympian making his pro debut.

“One thing I definitely remember: **Lou Duva** threw me a party afterward at Mi Tierra, a famous restaurant in San Antonio. There was a mariachi band and everything.”

GARY RUSSELL JR., 2008

(Pro debut: Russell scored a third-round TKO over Antonio Reyes at the Million Dollar Elm Casino in Tulsa, Okla., on Jan. 16, 2009)

"My pro debut was in Oklahoma on *ShoBox* and I remember being excited and a little bit anxious. I had the opportunity to start all over again. I felt like I was having my first amateur fight and it was exciting to do something for the first time.

“My opponent was wearing a suit at the press conference and I remember thinking that wasn't going to help him in the ring at all. I had full confidence in my ability to beat him."

ANDRE WARD, Gold Medalist, 2004

(Pro debut: Ward knocked out **Chris Molina** in the second round on Dec. 18, 2004 at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles.)

“I was more anxious than nervous. It was STAPLES Center, on the undercard of Antonio Tarver-**Glen Johnson**. My fight was televised on premium cable. There were huge

expectations and I had a lot to prove even though I had won the gold medal. I also had to prove to myself I could take a shot as a pro.

“I had an absolute wild man on the other side of the ring. Molina wanted to prove I born with a silver spoon in my mouth. He was throwing bombs, head-butting and yelling at me during the fight. I just had to stay in the moment. I hit him some good shots and he quit.”

(Note: Molina, who was 2-0 going in, never fought again.)

ANTONIO TARVER, 1996

(Pro debut: Tarver scored a second-round knockout over **Joaquin Garcia** at the Blue Horizon in Philadelphia on Feb. 8, 1997.)

“I didn’t know what to expect. You take off the headgear, you put on the little gloves. There were a lot of butterflies. It was like starting over. All jitters and I was fighting on national TV on ‘Tuesday Night Fights,’ and at the Blue Horizon, which had a tough, educated crowd. I just wanted to be perfect.

“I was 28 and a lot of people thought I was too old to be turning pro. I fought an undefeated guy who had a good chin. I was so anxious; I don’t know if I did everything I wanted to do, but I still got the award for Knockout of the Night.”