

Sergio Mora Eyeing Middleweight King Jermain Taylor

Written by David A. Avila

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Undisputed middleweight world champion Jermain Taylor wrecked his way to victory last weekend, but there is a certain Contender waiting in the wings anxiously. His name is Sergio Mora.

Negotiations are underway to stage a showdown between Mora and Taylor for some time in April if all parties agree. If it's signed, it won't be the first time they've fought in the ring.

"We have a history with each other," said Mora, who was the winner of the Contender television reality show in the first year. "Me and Jermain go way back."

During the Olympic box offs in 2000, Taylor and Mora fought against each other in a rousing four-round bout to make the Olympic team. That day Taylor emerged the victor.

"It was a really close fight," said Dean Campos, who trains Mora and was in his corner that day. "Sergio could have done more but he hurt his back in the fight before."

During the box-offs, Mora was wrestled to the ground by a frustrated Sechew Powell, who was disqualified for his illegal tactics. Though Mora moved on to the finals, he suffered a back sprain that kept him from fighting at his best.

"Truthfully, I don't know if I would have fought any better because I was pretty excited," said Mora, who is currently ranked number 10 by the WBA and WBC in the middleweight division. "After that fight I was pretty sore."

Mora was a virtual unknown to the boxing world when he surprised most experts by emerging as the champion of the television reality show that featured more recognized and touted boxers such as Ishe Smith, Peter Manfredo Jr., and Jonathan Reid. Since then, he's racked up wins against middleweight contenders Archak Ter-Meliksetian and Eric Regan.

"I would love to fight Jermain," said Mora (19-0), who feels he needs one fight to get the kinks out of his ring rust.

Taylor, who fought a gritty battle against hard-charging Kassim Ouma on Saturday Dec. 9, has not ruled out fighting Mora or any other middleweight. In fact, make that any other super middleweight too.

"Whoever wants to fight me I'll fight," said Taylor (26-0-1) after his unanimous decision over Ouma. "If Sergio wants to fight me I'll fight."

Taylor, 28, seems to have cleaned up most of the middleweight division, but it's only a mirage. As always, it's one of the toughest of all divisions and is filled with numerous opponents capable of ending the great Arkansas fighter's undefeated streak.

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"I saw some weaknesses in Taylor," said Mora, 26. "It was very interesting. I was surprised at Ouma's ability to take Taylor's punches. That really surprised me. Ouma is so little."

But Taylor has shown an ability to win fights. Whether he looks pretty or not, he comes out on top.

"You can't let Jermain Taylor set up," said Mora evaluating the Taylor-Ouma fight the next day. "If you let him do that, you're in trouble. He can get you out with that right hand."

After Taylor's fight with Ouma, the middleweight world champion evaluated his own performance honestly as usual.

"He fought all 12 rounds. The little guy is a tough guy," said Taylor of his five-foot- eight-inch opponent Ouma. "I wanted a knockout so bad I think I threw myself out."

Mora watched the fight with extreme interest. He's a middleweight and a big match with Taylor looms if the fighter's management can agree to terms. Before this month, other names had popped up such as Fernando Vargas or Oscar De La Hoya. But fighting for the middleweight world championship has special interest for the East Los Angeles boxer Mora.

"I'm excited about it," said Mora from his home.

Taylor has mentioned his amateur fight with Mora was one of the toughest of his career.

"Sergio Mora is surprisingly strong," Taylor said.

Other middleweights on TV

Colombia's Edison Miranda meets Philadelphia's Willie Gibbs in a middleweight contest that will be shown on Saturday Dec. 16, on HBO After Dark.

It's Miranda's first return to the ring since losing a hotly contested battle to WBO middleweight titleholder Arthur Abraham in Germany last September. The Colombian was deducted several points for headbutts and low blows that all resulted in a loss. But Abraham suffered a broken jaw and was reportedly ready to quit. But he survived all 12 rounds and won by unanimous decision. A rematch is scheduled for next summer.

Miranda faces a tough Phillie fighter in Gibbs whose only loss came to hard-hitting Daniel Edouard two years ago. It should be an explosive matchup.