Written by David A. Avila
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Several years ago Carl “The Cobra” Froch stepped into the boxing ring at a small fight show in a Hollywood night club and performed rather tenuously against a middleweight from Central America.

Froch defeated the stubborn foe and afterwards was rather harsh on his own performance. Regardless of the opponent’s reputation for hardiness, Froch was visibly and vocally upset.

The boxing journalists present, including myself, were surprised at the British fighter’s

self-disgust in his performance. That was nearly seven years ago and now we see why he bashed himself mercilessly.

He's a much better prizefighter than many expect.

Based out of Nottingham, the steely blue eyed prizefighter whose arm is usually entangled with ravishing brunette girlfriend Racheal Cordingley, seemingly grabs more attention from his relationship with the model than his exploits in the ring. For nine years British journalists found little interest in his boxing capabilities until now.

Froch (28-1, 20 KOs) has reached the pinnacle of the Super Six Super Middleweight tournament and finds one last man standing in California's Andre "S.O.G." Ward (24-0, 13 KOs). WBC champ Froch meets WBC champ Ward on Saturday at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. The co-sponsor of the tourney Showtime is televising the finale.

"It's been a long journey and I'm where I wanted to be in the tournament: in the final," said Froch.

Reaching the ending point was a journey rife with obstacles that truly tested the British fighter's capabilities.

First was former middleweight champion Jermain Taylor whose mix of speed and power resulted in Froch hitting the canvas in round three. He could have slipped into survival mode and cruised to a decision loss. Instead he ramped up the punch output like a conveyor belt boosted to twice the normal speed and stopped Taylor in the final round. That was the warning signal to the boxing world he was indeed a threat.

Next on the Froch hit list was the long armed hit and leave practitioner Andre Dirrell of Michigan. If Taylor was deemed fast then Dirrell's blows were going to be practically invisible. At first it seemed the 6'2" southpaw nicknamed "the Matrix" was going to slap Froch silly. But cleverly the British prizefighter began to change the match from an arms-length tactical tit-for-tat fight to an in-close chin to chin, street brawling affair where pub and barroom fighters were probably

toasting gleefully at home with beer mugs dripping from hoisted cheers. Froch won by split decision.

Perhaps Froch's darkest day came when he crossed the North Sea to meet Denmark's Mikkel Kessler on April 24, 2010. Once again he faced a former world champion but this time Froch was unable to circumvent Kessler's hometown advantages and lost by unanimous decision after 12 rounds. It was his first and only loss and his WBC title was also taken away.

Another cold journey across the North Sea was more rewarding when he met Germany's human Howitzer Arthur Abraham in Helsinki, Finland on Nov. 27, 2010. Because Kessler opted out of the tournament and deigned not to fight the imposing knockout punching Abraham, the WBC title was declared vacant and available to the winner. Froch surprised many by utilizing both his boxing skills and sturdy chin to win a near flawless victory over the former champion Abraham. He also regained the WBC title he coveted and reached the semi-finals of the Super Six.

Because Kessler suffered an eye injury, Glen "The Road Warrior" Johnson replaced the Danish fighter. Those not privy to Johnson's abilities would soon discover why the ageing former light heavyweight champion was not an easy pass. On June 4, in Atlantic City, Froch and Johnson engaged in 12 combustible rounds that eventually saw the British prizefighter pull away in the final rounds. "If you can imagine sparring an oak tree? You hit him and he doesn't move," said Froch respectfully of Johnson's durability.

Andre Ward

On the other corner will be Oakland, California's Ward with his blend of speed, power and determination. So far no one has been able to crack the Ward code that gave Kessler his first loss and enabled him to breeze through the feared Abraham last May in the Home Depot Center. Each opponent was met with few words and more action than expected. Key to his success has been an ability to adapt.

"If you watch my fights I do a little of everything. I have the wherewithall to make adjustments. To do whatever is necessary to get the victory," said Ward during a telephone conference call.

Ward has proven to be more than just the fleet-footed 2004 Olympic gold medalist who skipped around the ring and occasionally slapped opponents silly with blistering speed.

"Before Andre emerged to the boxer that he is, he was a fighter," said Virgil Hunter who trains Ward. "Over a period of time that he won a gold medal he adapted to the point system. Through the years the fighting (aggressive style) never left him and I think that's what surprises people."

Injury postponement

After Ward suffered a cut during training that forced a postponement in October, Froch continued training and looks forward to solving yet another American speedster. Taylor and Dirrell discovered that Froch knows the American style.

"Styles make fights, it's an old cliché. I expect Andre Ward to come and box and use his jab. He may come inside and get rounds in there, it's hard to predict," said Froch who expects several hundred fellow countrymen to join him in Atlantic City. "I come to fight. I'm going to do everything I need to do to win these two belts."

Froch has been unable to captivate the number of rabid fans of his British predecessors Ricky Hatton or Joe Calzaghe. A win over Ward could do the trick. But the change in dates has enabled his followers to take advantage of the later fight date.

"It (the date change) actually went to my favor. I had two weeks break when I heard about Ward's cut. I've been cranking it up pretty good," says Froch. "The main problem it caused was just my fans had bought tickets. But it seems to have worked in my favor too. There's great response. More and more people seem to be coming."

In many ways Froch is like the super middleweight division. Despite skills and a chest full of grit, the British prizefighter had been long ignored. That can all change on Saturday.

"The prize is there waiting for me," Froch said.

Indeed.

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutura, 11:30 p.m., Alan Sanchez (8-2-1) vs. Keandre Gibson (5-0-1).

Sat. Showtime, 9 p.m., Andre Ward (24-0) vs. Carl Froch (28-1).

Sat. Showtime, 10:30 p.m., Gilbert Melendez (19-2) vs. Jorge Masvidal (22-6).

Comment on this article

amayseng says:

when i watch froch fight i see a slow footed, unskilled, plodding, predictable ordinary slow fighter.

as far as a boxer with skill and technique, froch is limited. he has a decent chin, but he got out boxed by a shot kessler and also a more shot and very bad jermain taylor before knocking him out in the last round....

i just dont see froch as a skilled or good boxer.

ya he beat an ordinary AA using a long jab and tossing in combos to score on activity.

i was not impressed.

i am still not impressed.

also, he truly lost his first fight against Andre Dirrel as well and got a gift in a decision as he lost

at least 8 rounds in that fight as well.

his gf may be hot, but she never shuts up and her actions during the fight are an embarrassment

Radam G says:

Wow! It is amazing how two people see different things while watching the same things. I see a skilled Froch with average foot speed and mean power. But he'll probably be no match for the speedy SOG.

With his flute -- I mean jab -- I can see SOG musically charming that Cobra and then slicing its head off with hooks and crosses. There may not be much hissing from the Cobra after the SOG conducts what should be a clinical beatdown. Holla!

cu chulainn says:

Ward wasn't the first to beat Kessler, Calzaghe beat him in Wales a couple of years ago. Agree with the above posts though..... hard to look past Ward for this one.