

## CBS Showcases IBF Bantamweight Champ Leo Santa Cruz and Olympian Joe Diaz Fights

Written by David A. Avila

Thursday, 13 December 2012 22:11

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*Santa Cruz, Santa, and Guevara look pumped for the return of boxing to the networks. (photo from Golden Boy)*

When Leo Santa Cruz first laced up the boxing gloves professionally many wondered how the skinny kid with braces could endure the unforgiving world of prizefighting.

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In those early fights in places like the Morongo Casino, Alameda Swap Meet, Commerce Casino or Pala Casino, the Lincoln Heights youngster showed relentless determination but lacked timing, strength and footwork.

Several promoters passed on him.

But sometimes things click for some boxers and for others the answers never come. With Santa Cruz, the lanky youngster seemed to get better in big strides especially after ridding himself of the braces on his teeth.

Perhaps Santa Cruz finally felt like a prizefighter?

The IBF bantamweight titlist Santa Cruz (22-0-1, 13 Kos) makes a defense of the title against Mexico's undefeated Alberto Guevara (16-0, 6 KO) on Saturday Dec. 15, at the L.A. Sports Arena. Golden Boy Promotions is staging the fight card and CBS will show it live at 1:30 p.m.

It's only been a month since Santa Cruz fought and though he won the fight by ninth round knockout, the lanky power-hitter absorbed punishment as his pressure style is apt to do. Yes, he battered and clubbed the Mexican fighter Victor Zaleta for nine rounds, but he did receive return fire for all nine rounds. Yet, here he is again.

"I'm confident I'll win Saturday and then be able to take a little vacation during the holidays. I really want to finish this year on a great note so that I can go on to even bigger and better fights in 2013," said Santa Cruz, 24.

Ever since Golden Boy Promotions signed the East L.A. youngster a rapid increase in confidence has carried Santa Cruz into the elite level. Everything has improved from his timing on offense to his vastly upgraded defense.

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Eric Gomez, the primary matchmaker for Golden Boy, raved about his performance against Eric Morel and Vusi Malinga and rightfully so. Though Santa Cruz didn't get all the raves during his amateur career, he showed what he could do as a young teen.

"He beat a lot of good guys like Rico Ramos and Charles Huerta," said Rudy Hernandez who trained his older brother Jose Armando Santa Cruz. "He's a hard working kid."

Hernandez said that conditioning has always been a strength of the youngest Santa Cruz, but with added years he's even gotten stronger.

"He has his man-power now," Hernandez says.

Santa Cruz's opponent Guevara comes from Sinaloa, Mexico and feels that the world champion will be surprised.

"You will all know who I am after the fight on Saturday," said Guevara whose only victory of note came against Khabir Suleymanov, a solid fighter who works out of Los Angeles.

Santa Cruz likes that he's fighting quickly and especially likes that CBS will televise his bout.

"I'm very happy and excited and especially honored to be fighting on CBS. I really want to thank Golden Boy and my manager for this unbelievable opportunity," said Santa Cruz, who is managed by Al Haymon. "So many fans will be watching, and that's where I get my motivation - from the fans."

The braces are off.

**Olympian**

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Also on the card will be former U.S. Olympian Joseph Diaz who fights out of South El Monte and is making his pro debut. The featherweight is trained by ace trainer Ben Lira and was one of the few Olympians to get a win in the London Games.

“This is a dream come true for me to be making my pro debut on free network television. I really want to thank everyone involved from Golden Boy to my team for making this happen and for them choosing me to fight on CBS. They could have picked anybody, but they picked me and I really appreciate it,” said Diaz, who meets Vicente Alfaro (5-2) in a scheduled four round bout.

The first fight begins at 1:30 p.m. and will be televised live on CBS.

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