NEW YORK (February 21, 2013) - One of the best kept secrets in boxing, late replacement Evgeny Gradovich (15-0, 8 KOs), will be a live underdog on March 1 as he challenges International Boxing Federation (IBF) Featherweight Champion Billy "The Kid" Dib (35-1-0-1NC, 21 KOs), in the 12-round main event on ESPN Friday Night Fights, co-promoted by DiBella Entertainment and 50 Cent's SMS Promotions, airing live at 9 p.m. ET from the MGM Grand Theater at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, Connecticut.

In the 10-round ESPN Friday Night Fights co-feature, North American Boxing Federation (NABF) super welterweight champion Willie "The Great" Nelson (19-1-1, 11 KOs) makes his first title defense against Michael "El Magnifico" Medina (26-3-2, 19 KOs). The Nelson-Medina fight is being promoted in association with Rumble Time Promotions.

Australia-native Dib, who is promoted by hip-hop superstar 50 Cent, was originally supposed to fight Luis Franco who unexpectedly withdrew from the title fight. Gradovich immediately accepted the challenge without any reservations. "I train most of the time and I'm always in shape," Gradovich said. "To fight for a world title in only my 16th pro fight is quick, but I have good experience and this is a great opportunity for me."

Gradovich was discovered by rising Russian manager Egis Klimas, who first heard about his latest star from his most well known boxer, world light heavyweight title contender Sergei Kovalev. "Evgeny had more than 150 amateur fights and he was a member of the Russian National Team," Klimas explained. "I went with Don Turner to scout him at the 2009 Russian National Championships. Evgeny lost but Don said that he was really good and to sign him if I could. All of my Russian fighters are trained in North Carolina by Don (19 world champions) when they first come to America.

"I didn't build up his record. I had him fight opponents with equal records. If Evgeny was 5-0, he fought a guy with a similar record and so forth as he developed. Gradovich is a punching machine. He's going to pressure his opponent and throw a lot of punches, especially in good combinations. Being a late replacement won't be a problem. He'll have five weeks of training in Oxnard (CA) with Robert Garcia for this fight and he never blows up in weight between fights like other guys. We're not going to Foxwoods to meet 50 Cent; we're coming to take Dib's world title belt back with us."

Called the Mexican-Russian by other fighters in his gym because of their respect for tough style of fighting, Gradovich is living the American dream: promoted by Top Rank, managed by trusted fellow countryman Klimas, trained by Garcia, and fighting for the world title in only his 16th pro fight. "Yes, I am," he agreed. "I like this country a lot. I wouldn't be fighting for the world title now if I had stayed in Russia. Boxing is difficult in Russia but you can move forward in America. I have a good team here that helps motivate me. I've been working with Robert Garcia, who trains a lot of world-class athletes, for the past year and I think he's the best trainer in boxing."

Gradovich reports that Klimas, Kovalev and Turner will all be supporting him at the MGM Grand at Foxwoods on March 1.

Tickets priced at $200, $100, $75 and $40, may be purchased online at foxwoods.com, by calling the Foxwoods' box office at 800-200-2882, or in person at the Foxwoods' box office.

NEW YORK (Feb. 21, 2013) -- In anticipation of the highly anticipated doubleheader featuring Sharif "The Lion" Bogere and Gary Russell Jr. on Saturday, March 2, live on SHOWTIME® (10:00 p.m. ET/PT) fromThe Joint at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, Nev., SHOWTIME Sports is offering a full-length replay from each of the world-class boxers' recent fights on the premium network's website.

The excellent, crowd-pleasing scrap between Bogere and Ray Beltran from May 13, 2011 which aired onShoBox: The New Generation replays in its entirety (http://sports.sho.com/videos/1341), offering fans a glimpse of what they can expect from the undefeated Ugandan contender. The unanimous decision victory for Bogere featured multiple momentum shifts and cut-inducing head-butts as the two battled for 10 hard-fought, bloody rounds.

