

Happy Holiday la Hoya '07: Big Moves and Destiny

Written by Phil Woolever
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As the blossoming calendar beckoned, Oscar de la Hoya beamed with cheerful satisfaction and looked toward another big year, another big fight.

De la Hoya won't be in many annual listings for Fight or Fighter of the Year of 2006, but he enjoyed one of the boxing business's most productive seasons in more ways than most. His promotional enterprise made significant gains with a widening stable and extended television contracts while his personal stock rose after he creamed Ricardo Mayorga.

You can tell a lot about a person sitting next to them at the fights for a little while.

If the fight game is as mental as it often appears, de la Hoya shouldn't be an underdog against Floyd Mayweather, Jr next May.

De la Hoya was confidently relaxed, in winter vacation mode for a mid-December Golden Boy card at Desert Diamond.

What follows is a mix of interview data and off-the-wall conversation, with the distraction of a tape recorder and intervals of nonstop fan photos and hugs. Any state secrets or gossip exchanged remains hushed.

An endless stream of well-wishers would keep most people psyched comfortably, but de la Hoya seems to have discovered a personal, maturing aura of content strength.

"I think I found the formula to balance my life," said de la Hoya. "You know, I have family, my career, promotions and businesses, all the things we do outside boxing. It's a matter of just making time for everything. Balancing."

De la Hoya has a lot on his pugilistic plate, including the business side of facing off with Mayweather in the New Year's glossiest fight, plus promotional hassles like the Manny Pacquiao contract coup of rival Bob Arum with pending lawsuits.

Multitasking will change to focus on physical aspects.

"Once I start serious training two months prior to the fight, there's no distractions whatsoever. I might do a few things here and there, but distractions are very minimal."

Meanwhile, de la Hoya spoke on various subjects, cracked non-boxing related jokes between rounds, and got ready for Christmas shopping ("You know, my wife is so simple to shop for. I'll probably get her some flip-flops. Down in Puerto Rico she loves flip-flops. She loves Abercrombie and Fitch cargo pants. Beside from that big, eight-karat ring I'm gonna give her, she's very easy to shop for.")

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De la Hoya credits domestic bliss for his inner peace, but his zip code basics face change.

“When I made a pact with my wife to get married, I promised her that we would spend the first four or five years of our marriage down in Puerto Rico, because after that we’re gonna move back to California fulltime.

“I mean, imagine. I’m gonna move my wife to California, when she’s been living all her life in Puerto Rico. It’s a big move for her, so I kind of negotiated that. Now the four years have passed, and we’re gonna be moving back to California, possibly after the Mayweather fight.

“It’s been nice living in Puerto Rico. People have been very respectful, everywhere we go. People always whisper in my ear, ‘You beat Trinidad, but oh my gosh, don’t say I said anything.’”

After de la Hoya announced intentions to keep fighting beyond Mayweather, he was called out by the man who sent Trinidad into probable permanent retirement, recent Golden Boy partner Winky Wright, another of boxing’s elite.

“I think it’s a first in boxing, a fighter challenging his promoter,” chuckled de a Hoya. “Look, I’ve never shied away from any challenge. I’ve always tended to fight the best, and I think this would be no exception.

“If destiny will bring us together then so be it. I’m obviously more than willing. I have a tough job at hand May 5th and I want to take care of that and move on from there. But I’ve always been up against the best, and Winky Wright is one of the best.”

De la Hoya doesn’t have to eat leather every time he’s dealing in mega-fights, but that still doesn’t mean it’s a cakewalk. The potential Pacquiao – Marco Antonio Barrera rematch is one such situation.

“Obviously, I turned promoter to do the right thing and this is no exception. We’ve done the right thing with Manny Pacquiao. We signed him to a contract, and we have a very strong, solid contract.

“The fact that Bob Arum came in and interfered, now he has to pay for it. My legal people are on it and will take care of the situation, but hopefully we can straighten it out sooner than later. Actually, I’m out of it. Richard Schaffer is dealing with that whole situation but I’m very confident that our contract will hold strong. The truth will come out and we will prevail. I’m gonna continue on being the positive face for boxing.

“Barrera – Pacquiao, that’s the fight everybody wants to watch. As a promoter that’s the fight I want to do, that’s the fight that’s necessary to keep boxing up on a level of excitement. I think Pacquiao was the Fighter of the Year. I feel that we will make that fight. Let’s hope we can do it soon.”

Maybe the smooth grind of big biz stardom makes for an appreciation of general public

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pleasures and distractions like slapstick comedy, classic rock or standards.

"I like movies like Meet the Fockers and comedies like that," smiled de la Hoya. "I have an Ipod, and I'm listening to Elton John, the Beatles, and Motley Crue. I have AC/DC, the Who and Sinatra."

Does he ever listen to his own Mexican pop CD?

"That's collecting dust in the corner of my house somewhere."

De la Hoya can afford to be modest. His proven talent and charisma make for A-list trappings and alpha "Man Law" endorsement jurisdiction, including political connections.

"Arnold (Schwarzenegger) is a friend of mine. I've been around him on occasions before and after he became Governor. He's really trying hard to be fair and do a good job for California. He's a lot more serious about politics since he won the election, but he's still a funny guy."

De la Hoya's commentary on immigration law after the Mayorga blowout or appearance at charity events he sponsored indicates a natural politician, though he claims no interest.

Another popular entertainment figure who mentions a political future is Hall of Fame hoopster and previous fellow golfer "Sir" Charles Barkley.

"I don't know if you could call what Charles does really playing golf, but he's a great natural athlete and he's always a blast to be around."

On other entertainment, the door seemed half-open, half closed to the possibility of promoting other combat sports.

"It's funny you know, when it started UFC was very popular. Now we're hearing and seeing that their arenas are not filling up the way they used to before. I think that's a sign maybe that trend is slowing down. It's great entertainment, obviously, but boxing has been around for so long, the history of [that type] fighting will never be overshadowed."

De la Hoya's sense of history in facing top opponents makes even old critics admit he's consistently performed at a level reserved for only the best.

He's really up for Mayweather, but you could say the same thing about the Bernard Hopkins fight. The big question beside weight might be whether a relatively comparable showing for de la Hoya (as against Hopkins) means a win against Mayweather.

"I'm treating this as the biggest fight of my life," claimed de la Hoya. "I started training already (around mid-October). I've done a lot of pre-camp [workouts]. The other day I ran ten miles.

"I'm still training with Floyd Mayweather Sr., but I haven't made the final, final decision yet. I talked to him in Las Vegas (mid-November) and he looked into my eyes and told me, 'I'll train

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you to beat my son.'

"As odd as that sounds, he will do it. I'm still gathering my thoughts about it because one thing I don't want to do is get in-between family. That's just not in my nature.

"I have to make sure that Floyd Sr. is going to be one hundred percent with me, passionate and right there, because if he's not I can't afford to have him in my corner. This is my life. I have to be ready."

While de la Hoya cites various improvements he'll need to be properly prepared for Mayweather Jr., there's a vibe that hints Oscar would be more than ready if the fight was tomorrow.

It's a little bit farther down the road than that.

In the meantime, we wish for all, life is good.