

David Diaz: Time off for good behavior

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Sunday, 11 December 2005 19:00

Do the same thing every day for more than 15 years of your life. Do the crunches; take the punches.

Forget that your childhood or teenage years ever existed. Remember you'd better be in top form, lest the man on the other side of the ring not only take your money, but possibly your life.

With those conditions, could anyone blame 29-year-old David Diaz for being even slightly disenchanted with boxing for a few years?

Since the former Olympian and two-time Golden Gloves champion was set for his first shot at a title in his almost 10-year career Saturday, he cherishes the fact he took that time off. The time was just right for the Chicagoan to reach for the International Boxing Association's lightweight belt.

"I think it was the best thing to happen to me," Diaz said. "If I had kept on the way I was going – barely training, cutting a lot of pounds before the fight – I would have ended up seriously hurt."

Diaz did what most boxers do when they've been beaten out of the game or just simply beaten themselves. He took to the construction sites and other odd jobs. He would have worked just about anything, as long as it wasn't boxing.

"The reason I kept on so much was you have all these fights (as an amateur)," Diaz said. "When you have fights, you have trips. You want to go on these trips, and the only way to go is to fight."

"If it wasn't for boxing, I don't think I ever would have left Chicago."

Oddly enough, when Diaz retired himself in 2000, he hadn't lost a single fight. In fact, his last fight Sept. 9 of that year was a second-round technical knockout of Steve Larimore.

He admitted the shift to the pros in 1996 was a bit of an adjustment.

"Once the pros hit in, it's like, wow, you're getting paid," Diaz said. "That was the problem. I wasn't work as hard as I was when I wasn't getting paid. I had to weigh my options and it ended up I needed a little break."

Competition wasn't much of a problem for Diaz. He'd been around some of the best most of his life. He beat current WBA, WBC and IBF titleholder Zab Judah for a spot on U.S. Olympic team at the Atlanta Games in 1996. The team turned out more than a few professional champions, including Eric Morel (112-pounder, now the former WBA flyweight champ), Floyd Mayweather Jr. (125-pounder, now the current WBC light welterweight champ), Fernando Vargas (147-pounder, now the former IBF and WBA junior middleweight champ), David Reid

David Diaz: Time off for good behavior

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Sunday, 11 December 2005 19:00

(156-pound gold medallist, now the former WBA super welterweight champ) and Antonio Tarver (178-pounder, now the current IBF, WBC and WBA light heavyweight champ).

Diaz has watched each one of the professional triumphs of his former Olympic teammates. Although, he admitted it never stirred a rush to get one of his own.

"I was actually happy for them," Diaz said. "I would have to say that I've been finally getting my experience and everything where I think I'm ready for a title shot."

It's almost ironic that Diaz would relish having taken his time, considering he never intended to stay in the ring beyond the age of 27. As of now, he's scribbled out the dates he'd circled years ago and moved them up to three years from now. That's when he'll finally call it quits. But even those circles are in pencil.

"It all depends if my body is telling me to stop," Diaz said. "Whether I become champ or not, I would have to hang it up."

Time was on his side Saturday, and so was the experience of 30 professional fights heading into the contest at southern Indiana's Grand Victoria Casino in Rising Sun, just 45 minutes away from Cincinnati. Of course, he needed every bit of experience against a fighter he'd never seen the likes of in southpaw Ramazan Palyani.

Palyani had logged more than 400 fights between his amateur and undefeated professional careers, although he only has 12 that awarded him a paycheck. Diaz's experience told him the 32-year-old boxer-puncher from the Republic of Georgia is unlike any southpaw he's faced, based merely on Palyani's technical skills.

Between the two fighters Saturday, neither carried the advantage in a fight declared a draw and the vacant belt remained unclaimed.

To Diaz's credit, he's left southpaws weighed, tried and left wanting. More recently, he TKO'd Jamie Rangel in the ninth in 2004. Diaz did worse to Dillon Carew, whose corner stopped their 2003 bout in the third round.

If anything, Diaz is doing the crunches and taking the punches he needs to these days. He learned a hard lesson when he dropped the first fight of his professional career in February against Kendall Holt (17-1) by way of an eighth-round TKO.

"I am hungry," he said. "I've done everything I need to do to get to the shape I am now. Hopefully when I win the title, people are going to be gunning for me."

"I'm going to do what I have to so they can't beat me."