An all-action fighter, the undefeated Bogere (23-0, 15 KO's) will square off against Richar Abril (17-3-1, 8 KO's) for the vacant WBA Lightweight World Championship in the March 2 main event.

The 24-year-old Bogere was a five-time African champion as an amateur and has continued his success as a pro with his aggressive style and impressive power. The 30-year-old Abril, a Cuban-born Miami resident, is looking to bounce back from a controversial split decision loss to Brandon Rios in a bout for the WBA Lightweight World Championship on April 14, 2012.

Featherweight Russell's brutal one-punch knockout over Roberto Castaneda last November 9 on ShoBox:The Next Generation (http://sports.sho.com/videos/1340) wound up near the top of many writers' 2012 Knockout of the Year lists. The manner in which he impressively dispatched Castaneda served as a warning to viewers and potential opponents that the lightning-quick Russell also packed a dangerous punch to go with his blazing speed. The 2008 United States Olympian landed a picturesque right-hook to the chin of Castaneda at 1:25 of the third round -- a vicious, explosive punch that instantly ended the fight.

One of boxing's most talented contenders, Russell (21-0, 13 KO's) will take a step-up in opposition againstVyacheslav Gusev (20-2, 5 KO's) in the 10-round opening bout of the March 2 telecast. The 24-year-old southpaw of Capitol Heights, Md., knocked out three consecutive opponents to close out 2012 and is looking to kick 2013 with an impressive victory over the 26-year-old Russian who is a nine-year veteran.

Abril vs. Bogere, a 12-round fight for the vacant WBA Lightweight World Championship, will take place Saturday, March 2 at The Joint at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. The event is promoted by Golden Boy Promotions, sponsored by Corona and will be televised live on SHOWTIME telecast beginning at 10:00 p.m. ET/PT (delayed on the West Coast) with preliminary fights to air live on SHOWTIME EXTREME at 8:00 p.m. ET/PT (delayed on the West Coast). The co-main event will be a 10-round featherweight bout between undefeated

phenom Gary Russell Jr. and Russia's Vyacheslav Gusev.

Tickets priced at $150, $100, $75, $50 and $25, plus applicable taxes, fees and services charges, along with a limited number of VIP suite seats priced at $125, are on sale at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Box Office, all Ticketmaster locations, online at www.ticketmaster.com or by phone at (800) 745-3000. An exact on sale date will be announced as soon as determined.

NEW YORK (Feb. 21, 2013) — For the first time in a long time, UFC and Mixed Martial Arts superstar Ronda Rousey will not be attendance for a fight that features undefeated super featherweight boxer, Art Hovhannisyan, her stablemate and good friend who faces Alejandro Perez in the main event Friday, Feb. 22, on ShoBox: The New Generation live on SHOWTIME® (11 p.m. ET/PT, delayed on the West Coast).

Rousey would like to be there, like always, but she has a fight of her own the next night against Liz Carmouche at the Honda Center in Anaheim, Calif. Her weigh-in is the same day as Hovhannisyan's fight.

"If I wasn't fighting on Saturday, I'd definitely be going to Art's fight,'' said Rousey, the first female fighter signed by the UFC who'll be making her highly anticipated debut for the organization in the main event against Carmouche. "But Friday is a fighting day for me. It's the day of the weigh-in.''

Rousey and Hovhannisyan have known each other for several years. They belong to the same gym, Glendale Fighting Outfit, in Glendale, Calif., and are both coached by Edmond Tarverdyan. They spent a few weeks together recently preparing for their upcoming fights at a training camp in Big Bear, Calif.

"We have a great bunch of people at our gym,'' Rousey said. "We all pull for each other. There is no hierarchy. Nobody's jockeying for position. We're just simply a team, and a family and we're always there for the other one. Art usually trains with Edmond in the morning right before I do.''

