

Long Tall Paul, Martinez, Arreola And Minto Talk Up Dec. 5 Card

Written by Robert Mladinich
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There was much disappointment among the boxing fraternity when Kelly Pavlik pulled out of his scheduled December 5 fight with Paul "The Punisher" Williams. After much scrambling and intense negotiations, the evening was salvaged when HBO executives, working with promoters Dan Goossen and Lou DiBella, and four fighters who refreshingly want to fight the best available competition, put together what looks to be a slam-bang night of boxing at its absolute best.

In the main event of a sensational card from the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, the hard-punching Williams, 37-1 (27 KOS), a three-time world titlist who is generally regarded as the most avoided man in boxing, will square off against Sergio "Maravilla" Martinez, 44-1-2 (24 KOS), the current WBC interim junior middleweight champion who hails from Argentina.

In Martinez's last fight, on February 14, he battled to a draw with Kermit Cintron in a bout that most observers thought Martinez won handily.

In the televised co-feature, Cristobal "The Nightmare" Arreola, 27-1 (24 KOS), of Los Angeles, returns to the ring just nine weeks after absorbing a tremendous beating from WBC heavyweight champion Vitali Klitschko.

Arreola will have his hands full with Brian "The Beast" Minto, 34-2 (21 KOS), of Butler, Pennsylvania, a seven-year pro who has never been stopped and has acquitted himself well on two occasions in Germany where local promoters expected him to show up, get stopped, collect a check, and go home.

The four were all present for a freewheeling press conference hosted by promoter Goossen at The Palm restaurant in midtown Manhattan on December 2.

Goossen touted Williams as a force of nature who because of his ferocity in the ring is having difficulty finding suitable opponents from 147 to 168 pounds. He was especially critical of Shane Mosley, who he said talks a good game about being avoided but has himself avoided Williams like the plague.

As a result, said Goossen, Williams, a natural 147 pounder, is being forced to fight anyone willing to lace them up despite weight disparities.

"That is a testament to how tough he is," proclaimed Goossen. "He's tough and he's willing to fight anyone. He's the baddest mother out there."

Talking equally tough was Williams's longtime trainer and mentor, George Peterson, whose kindly appearance belies a trash-talking demeanor. Although he praised Martinez for being the only one willing to step up and fight, he said that the Argentinean is in "a hell of a predicament" because Williams will take out his five months of frustration about who and when he'd be

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fighting on December 5 on “this fine young man.”

Williams concurred with the description of his recent frustrations, while managing to be cocky and semi-respectful at the same time. He seemed particularly incensed by the belief that Carlos Quintana, who fights similarly to Martinez, handed Williams his only loss. In the rematch, however, Quintana’s in-and-out, fast-paced style amounted to nothing and he was starched in the first round.

“Saying he (Martinez) is fast means nothing to me,” said the 6’2” Williams. “He can take a punch, and I can give a punch. People say he can jump in and jump out. I’ll be jumping in and out, too. I’ll fight along with him. I can change up, and I will take him to school.”

Williams was on a verbal roll, but he saved the best for last. “I’m going to have a pig’s roast on the fifth,” he said, making it clear that it was Martinez’s goose that would be cooked. “And I’m going to put an apple in his mouth.”

The gentlemanly Martinez, who has the looks of a Latin movie star, was much more demure in his assessment of the fight. Although he is three inches shorter than Williams, he described himself as “the real deal” and promised that “the whole world will see that” when he has his hands raised in victory on Saturday.

Making Martinez even more likeable was the fact that he would pay homage to his good friend Vernon Forrest, the recently murdered champion whose masterful boxing abilities and engaging manners were very similar to those possessed by Martinez.

Martinez’s promoter, Lou DiBella, was much less clinical in his opinion of the fight. He responded to George Peterson’s assertion that Martinez had only beaten “D and E class” opposition, and had lost to the only “A class” opponent he ever faced, Antonio Margarito.

According to DiBella, that has little relevance when it comes to Saturday’s fight. He said Alex Bunema, who Martinez stopped in eight rounds was a “C “ level fighter, and Cintron, who Martinez beat but only got a draw was an “A- or B+ fighter.”

But, insisted DiBella, “Come Saturday night, Sergio will beat an A fighter.”

“This is a real fight, an action fight, a much more competitive fight than Pavlik,” said DiBella. “Sergio is one of the few guys that Paul can fight and look in the eye. Paul looks like a (basketball) forward with a huge wingspan, but he will have a guy in front of him who is not afraid.”

Coming up through the ranks, Arreola, who is still angling to become the first Mexican heavyweight champion in history, frightened many of his opponents. While he has often looked sloppy and out of shape, his relentless, non-stop punching style put nearly all of his opponents to sleep.

Klitschko might have been too much too soon for him, but his decision to come back so soon

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after such a devastating loss shows what a championship heart beats in his chest.

Asked why he didn't take a while longer to recuperate from such a one-sided shellacking, Arreola was not the least bit circumspect.

"I can rest when I'm dead," he said. "I became a boxer to fight, not to sit on the shelf. In the dressing room after the Klitschko fight, I told Dan (Goossen) to get me a tough opponent. I just fought a great champion. Why scale so far back? I wanted a challenge, and I got it. Minto is a tough, rugged guy who comes to fight.... and win. That's what I need, not a human punching bag."

Despite Minto's two losses, both by close decision to Tony Tubbs and Luan Krasniqi, it could be argued that he should still be undefeated. Five months before the loss to Krasniqi, which took place in Germany, Minto made his first foray to the Deutschland and beat local hero Axel Schulz in a fight that shocked the more than 15,000 fans in attendance.

"When we walked into the ring, all you could hear were boos," said Tommy Yankello, Minto's trainer. "When the fans realized what a beating Schulz was getting, you could hear a pin drop."

Minto wound up stopping Schulz in the sixth round. As he had been doing even prior to that, Minto continued lobbying for big fights against big names. He had been calling Arreola out on the Internet for quite some time. He is convinced that should he beat Arreola, he will finally become an overnight sensation.

"This is definitely the biggest fight of my career," said Minto, who despite being very stocky at 5'11" looked downright diminutive next to the 6'2" Arreola. "This is a golden opportunity for me, what I've been waiting for a long, long time. I'm not going to let it pass me by."