

Bring Malignaggi Show To Las Vegas Too

Written by David A. Avila

Monday, 31 December 2007 19:00

People are talking about Brooklyn's Paul Malignaggi, but the talking is limited to the east coast.

Up and down the eastern shores the speed-talking, fast-fighting IBF junior welterweight titleholder Malignaggi (23-1, 5 KOs) has heads nodding and high-fives slapping at the mention of his name.

Just a few boxing fans west of Missouri know about Malignaggi.

It's about time New York shares its best fighter with the rest of the world.

Once again Lou DiBella, who promotes the Italian-American, has Malignaggi fighting in Atlantic City when he meets Canada's Herman Ngoudjo (16-1, 9 KOs) on Saturday Jan. 5, at Bally's Hotel and Casino. The title fight will be televised by Showtime.

Despite being one of the slickest, flashiest and bravest prizefighters on the planet, Malignaggi has never fought in Las Vegas or Los Angeles. He deserves to be up in the neon lights and known on both sides of the country.

"Everybody knows Paulie Malignaggi," said Malignaggi, 27, during a conference call.

Everybody on the eastern side knows Malignaggi, but outside of hardcore boxing fans, few in the Southwest - where boxing still remains strong - realize that this junior welterweight champion exists.

It's a boxing travesty.

Debuting in July 2001, the spiky-haired boxer known as the "Magic Man" has blown through all but one fighter in his six-year career. Using his cat-like quickness he has that uncanny ability to hit and not get hit. But don't call him a runner.

The only opponent that was able to decipher the anti-Malignaggi formula was Puerto Rico's Miguel Cotto who truly is a welterweight and used that strength advantage to the maximum.

Though Malignaggi took more punches in that fight than all of his others combined, especially to the body, the Brooklyn fighter gained a lot of fans with his refusal to submit.

The kid has plenty of heart.

It's that fortitude that fans, especially those high rollers in Las Vegas, love to see. Malignaggi creates that kind of zeal that would make people plop down \$3,000 a ticket to watch him work.

And he does it with style.

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Perhaps after this fight with Ngoudjo the Brooklyn fighter will venture west.

Ngoudjo, a tough pressure fighter originally from Cameroon, has never faced a quick-footed boxer like Malignaggi. But you never know about fighters from Africa. They tend to get obscured because of the language barrier.

During a press conference featuring Malignaggi and Ngoudjo, that language barrier was crashed with taunts and promises from both pugilists.

It was a year ago that Ngoudjo lost a split-decision to Mexico's famous Jose Luis Castillo who was moving up from the lightweight division. Many felt Ngoudjo won the fight that showed the African fighter's strength and ability to fight chin to chin with Mexico's former juggernaut.

When the decision was announced, Ngoudjo looked in shock.

"Everybody told me I won the fight so I was okay," said Ngoudjo, who then beat former junior welterweight champion Randall Bailey by split-decision last June. "I felt better very quickly."

The pressure fighting Ngoudjo likes fighting the odds.

Ngoudjo bucked the odds a first time when he was part of Cameroon's Olympic boxing team and jumped ship to stay in Canada. He didn't like his former country's system and spoke out.

Speaking out is what Ngoudjo likes to do.

"I will make him dance, and I'm going to put him down," Ngoudjo says of Malignaggi. "He thinks he's the best fighter in the world."

Those are tough words.

Ngoudjo hopes he can bore through Malignaggi's defense like he has against all of his opponents. But it's tough to hit a moving target.

Fighting a super strong pressure fighter like Ngoudjo is par for the course, says Malignaggi who will be fighting his second fighter known as the "Black Panther." He just doesn't care.

"I was surprised how difficult it was to solidify my first defense," said Malignaggi, who beat Lovemore N'Dou for the title last June in Connecticut. "Right now my only focus is Herman Ngoudjo on Jan. 5."

If Malignaggi wins, then hopefully, the Italian-American comes west to the town that was basically made by Italian-Americans: Las Vegas.

A lot of magicians have worked Las Vegas.

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Glen Johnson

After knocking out the great Roy Jones Jr. life should have been easier.

Former light heavyweight champion Glencofe Johnson meets Colombia's Hugo Pineda in a 10-round semi main event at Bally's Hotel and Casino.

Johnson, a rugged no nonsense fighter, has experienced problems finding opponents in his weight class. This past summer a potential clash with Huntington Beach's Julio Gonzalez fell through. Meteoric collision is the best I could describe that rematch of a fight that took place five years ago. Gonzalez barely won that fight.

It was in 2004 that Johnson captured the IBF title against Clinton Woods in Great Britain, then, seven months later, accepted a fight with Jones. He would knock out the former pound for pound champion emphatically.

Three months later, he would meet another Jones conqueror Antonio Tarver at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. With his battering attack Johnson won a split-decision.

All those wins came in 2004.

Since then he's only fought six times and can't seem to land a mega fight that his talent deserves.

Johnson fights Pineda, a hard-hitting Colombian who was fighting at nearly 20 pounds lighter just two years ago. It doesn't mean he can't fight, but it should be a tune up for Johnson who hopes a win scores him a date with WBC light heavyweight titleholder Chad Dawson.

For Johnson, it means not beating up Pineda too much. Don't want to scare away the competition.

Lovemore N'dou

It's only an eight-round bout but the South African boxer who lost by unanimous decision to Paul Malignaggi last June needs a win to keep a possible date with the champion intact.

N'Dou (45-9-1, 30 KOs) faces Mexico's Rafael Ortiz (14-11-2, 13 KOs) who likes to give everyone fits with his punching power. It might not be a good idea against N'Dou who would rather punch than duck.

The junior welterweight bout takes place at Bally's Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City on Saturday Jan. 5.

Fights on television

Fri. ESPN, 6 p.m., Allan Green (25-1) vs. Rubin Williams (29-2-1).

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Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Michel Rosales (13-1) vs. Dario Esalas (30-10, 24 KOs).

Fri. Showtime, 11 p.m., Lamont Peterson (23-0) vs. Antonio Mesquita (34-0).

Sat. Showtime, 9 p.m., Paul Malignaggi (23-1) vs. Herman Ngoudjo (16-1).