No, Rousey and Hovhannisyan have never seriously sparred. "I learn a lot just watching Art,'' she said. "He's such a big puncher; I just watch the way he sets down on his punches. Sometimes, he'll try and work with me on my footwork. I don't know what I'd do if we ever actually sparred, probably try for a takedown or something.''

The incredibly popular Rousey is impressed with Hovhannisyan inside the ring and out. "Art is very respectful and a pleasure to be around,'' she said. "He's just the biggest sweetheart. You'd never guess he was a cold-blooded killer during a fight.''

Hovhannisyan will be ringside for Rousey's fight on Saturday. "Of course, after my fight I plan to go and support her,'' he said. "We all support each other. We're a team. I think she's seen me fight three times, and I've seen her fight three or four times. I met her at the gym the first time she went there. You could say we've had light sparring, but mostly we're just working on technique.''

The Armenian-born Hovhannisyan gets to witness a side to Rousey that many accustomed to her brash attitude and trash-talking ways don't often see.

"As a person, she's a good friend of mine,'' he said. "She may learn from me in the ring, but the things I learn from her are humanly characteristics. I see her drive and total dedication. To watch how far she's come from when she was just an average judo fighter to what she's now become, an MMA superstar and UFC World Bantamweight Champion is an absolute inspiration. As an athlete, she's the best of the best, I can tell you that.

"My fight on Friday will start a big weekend for the Glendale Fight Club. We're going to go 2-0.''

In the middle of this is the trainer, Tarverdyan, who along with George Bastrmajyan has been instrumental in the lives and careers of all the fighters at Glendale Fight Club. They'll be at both fighters' weigh-ins and fights, making the approximately 75-mile, one-way trip between Cabazon and Anaheim a couple times.

"We'll be at Art's weigh-in on Thursday in Cabazon, than go to Ronda's weigh-in on Friday in Anaheim,'' Tarverdyan said. "After the weigh-in, we'll go back to Art's fight in Cabazon, but then we're going to Glendale for an engagement party before heading to Ronda's fight on Saturday.''

That's a lot of drive time but Tarverdyan, whose passion for combat sports cannot be understated, has made this kind of trek to back-to-back events in the past.

"It's exciting,'' he said. "Actually, we were supposed to have two fighters on each card, but their fights fell out, or we'd be dealing with double duty on both nights. We'll be in the car for something like two-and-a-half hours in Friday traffic, but we've been doing this for 12 years so we've done it before and we'll do it again. There's no pressure. I'm confident both Ronda and Art are the superior fighters and will win.''

Tarverdyan, 31, is a fighter himself. He was 27-2 in Muay Thai and retired as the WBC International Champion. He's 2-0 in MMA with his next fight scheduled for April 13 at Hollywood Park Casino in Inglewood, Calif.

"I'm fortunate to be doing what I truly love; it's also all about trying to be a successful coach,'' he said. "We've had our share of hard times and disappointment, but we've had success, too. I love working with the fighters, and trying to keep them motivated. Even just holding the mitts or talking with the fighters is exciting for me.''

Coaching dedicated athletes like Rousey and Hovhannisyan makes it even more special, he says.

"Ronda is so fun to work with,'' Tarverdyan said. "She's cool with whatever you say. I've seen a lot of difference in her, the way she's changed in her training the last couple years. When she first came here, she just mostly sparred. Now, she does everything in a most professional manner and we bring in top people to work with her. Of course, she gets mobbed wherever she goes. But her focus in the gym has always remained totally focused. I actually think her boxing

at this point is better than Cris Cyborg's.

"Art's been with us since his third pro fight. We're like brothers. If he has a problem outside the ring, he can call me or George. It's been a hard road for Art because of injuries and fights falling out, but he's really easy to work with and never complains. He's basically very quiet outside the ring, but he hits like a truck and is a real crowd-pleaser inside. I think Art will stop Perez inside 10 rounds, probably in the fifth or sixth.''