

Battle Of LA: Antonio Margarito-Shane Mosley

Written by David A. Avila

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LOS ANGELES-If your name is Antonio Margarito you wished like crazy for a match against the only recession proof fighter in the game today.

That didn't happen.

Now you sign to fight one of the true warriors of the sport, Sugar Shane Mosley (45-5, 38 KOs) on Saturday Jan. 24, at Staples Center in Los Angeles. The WBA welterweight title will be on the line and that means a lot is at stake.

Margarito was hoping and praying for a fight with Oscar De La Hoya, though rumor had it that the East L.A. fighter would never fight another Mexican before he retired. There was always hope.

"We knew there was a slim chance but not after Saturday," said Sergio Diaz, who co-manages Margarito. "Now we have Shane Mosley and it's not an easy fight by no means."

Exactly.

Though Mosley gives up several inches in height, seven years in age, and probably 3-1 odds by sports book handicappers, he doesn't give up an inch when it comes to heart and experience.

You might call Mosley the heart and soul of prizefighting.

Mosley finally returns to the site of his greatest victory. It was in 2000, when the Staples Center had barely opened that he defeated Oscar De La Hoya in front of a star-studded crowd that included Salma Hayek, Halle Berry, and Sylvester Stallone among many others.

Of course there are going to be many skeptics that say Mosley has no chance against Margarito.

But just like last week, when De La Hoya was beaten by a much smaller man, anything can happen in prizefighting. You never know until the fight happens in the ring.

Mosley, 37, truthfully should be thinking about retirement. He's had some tough battles and received punishment that would crunch a normal man. But the speedster from Pomona has never been beaten down and he doesn't think Margarito will be the guy to do it first.

"He likes to go forward and that's perfect for me," said Mosley on Tuesday dressed in a sharp blue pin-stripe suit. "I'm used to fighting Mexicans. That's where I developed my style in the gyms, against tough Mexicans."

Mosley speaks the truth.

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Before the victory over De La Hoya, who at the time only had a much disputed loss against Felix Trinidad, nobody outside of Los Angeles knew much about Sugar Shane Mosley. But that night he pulled out all the stops and rallied to win the latter half of the fight and the honor of being named the best fighter Pound for Pound in the world, in some circles.

Remember that?

It's been eight years since that night. Sure Mosley has lost some of the speed, and sure he's lost some fights, but when he's in the ring you can be sure he's going at 90 miles an hour.

"He's a veteran with a lot of experience," said Margarito (37-5, 27 KOs), who though recognized as one of the toughest prizefighters on the planet, realizes who he is facing. "It's not going to be an easy fight."

Game recognizes game.

Margarito has been fighting since he was 15 years old and has never had an easy time in the ring with set ups. Heck, his first losses were to undefeated slickster Larry Dixon, good southpaw punchers Rodney Jones and Daniel Santos. But he plowed on and now, after his devastating victory over Puerto Rico's Miguel Cotto, he's making his move to become the darling of Mexican fans.

"I respect all fighters and especially Shane Mosley," said Margarito, wearing a beige Polo shirt and jeans. "I wanted to fight the best fighter out there."

Mosley said you can't base the outcome of their fight on Cotto's inability to crack Margarito's toughness.

"We're not the same kind of fighter," said Mosley, who lost by close decision to Cotto in New York. "In fact, you could say Margarito beat Cotto because I took a lot out of Cotto. I softened him up."

Don't expect this fight to be a soft touch for either fighter.

Tickets go on sale on Friday and are priced between \$50 and \$300.