

Having seen a mere 25 turns of the calendar, "Ferocious" Fernando Vargas has a lifetime of ring wars under his belt. Here's to hoping that he and his team have learned something from it. Despite a stellar record of 24-2-0, it is the two "L's" that are cause for concern for the former champion.

Last week Vargas took on, and dispatched, veteran Tony Marshall, 5 months after having had a bit of trouble with the very awkward Canadian Fitz Vanderpool. Versus Vanderpool, Vargas struggled with his timing and at times seemed unable to put his combinations together like he used to. While Marshall wasn't much of a step up from Vanderpool, in reality a step down coming in having lost 4 of 6 fights, Vargas still found himself on the receiving end of too many blows.

One thing that a lot of people forget about the Oxnard, California fighter is that he is only 25 years old. That is young. The two beatings Vargas took were to the two best fighters in his division, Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya. They were both incredibly entertaining bouts that had "El Feroz" taking on a bit more than he could chew. After being knocked down for the first time in his career in the very first round of the Trinidad bout, Vargas came back to drop Tito in 4th round. Eventually the punishing shots of Trinidad took their toll and Vargas was dropped, dropped and dropped again in the 12th and final round as ref Jay Nady finally stopped the bout. Vargas showed incredible will and determination to keep coming back and, in losing, gained even more admirers for the way he went down with all guns blazing.

After the fight he made some very intelligent comments to the effect that he was in the "hurt business" and that many great champions before him had lost and been knocked down, so why not him. Quite mature, and this was coming from a 22-year old boxer. Kinda makes you stop for a minute to digest: Fernando Vargas was 22 when he took on the best fighter in his division, a fighter among the best pound-for-pound in the world. Lesson learned, boys shouldn't run with the men.

In the fight with De La Hoya the two California boxers finally met after years of Vargas calling out Oscar as often as he could. De La Hoya came with the name, the money, and years of experience under his title belts. Vargas came with a chip on his shoulder and the Trinidad memory pushed to the back of his mind a mere two fights after that loss. Since the beating he took at the hands of Trinidad was exactly that - a beating - it just didn't make sense for Vargas to challenge the Golden Boy so soon, but it did make dollars and cents.

After a strong start by Vargas, De La Hoya eventually took control of the fight and dropped Fernando from an accumulation of punches. The fight was stopped again, this time by Joe Cortez, with Vargas on the ropes eating punches. Oscar was able to let his fists do the talking in the ring whereas Vargas ran his mouth before the fight. No shame in losing to Oscar De La Hoya, of course, but it was another lesson learned for Vargas. Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it.

With Age, Wisdom

Written by Joey Knish

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Having witnessed the past two fights on Vargas' resume it appears he still has a long way to go to make it to the top, if he ever does again. His combinations are not flowing like they used to, his menacing attitude a bit dented, and he is simply getting hit too often. In moving from Vanderpool to Marshall it appears that Fernando Vargas and his team have learned a valuable lesson, albeit the hard way. Slow and steady just may win the race, and the race is long.

Note: Have to give props to Vargas as he continues to give back. A week after the Marshall fight Vargas was back in Oxnard, California handing out 2,000 Christmas gifts to economically disadvantaged children, something he has done now for six straight years.