

Nonito Donaire: Flyweights Can Bang Too

Written by David A. Avila

Monday, 26 November 2007 19:00

On rare occasion a flyweight emerges with speed, agility and serious eye-popping power. Nonito "Filipino Flash" has that kind of talent.

Not since Michael Carbajal and Humberto "Chiquita" Gonzalez fought in the 1980s have so many flyweights with a middleweight punch arrived.

Donaire (18-1, 11 KOs) defends his IBF flyweight title against Mexico's hard-hitting Luis Maldonado (37-1-1, 28 KOs) at Foxwoods Casino on Saturday Dec. 1. The fight will be televised on Showtime with two other title fights.

But don't miss Donaire.

For the last few years a stream of heavy-hitting fighters from the Philippines has arrived and shaken up more than a few divisions. Filipino fighters have always been good but now the world is getting a true understanding of their talent.

Donaire's like a small bottle of nitro just waiting to be dropped.

But the whole flyweight division has boosted its image with more knockouts than seen in 20 years. Fans like knockouts and the 112-pounders are beginning to deliver.

Just last July it was Donaire's Fourth of July when he bopped out Aussie slugger Vic Darchinyan with a left hook from Manila. One punch and it was over.

Darchinyan had been doing the same thing with his brand of seek and destroy fighting that had stashed 10 consecutive opponents including Donaire's older brother Glenn.

It must be something with the ozone because flyweights aren't supposed to be doing this.

Now, Donaire faces Maldonado, a fighter who lasted 10 rounds against Darchinyan but that doesn't fool the Filipino fighter.

"Styles make fights," said Donaire who flew to the Philippines where he practiced his craft for a month. "Darchinyan was over-powering him but when he fought Cristian Mijares (WBC junior bantamweight titleholder) he got a draw. It shows he has a lot of heart and he's a tough guy."

Maldonado showed a variety of ploys and cutesy movements that enabled him to survive the Darchinyan storm. He also has a lot of power that has sent 28 opponents to the hammock.

Donaire decided to go to the Philippines to find sparring.

"Everything I needed to do was available there," said Donaire who trained at the famous ALA

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Gym in Cebu in the Philippines. "It was really hot and it helped get my weight down."

The likeable Donaire sparred with Filipino veterans Michael Domingo and others on a daily basis. He also worked with AJ Banal, Rey "Boom Boom" Bautista and Z Gorres who is preparing to meet former champion Darchinyan in January.

"We talked a bit about his fight with Darchinyan but we didn't spar much," said Donaire who plans to move up in weight to the junior bantamweight division too. "I sparred with Rocky Fuentes too. He's the Philippine champion."

Cebu City proved to be the right choice for Donaire and the young budding star wants every advantage when he faces Mexican threat Maldonado.

"Everybody poses a threat," Donaire says. "I can't let anybody try and take it (the title) away from me."

The flyweight division could possibly be on the cusp of a rebirth of earlier times.

"I'm looking to validate that I'm a world champion," Donaire said.

Don't blink.

Vernon Forrest

For more than two years Vernon "The Viper" Forrest traveled from one side of the country to another looking to find the groove he lost due to injuries.

He's got his groove back now.

Forrest, the WBC junior middleweight titleholder, rides a four-fight victory streak that includes impressive wins over Ike Quartey, Sergio Rios and Argentina's Carlos Baldomir.

In the last fight he grabbed the vacant WBC junior middleweight with a 12-round slugfest with hard-nose Baldomir.

It was impressive because he fired indiscriminately with disregard of previous injuries.

"Early on I was a little concerned about it," said Forrest (39-2, 28 KOs) who endured several surgeries to repair injuries to his elbow and shoulder. "I'm more comfortable now, it was more of a mental thing than a physical thing."

Now Forrest faces former welterweight titleholder Michele Piccirillo of Italy in a junior middleweight title defense.

"He's a very intelligent fighter, a former world champion. Anytime you can win a title that speaks volumes," said Forrest, 36, of his next foe Piccirillo. "He's trained by Sumbu Kalambay one of

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the great fighters.”

Piccirillo, 37, who captured the vacant IBF welterweight title against Cory Spinks then lost it in the rematch, says he knows it could be his last world title opportunity.

“It will be a tough fight for me, but it will also be a tough fight for Vernon,” said Piccirillo (48-3, 30 KOs) of Puglia, Italy. “Winning in the United States is not easy.”

Forrest won’t even talk about a future opponent.

“I learned my lesson,” said Forrest about losing twice to Ricardo Mayorga. “Mayorga taught me a very valuable lesson. Do what you’re supposed to do.”

Antonio Tarver

Florida’s Antonio “Magic Man” Tarver is treating his upcoming IBO title defense against Danny Santiago as if his Hall of Fame credentials are riding on it.

Good decision.

After losing to Bernard Hopkins and beating Elvir Muriqi by a majority decision that he felt was badly scored by the judges, Tarver seems about to explode in the ring as proof of his talent.

“It’s more than just fighting in the ring,” said Tarver (25-4, 18 KOs) during a conference call. “Just winning isn’t enough for me. I have to go and do something dramatic.”

Santiago, a good natured and intelligent person, dreamed of being in this position and jumped at the chance to fight Tarver when the original scheduled fighter was unable to fight.

“I’m going to make a name for myself,” said Santiago (29-3-1, 19 KOs), who lives in Florida too. “I’m definitely getting up for it.”

Until Tarver ran into Bernard Hopkins, he had been recognized as the best of the light heavyweights. But 17 months ago their encounter proved that the Philadelphia fighter was far from retirement with a convincing win over the Floridian. It makes Tarver angry.

“He got one win over me. I was a shell of myself,” Tarver said. “Bottom line is he has never been in the ring with the Magic Man.”

In Tarver’s last fight, this past June against Muriqi, three judges scored the fight tightly because of the overwhelming amount of punches fired against Tarver.

Tarver said they weren’t connecting.

“Just because a guy is throwing punches doesn’t mean he was landing,” said Tarver who won by majority decision. “I’m going to make sure I do everything on my side to make sure the fight

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don't go the distance.”

Santiago calmly listened to Tarver's rants and seemed content to wait for his moment.

“It's an honor and a privilege,” Santiago said of fighting Tarver. “He's achieved a lot of things well deserved.”

Look out Tarver.

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Freddy Hernandez (23-1) vs. Roberto Garcia (24-2).

Fri. Showtime, 11 p.m., James Kirkland (20-0) vs. Allen Conyers (11-2).

Sat. pay-per-view, 6 p.m., Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. (33-0-1) vs. Ray Sanchez (20-1); Jorge Arce (47-4-1) vs. Medgoen Singsurat (53-4); Ivan Calderon (29-0) vs. Juan Esquer (22-2-1).

Sat. Showtime, 9 p.m., Nonito Donaire (18-1) vs. Luis Maldonado (37-1-1).