Written by Jose Torres
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The Latino boxing community is tensed. There is a profound division of opinions not only among Mexicans, but among brothers and sisters of Puerto Rican and Dominican background… among South and Central Americans. The discussions among them as well as bad blood are many and so are the fist fights. And all this for one simple reason: they are divided in their opinions concerning who would win the fight Saturday at the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas, between Oscar De La Hoya, a Mexican from California, versus his challenger, Fernando Vargas, also a Mexican from California.

But, who is stirring all this commotion? None other than the two pugilists.

De La Hoya has always been conscious that the power of the loud word could be used as an effective weapon in every debate, including boxing. But it looks as if Vargas is no fool by a long run. With uncommon surprise, he was the one to show signs of having bad blood with Oscar. “Oscar is no Mexican,” Vargas told the press with anger. “Mexicans don’t run away from opponents the way he did with Trinidad. Mexicans do like I do, they take risks like a pure macho man, to hit and get hit. And that’s why I consider Oscar a simple American boxer, with an American style.”

Oscar couldn’t remain quiet. “I’m tired of his insults and lies! He screamed. “Due to this consistent behavior I refused to fight him so that he wouldn’t make millions. For, the only fight that could produce him ten times more money than with any other opponent, was with me. I’m the only boxer he can get rich with. Now to hell with it; I’m going to make him rich, but he’ll pay in that ring when I finish with him. He’s gonna get what he deserves.”

Indeed, Oscar is getting lots of attention from the media, and not because he’s handsome –and he is. His prominence has been increasing consistently even though he suffered two defeats –a close decision at the hands of Félix Trinidad and another against Shane Mosley, two super champions of extraordinary talent. The man is charismatic and has a sensitive personality, which contrast immeasurably with his pugilistic ability. Outside the ring he looks like an altar boy.

Meanwhile, Fernando gives the impression of being the kind of brave prizefighter boxing fans imagine –strong with protruding muscles, super macho and ready to accept punishment in his effort to attain victory. His insults to Oscar make him seemed like a guerrilla man ready to offer his life with the classic valor of a Mexican macho-man.

Of course, a victory over his colleague –calling him “compatriot” may bother Vargas- would make Fernando at least a Four-Star General in the army of the Pure Mexican Machos.

Still, watching how poison has always been the clue for the successful marketing and publicity of boxing promotions, De La Hoya is not impressed with it. He obviously recognizes that to allow Vargas’ insults affect him emotionally could represent accumulation of points for his

adversary.

"I'm not mad at Fernando, and feel no hate for him," De La Hoya said. "I have been involved in boxing and its gossip for a long time, and I'm conscious that all is the same everywhere I go."

Stating that he can deal with that kind of gossip without losing any concentration on the fight, Oscar continued: "If this fight is considered the most important one of his boxing career, he better watch out for he's going to be painfully disappointed."

From Vargas' camp we heard a different song. The man couldn't be better physically. He's enjoying a magnificent physical condition, with a body that seems one of a weight-lifter and a new muscular definition in his chest, shoulders and abdomen.

Indeed, Oscar is fully aware that the muscular aspects of a prizefighter are not considered relevant in boxing, unless his rival possesses the physical, psychological and emotional condition prevalent in Oscar.

In any event, the Latino population is on its feet expecting an exciting fight from these two troublemakers. And, frankly, this is one of those fights very difficult to figure out. For now I would advise caution to every bettor. Don't place every penny you have on either of the combatants. It would be a most dangerous risk.

They both have the physical tools to destroy the other. Oscar is a master at getting out of trouble when in danger, and he knows how to accompany his escapades from danger with great backing from an explosive artillery he always produces from –seemingly- nowhere. Meanwhile, Fernando employs a volatile pressure very difficult to resist, backed by a devastating bombing session that destroys anything it finds in its way.

I know, for example, that the principal conflict that both will be forced to undertake has to do with the mean pressure and great punch of Fernando Vargas. But, could Oscar De La Hoya overcome that with his experience and intelligence?

I've always been impressed with Fernando Vargas. He's one of the best boxers of his time.

But Oscar De La Hoya's brainpower is awesome. And you all know my view of boxing at the top level. I always pick the one who best uses his head instruments, as killer bombs come rushing his way.