

James McGirt Jr.: High Expectations

Written by Robert Mladinich
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Unbeaten middleweight prospect James McGirt Jr. is determined to escape his father's shadow. When all is said and done, the 24-year-old southpaw, who is trained by his famous dad, James "Buddy" McGirt Sr., hopes that people will say he was an even better fighter than his father was.

The elder McGirt, who held world junior welterweight and welterweight titles during a career that lasted from 1982-97 and produced a 73-6-1 (48 KOS) record, hopes that is the case.

"I don't want him to be like me," said the senior McGirt. "I want him to be more successful and a better fighter than me."

McGirt Sr. has been training his son at his Vero Beach, Florida, boxing facility since he turned pro in January 2004 on the undercard of the Arturo Gatti-Gianluca Branco bout in Atlantic City.

Prior to embarking on his pro career, the long and lean 6'1" McGirt Jr., who had nearly 50 amateur fights, attended St. Petersburg Community College in Florida, where he was a basketball star.

But the youngster feels that he was preordained to be a boxer and is very happy with the career choice he has made, even though his father didn't share his enthusiasm early on.

"I was born into the sport," said McGirt Jr., who recently signed with promoter Lou DiBella and just ran his record to 13-0 (7 KOS) with an eight-round decision over Dennis Sharpe, now 17-4-3 (6 KOS), on DiBella's final Broadway Boxing show of the year in Manhattan on December 14.

Just a few weeks earlier, Sharpe had also extended hot undefeated Irish prospect Andy Lee the distance on the underneath Wladimir Klitschko-Calvin Brock at Madison Square Garden.

"It was all-around me growing up," continued McGirt Jr., who has already laced up the gloves in Michigan, Florida, New York, New Hampshire, Nevada and Arizona. "I had no choice."

If you listen to McGirt Sr., his son had plenty of other options. You need not look past the fact that he attended college, which his father did not do. Moreover, when McGirt Jr. would accompany his father to the gym as a young boy, his dad did nothing to encourage him or stoke his competitive fires.

"I never wanted him to box," concedes McGirt Sr. "He made this decision on his own. I tried to keep him away from it, but if he wants it I want to help him."

Because McGirt Sr. is now considered one of the best trainers in the business, his son is in very good hands. The fact that he is also promotionally aligned with DiBella certainly can't hurt either.

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In his first show under DiBella's stewardship, McGirt Jr. defeated Stephan Pryor, the once beaten son of another ring legend, Aaron Pryor, on Showtime.

"He is a great athlete," said DiBella. "I would have been interested in him on the basis of his own talent, but having the name McGirt attached to him can't hurt. His father built a great career in the New York City area, and I hope to build a great career for his son here as well.

"Having the name McGirt will help him get recognition, but he's going to have to be able to fight. If he can't fight, the name will hurt him. But I think that he is talented enough to not fight in his father's shadow, develop his own identity, and become a contender."

"Everyone expects a lot of me," said McGirt Jr., who is next scheduled to fight on the undercard of DiBella's Boxing After Dark show on HBO in February. That show will emanate from the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York, and will feature Paulie Malignaggi vs. Edner Cherry and Sechew Powell vs. Ishe Smith.

"That just makes me work harder," continued McGirt Jr. "I can't be Buddy McGirt. I don't want to be Buddy McGirt. I just want to be myself. He's Buddy and I'm James. I have to build myself up and create my own legacy."

One thing that both father and son have in common is their steadfast dedication to their sport. On a daily basis McGirt Sr. used to travel quite a distance from his Brentwood, Long Island, home to New Jersey to train with Al Certo.

While his son, who lives and fights out of Florida, is not encumbered by great geographical distances, he has already proven himself to be as eager to learn as he is tireless in the gym.

And as proud as he is to carry his father's name, he knows that whispers abound that he is just another silver-spooned offspring of a famous champion who will succumb to defeat just as soon as he upgrades his caliber of opposition.

DiBella certainly doesn't think that is the case with McGirt or Ronald Hearn, the son of the great Thomas Hearn, whom he also recently signed to a promotional agreement.

Nor does McGirt Sr. feel that way. He was always a firm believer in the power of positive thinking, so he never let his own negative thoughts or the negativity of others hamper the tremendous belief he had in his own abilities.

"You can't let other people's bullsh-- affect you," said McGirt Sr. "There are always a lot of people who want to tear you down. But you can't let negative thoughts or negative people affect you. You can only do your best in the ring. No one can expect any more than that."