

Librado Andrade awaits Mikkel Kessler

Written by Ralph Gonzalez

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The day Librado Andrade's family decided to live across a boxing gym, his fate was sealed. Andrade was nine years old when he and younger brother Enrique arrived from Guanajuato, Mexico. They immediately started frequenting the La Habra boxing club. "We used to live right across the boxing club and we'd go there and play football and sometimes we'd hit the punching bag," remembers Andrade. "Dave Martinez eventually asked me if I wanted to learn how to throw a punch. He then taught me how to throw a jab. He's the one that started me in the sport."

There's nothing more exciting for boxing fans than watching a young prospect evolve into a contender and hopefully a world champion. Such is the case for Southern California aficionados who've been watching Librado Andrade's career evolve. Andrade, 24-0 (18 KO's), is ranked #1 in the 168-pound division by the WBC and set to fight for the title against the highly regarded champion Mikkel Kessler of Denmark. "We're in negotiations right now with Kessler's people. This is definitely going to happen. It's been a long time coming," Andrade said.

Andrade, 28, started out his career being a regular on promoter Roy Englebrecht's shows. Eventually he was promoted by Englebrecht's company and started to slowly carve out a name for himself. Andrade's skills and winning record paved the way to a signing with Golden Boy Promotions where his undefeated record remains intact. His first big test came against the also undefeated Willie Stewart in March of 2004 for the NABA title. Andrade took the twelve-round decision in what he calls his toughest test to date. "My hardest fight came against Willie Stewart. Before that fight I hadn't gone more than six rounds and he was a lefty. He was a very good fighter," Andrade says. "He hit me with a hook that had me hearing bells for about two rounds. It was an exciting fight and a great learning experience."

Andrade was stepped up against the very tough Panamenian Tito "Misil" Mendoza who he defeated in a twelve-round war. The fight ended controversially since it was discovered by the California Athletic Commission that Mendoza's corner was using ammonia caplets in order to quickly revive their fighter who'd been knocked down three times and severely hurt during the confrontation. Mendoza's cornerman was immediately suspended for the infraction. Andrade holds no grudge. Smartly, he chooses to see the positive aspect of the situation. "In a way, it's good that it happened. He fought at his very best. He was getting extra help in his corner where they were giving him smelling salts," Andrade said. "I had to go through a lot to win that fight. A fight like that prepares you for someone like Mikkel Kessler who's extremely tough."

Kessler, 38-0 (29 KO's), is the current WBC and WBA Super middleweight champion. He's no stranger to Andrade who's sparred with the Dane based out of Germany. "He's very fast. He throws nice jabs and then follows up with a right or left. He's a one, two, fighter. He's the best one-two combination puncher out there," Andrade said.

He feels confident enough in his skills that fighting in Kessler's backyard is a non-issue. "I have no problem with that at all. To me it doesn't matter. I've been to other countries and fought without a problem. I went to Canada when I fought Otis Grant and had a great time," Andrade

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said. "I want to make fans. I see this as an opportunity to see another country, meet other people and learn about another culture. At the same time, I'm showing up to win wherever I go."

Andrade, who stands six-foot-two, started off his pro career as a 175-pounder but discovered that the 168 lb. limit was easy to make. "The weight came off naturally. I had no trouble keeping it off. I'm not a big eater. I tried fighting at 168 and I liked it. So I said, why not? I walk around at 185 and that's if I haven't trained for two weeks."

Andrade, a pro for six years, didn't expect his life path would lead him to a world title shot. He seemed destined for fast food greatness as a manager for "Jack in the Box" where most of his family toiled. "I didn't have a plan for my life. Before I was a serious fighter I worked at Jack in the Box. I wasn't sure what I was going to do. I thought maybe I'd work my way up the ladder," Andrade said. Eventually he realized that boxing was his calling. "This is what I was born to do. Boxing is my life. It's given me a future and a career."

He's currently traded his Orange County haunts for Las Vegas where he trains under the guidance of one of the toughest men to ever lace up the gloves. "Wayne McCullough's been to the top. He tells me all about it. He's taught me a lot. His perspective really helps me. He's a real good coach and a friend," Andrade said. "I don't particularly need anyone to push me since I'm focused and I know what I have to do to win. What I need is a great friend inside and outside the ring who understands me and that's where Wayne comes in. I have a great relationship with him."

He also credits his manager for a new found lease in boxing. "Al Haymon has changed my life completely. I almost wanted to quit boxing at one point and he's put me on the right track. He's the person I look up to most," Andrade said. As far as other fighters are concerned, Oscar De La Hoya, who is also his boss, is someone he loves to watch in the ring. "I like watching Oscar. I like his style. I'm also a fan of Juan Manuel and Rafael Marquez. They're awesome."

Andrade's more than paid his dues. He's slowly stepped up against solid competition and has looked more impressive each time out. The native son of Guanajuato, Mexico by way of La Habra, California predicts a big future which includes a title currently held by Kessler. "My fans can expect me to be a world champion next year. I have all the confidence in the world that I can beat Mikkel Kessler. I've sparred with him before. He's a great guy, a nice guy, but he's got something I want and that's the world title. It's going to take more than a home field advantage to stop me from getting it."

To see Librado Andrade at work in an impressive one round demolition of Richard Grant click here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNmWXVISKg8>

For Andrade's record go to: http://www.boxrec.com/boxer_display.php?boxer_id=36961