Welterweight slugger Luis Carlos Abregu (24-0, 21 KOs) is a long way from home in the high climate of Big Bear, California where he's been training under the watchful eye of Abel Sanchez. Abregu has his biggest fight to date on Friday night against former contender David Estrada (22-5, 13 KOs), which will be televised from the Chumash Casino on Showtime Championship boxing.

The 24-year-old from Salta, Argentina has been completely devastating in his current boxing campaign but the quality of his opposition hasn't been anywhere near the elite level. Estrada should prove to be a good test. "I've studied his tapes. He put up a good fight against Shane Mosley. He comes forward and doesn't stop throwing punches," Abregu said. "He likes to brawl. If he wants to brawl then we'll brawl. If he wants to box then we'll box. I can do either."

It helps that Abregu's been sparring with former welterweight champion Carlos Baldomir who like Estrada, is a face first fighter continuously looking to engage. Not only has he been an asset in the gym but also as Abregu's manager. Baldomir is the one that brought him to Sycuan Ringside Promotions and to the United States, where he's knocked out two mid level opponents in Thomas Davis and Roberto Valenzuela. "I know I'm taking a step up in competition and that's exactly what I need," Abregu said. "Estrada is no joke. If I'm going to get a major fight I have to impress people and that's what I hope to do."

Currently the South American champion, Abregu concedes that this is a big event for him but feels no anxiety about possibly being watched by a potential audience of millions on Showtime during the eve of the De La Hoya vs. Pacquiao mega-fight. "On the contrary. I love to fight. This is what I've always dreamed of," Abregu said. "I've fought in big venues in front of 15,000 people as the main event so I'm not anxious at all. This type of event invigorates me."

Like every kid from Argentina who's ever put boxing gloves on, he idolizes legendary middleweight Carlos Monzon. Monzon is Argentina's equivalent to Muhammad Ali or Mexico's Julio Cesar Chavez, a boxing icon that will always be remembered and revered for his performances. "Monzon and Carlos Baldomir are both big heroes in Argentina and my heroes," Abregu said. "I'm also a fan of Miguel Cotto and Oscar de La Hoya."

Abregu had a chance to watch De La Hoya at work since "The Golden Boy" has been training at "The Summit" in preparation for his big fight against Pacquiao. The 4,000 square foot gym is owned by Abregu's trainer Abel Sanchez. It was a glimpse into the life of a boxing superstar that gave him much to reflect on. "Seeing people like Oscar and Nacho Beristain and Daniel Zaragoza and talking to them was an amazing experience. It was exciting," Abregu recalled. "I learned a lot about how to formulate a plan and how to execute it in the ring."

According to Sanchez, Abregu is more than ready for his upcoming test. "I think he's done the work and now it's a matter of throwing him in the ring," Sanchez said. "He's a raw talent and a good prospect with a big punch and fast hands. He's going to show the world that he belongs at

that level."

Sanchez should know. He was the trainer for Hall of Famer Terry Norris and his brother Orlin, who both won world titles under his tutelage. He's been in this position before. He understands that if Abregu loses, most of the fingers will be pointing in his direction. "I don't mind that. We trainers know how the business works. A fighter wins by himself but the trainer loses all the time," Sanchez added and laughed. "It just gives me more motivation to make sure my guy performs well."

It often happens that fighters from other countries come to the United States with undefeated records and high knockout rates. After stepping up in opponent quality they realize the harsh reality that fighting in America is a whole different proposition. The list of prospects that returned to their countries with their luggage filled with broken dreams is too long to list. Will Abregu be one of the few that cracks his way into big time American boxing?

He certainly displays the right attitude inside the ring where he mauls his opponents with bullish force and fast, accurate hands. He's got a message to boxing fans that will be watching him on Friday. "Have faith in me. I'm going to be the figure in boxing that you've always been looking for. I've been boxing since I was a kid. I want to be champion," Abregu said. "It's my goal and I want to reach it. I'll never rest until I become world champion."