

## Cuba's Mike Perez Dedicating Fight to Magomed

Written by David A. Avila  
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Cuba's Mike Perez burst into American consciousness with a televised war against heavyweight Magomed Abusalamov. For 10 rabid rounds last November 2, they pounded each other with equal zeal and aspirations.

But Russia's talented Abusalamov was taken to the hospital with serious head injuries after the brutal affair.

"When I got told what happened that was sad," said Perez, 28. "I want to dedicate this fight to Magomed."

The former Cuban heavyweight amateur star Perez (20-0, 12 Kos) knows he can't afford to waste time and agreed to a match against Carlos Takam (29-1, 23 Kos). The heavyweights clash on Saturday, Jan. 18 in Montreal, Canada.

HBO will televise.

Perez has persevered through years of work and grind under the Cuban sports program that discovered him as a youngster. All of those days training under the amateur system polished him into a fighting machine, but not their kind of fighting machine.

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"I like to throw punches," said Perez, adding that knockouts are his preferred method of winning. "When I was in Cuba they would try to make me box more."

During one of the amateur world championship tournaments Perez was left off of the team because the coaches did not like his willingness to stand and trade. They wanted him to move around the ring.

"That made me mad," said Perez, who decided to bolt the team and the country in pursuit of his dreams of being a world champion. "I tried three times to leave."

Twice Perez was jailed for attempting to defect from Cuba. In his last failure he spent more than 30 days behind bars. It didn't dissuade the heavyweight. Finally, he boarded a boat with fellow Cubans and landed in Cancun, Mexico.

The next stop for Perez would be Ireland where he spent nearly six years fighting professionally. It was an eye-opening change for the Cuban who had to adapt to the cold, the food and quickly learn to speak English.

"Nobody speaks Spanish over there," Perez said of Ireland.

Perez now has a family of three in the Emerald isle and doesn't plan to leave. But when it comes to fighting, his management team decided to sign a promotion contract with K2 Promotions. That has led to moving training camp to Big Bear Lake, Calif. So far it's been a pleasant change for the Cuban heavyweight.

"I love it here," said Perez, who now can converse in his native Spanish in the mountain resort. "It's very peaceful."

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Things were going smoothly. Even his fight with Abdusalamov was proving to be the kind of fight Perez prefers. They exchanged bombs and both proved tenacious and willing. But one hit too many ended in the Russian fighter enduring serious injury. Now Abdusalamov is in a New York rehab facility and under strict supervision. Perez and the boxing world are praying for his full recovery.

Perez is giving a portion of his purse to help his former foe's hospital costs. K2 Promotions is also contributing.

### Title hopes

The heavyweight from Ciego de Avila, Cuba, wants more than ever to become a world champion.

"I want to be the best and to fight the best," said Perez.

Abel Sanchez, who trains Perez and also middleweight champion Gennady Golovkin, said the transition from amateur star to pro heavyweight has been easy because of the Cuban heavyweights already aggressive style.

"He takes to advice and instructions like a sponge," said Sanchez. "He has a crowd pleasing style."

Tom Loeffler, the K2 promoter, said that their hard-charging heavyweight has no hesitation in fighting anyone put in front of him.

"What you see with Mike is his career had stalled a little bit when he was in Ireland. He's anxious just like Gennady when we signed him to a promotions contract," Loeffler said. "These guys are eager to fight."

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Perez has no preference about who he fights or what style is presented in front of him.

"I do what I do best, that's fight," said Perez. "They have to worry about me."

### **Helping Abdusalamov**

K2 Promotions said a web site is available where fans can help Abdusalamov's family with hospital costs and other concerns. For more information on how to help Magomed Abdusalamov go to: [www.ring10ny.com](http://www.ring10ny.com) .

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