

Can Junior Match J.C. Chavez Sr.?

Written by David A. Avila

Thursday, 29 November 2007 19:00

In a mere four years Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. has engaged in 34 pro fights faster than you can say lickety-split.

The 21-year-old son of Mexico's purported greatest boxer has also amassed a following throughout the Southwest from Mexican immigrants who blindly follow him in his adventure toward a world championship.

But can he possibly fill his father's gargantuan footsteps?

Chavez Jr. meets Ray Sanchez (20-1, 15 KOs) in that fighter's home state New Mexico in a junior middleweight bout that could be the biggest leap to stardom for the son of an icon. The 10-round fight takes place at Tingley Coliseum in Albuquerque. It will be televised on pay-per-view television and is promoted by Top Rank.

Father and son don't look alike or fight alike, in fact it's easier to say that it's the younger brother Omar who more resembles the father. But Junior has slowly shown that he's picking up facets of the sport here and there like a marching army crossing numerous battlefields and collecting discarded weapons.

"Over his last few fights he has looked very good and is much more settled as a fighter," stated big Julio during a press conference this week. "I really like what I see in him."

As a teen Junior and Omar Chavez lived in Riverside, California with their mother who was estranged from their father. Often the two could be seen boxing in numerous gyms in the area. Junior always had the dedication.

"The expectations of greatness will always be there because of my name," said Junior Chavez (33-0-1, 26 KOs) who began fighting as a lightweight and now is a junior middleweight. "But I knew that from the start and continue to live with it."

Despite a spindly appearance that included the face of a choir boy when he first stepped into a prizefight ring in 2003, Chavez has slowly rumbled through a list of Midwestern opponents with an occasional Mexican fighter thrown in as he marched to this moment.

But Sanchez, 24, poses many problems for Chavez starting with his left-handed stance, impressive record and hometown support.

Chavez can feel the pressure.

"My biggest concern is that he is left-handed," Chavez said at the El Paseo Inn in Los Angeles earlier this week. "I have never fought a lefty before."

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Even papa Chavez hesitates a bit with his son facing a southpaw.

“He’s (Sanchez) a very tough fighter and left-handers are always difficult to fight,” said Chavez Sr. who fought a total of 115 pro bouts and a few lefties in his career like Hector Camacho.

Soaking in the entire press junket like an amused bystander, Sanchez knows that a win would propel him into the forefront. He doesn’t think a win is farfetched.

“We are both hungry and both want to prove we belong at the highest level,” said Sanchez. “This is the first step for both of us.”

The New Mexico boxer has a lot to prove though he’s only suffered one loss and that came five years ago. But Sanchez’s resume doesn’t impress. He’s never beaten a veteran fighter with a winning record. Sanchez has never been truly tested.

“I couldn’t be more ready for this fight,” said Sanchez who is also a Junior.

Chavez already knows if he can beat Sanchez that he will be fighting Alfonso Gomez of the Contender reality television series. The fight will take place in March, but first things first. Sanchez stands in front of him.

And one more thing: his father’s shadow stands before him larger than the city of Culiacan, Mexico.

“My father’s shadow will never go away completely,” said Chavez Jr. “But I believe I have shown some people that I am a capable fighter and I know I have some fans of my own because of the way I fight.”

Well said. Almost as precise as a left hook to the liver that his father perfected.

“I think my son has more skills and is the stronger puncher of the two,” said Papa Chavez.

Other pay-per-view fights

Jorge Arce, like Chavez Jr., know if he beats his opponent Medgoen Singsurat (53-4, 39 KOs) in a battle for the vacant WBC Latino bantamweight title. It’s a dangerous fight because Arce is a flyweight moving up two divisions and the Thai fighter can really bang.

But Arce (47-4-1, 36 KOs) knows a victory leads him immediately to a match against former junior bantamweight titleholder Martin Castillo.

“I not only need to win but I need to look tremendous doing it,” said Arce. “If I win I get to fight Martin Castillo and that fight will be like Morales-Barrera and Vazquez-Marquez.”

Also on the fight card is the talented but seldom recognized WBO strawweight titleholder Ivan Calderon of Puerto Rico. He could possibly be the best boxer in the world but his diminutive

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size keeps the boxing world from noticing.

Calderon (29-0, 6 KOs) moves faster than a bullet train and is harder for opponents to hit than a fly in the dark. He defends his title against Mexico's Juan Esquer (22-2-1, 17 KOs) who probably hopes Calderon slips and falls.