It was like interviewing the young man who asked if he could marry your daughter. Polite, soft-spoken, respectful, all the right answers.

If you were looking for an excuse to not like him, you didn't find one. He never gave you an opening, never raised his voice or cursed God or made foolish threats against the man he doesn't seem to understand.

Instead, Oscar De La Hoya sounded calm and ready to fight, a guy on a personal mission who has already settled up with his own doubts and insecurities, put them behind him and out of his mind. All he has to do now is what comes naturally.

What has always come naturally.

When he faces Fernando Vargas on Sept. 14 at the Mandalay Bay Events Center in Las Vegas, he'll be in shape, he'll be focused and he'll be ready to do whatever it takes to beat Vargas and move on.

At least that's what he told us on a conference call earlier this week from his training camp in Big Bear, CA.

"These are my last fights, the defining moments of my career,'' he said. "And I want to go out with a bang.''

To go out with the bang, he needs to beat the two men who beat him. He wants a rematch with both Shane Mosley and the recently-retired Felix Trinidad. And just for kicks, he'd sure like a shot at middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins before he finally turns out the lights.

"It's very gratifying to know I have all these wins under my belt,'' he said. "But there's still something missing.''

Redemption maybe?

But it all starts with Vargas, which is also where it could end.

In a fight billed as "Bad Blood,'' De La Hoya seems to be the guy wearing the white hat, the one who isn't sure why there is bad blood, or has to be.

"My feeling is that every fighter I've fought from the greater Los Angeles area - with the exception of Shane Mosley - has had a beef with me,'' he said, himself

a product of the greater Los Angeles area just like Vargas. “I guess Southern California is only big enough for one champion.’’

Or maybe one legend.

If there’s more to it than territorial rights, De La Hoya wasn’t saying what it night be.

“(Vargas) has been talking trash for many years,’’ he said. “I think he’s just an angry person. It’s his way of motivating himself.

"But I can’t wait until Sept. 14 when I talk with my fists.’’

While this fight is for each other’s junior middleweight title (De La Hoya has the WBC belt and Vargas is WBA champ), De La Hoya said he doesn’t fight for world titles anymore. That was when he was younger, when he was fighting for recognition, a bigger house and newer cars. Today, he’s fighting for his place in boxing history, which is more important than a dozen new cars.

“Now, I just think about beating the opponent in front of me,’’ he said. “I’m not fighting for money or titles anymore.’’

No, the stakes are much higher than that.

“I already know what it feels like to let a lot of people down,’’ he said. “And I don’t want to feel that again.’’