

Andre Ward Talks About Injured Hand, Bute, Going To 175...MARKARIAN

Written by Raymond Markarian
Thursday, 22 December 2011 12:56



“Onward and upward, turn not back nor sheath thy sword. He it is who now commands thee.”

Fanny Crosby might have had super middleweight champion Andre Ward in mind when she wrote those lyrics in 1876.

Because since he laced up gloves for the first time and won almost every tournament in amateur boxing then continued his dominance as an undefeated professional at 25-0, with 13 knockouts, Ward has looked forward to the next challenge. No reflection on past performances.

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For him, in the midst of a promising career and the boxing world seemingly at his mercy for the time being, mental preparation for the next battle is constant.

Fresh off of the victory over Carl Froch on Saturday night to win the Super Six Tournament and stake his claim as one of the best fighters in the world, Andre Ward sat with me late Monday night to discuss the past, future, and all that has transpired over the past few years that turned an unproven “puppy,” as Ward likes to say, into a world champion. “It’s been a long road,” he says, filled with “unbelievable, surreal experiences.”

In a reflective two-part interview focused on mindset, pressure, and the great big target on his back, Andre Ward says he is ready to fight again in April or May. He also gives thoughts on possible bouts with Lucian Bute and Mikkel Kessler.

RM: Congrats on the victory Andre. How do you feel physically after the fight?

AW: What’s up Ray? I am sore but I have felt worse after fights in the past. There are times when it’s hard to get out of bed. It’s crazy. When you get yourself worked up like that for a fight, the adrenaline is powerful. But then it leaves you fast.

RM: You feel drained afterwards?

AW: You feel drained. Your energy level is low and your body is sore. You don’t realize what you are going through in a fight. The physicality of it, I mean, you feel some things but you don’t know if he hit your elbow or he hit you in the back of the head. You feel all of that stuff after the fight. Not just the next day, the second and third days are the worst days. But I feel good now man. Other than my hand being swollen, I feel good.

RM: Froch was hitting you a lot behind the head in the fight. I noticed that.

AW: Yeah, he has a tendency to do that, especially when he gets frustrated. I tried to block

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them as much as I could.

RM: I saw that picture of your swollen hand on Twitter. You injured it before the fight? How did that happen?

AW: Well, we got to Atlantic City on Wednesday. I had a sparring session on Thursday. I think it was the last round of sparring. I turned southpaw and hit my opponent on the top of the head. I felt the pain but I didn't stop. I kept going. When we cooled down, I took my gloves off and it just felt weird. I kept feeling it and telling Virgil, it felt like, I don't want to say a fracture, but it felt like that. We went back to the hotel, laid down, and I called Virgil at like 4 in the morning and told him I was concerned. We needed to get this hand x-rayed. We went in the morning to get it checked the doctor said it was soft tissue damage, or a third degree bruise. And it bothered me from that point on until the day of the fight.

RM: Did it swell before the fight?

AW: The swelling went down because I iced it like crazy. I had a Ziploc bag with ice wrapped or taped on my hand all day. I slept with it and everything. And the day before the fight I asked Stitch Duran to come in my room to show me what kind of wrap he was going to put on my hand. Then I put a 10 ounce glove on and I still felt the pain. I knew it was going to be a problem but hey, what are you going to do? I had to go through with the fight. I didn't want a second postponement. We had come too far so I just knew that it was going to be one of those fights where I had to bite down.

RM: What did your hand feel like during the fight?

AW: It felt fine for most of the fight. But in the sixth round I hit him with a hook, and oh my goodness, I felt the pain all the way down to my leg. And it would go and come and go and come. It would throb and go away. Or I would hit him in the wrong spot or hit him with a good shot and the pain would come right back. From the sixth round on it was tough.

RM: It seemed like you were using your left hand more than anything.

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AW: I know. And I didn't even tell Virgil about it in the fight. I don't know why. I just wanted to stay focused. I didn't want any distractions you know. I didn't want him to take his mind off of what he needed to tell me and I didn't want to take my mind off of what I needed to do. I just dealt with it, man. Guys have fought with a broken hand before. Mine felt like it was broken. But I just had to dig down. I told the guys at Showtime before the fight, 'I got a bruise on my left eye and a swollen hand. But to win the Super Six, I would take this any day.'

RM: Ok, so how do you feel right now mentally? I mean, you won the Super Six Tournament. You were an underdog going into the tournament. But you won. SportsIllustrated.com named you their Fighter of the Year. The lights are shining bright. What's going on in your mind, man?

AW: It has just been a long time coming, Ray. And you have been behind the scenes with us, coming to the gym and watching us train. You saw all the hard work, man. I am just thankful to God, to Showtime, for the opportunity. Some guys never get their shot and I got mine. And we were able to make the most of it. I have always believed, and I have told you this many times, I always believed that I could beat everyone in this tournament. I knew it wasn't going to be easy. And I knew I couldn't get ahead of myself in this tournament and had to focus on each fighter individually. We did that. We fought the biggest punchers in the division. We stood our ground. We were able to dish out more than we took. I went from a young puppy to - I don't want to say I am full-grown fighter just yet, but I have matured a lot in the last two and a half years. I had a good performance on Saturday night but it wasn't my best. I know that I have a lot more that I could show.

RM: You think you can get better?

AW: I feel like I am getting to the point where I could put together a string of fights that really show everything that I have. I turn 28 years-old in February. I am getting close to my prime, I think. Saturday was a good performance. But it wasn't my best.

RM: Do you feel like you have a target on your back now?

AW: I have always felt like there was a target, absolutely, even more so now that we won the

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tournament. There are guys that call me out and that's cool. We just have to take it one fight at a time. It is not about all the talk. It is not about that. We dealt with every type of guy you could deal with in this tournament. We dealt with different personalities in and out of the ring. We understand boxing. People are going to talk. We just focus on the next fight. Whoever the next fighter is, we will be ready to go. And we will be ready to defend our belts.

RM: But are you even thinking about the next fight? I mean, you just won the tournament two days ago. Are you looking forward to the next fight already?

AW: Oh yeah! That's the nature of the beast, Ray. I mean, twenty minutes after I got out of the ring they were already asking me about my next opponent. That's the way it is. But in the back of my mind, I know this (tournament victory) was great, it was historical, and it meant a lot. In the front of my mind I continue to push forward, looking for what's next. I am looking forward to this rest, though, because my body needs it physically. But in my mind, I am already thinking about what I need to do to get better, what I need to do to get stronger, faster, and craftier. That has been my mindset from day one. Just like the Olympics. In the back of my mind, I knew it was a tremendous achievement, unbelievable. But I couldn't enjoy it simply because you have to keep working. You have to keep moving. In the back of my mind, I am trying to grasp what this (Froch) victory meant but in the front of my mind I am thinking, it is just another victory and I have to keep moving. We were able to beat a tough skilled fighter, and I believe Carl Froch will be champion again one day. We were able to beat a great fighter. But when I watched the fight, I still see that there is room to grow. I am excited because I know that I could get better.

RM: Well, if you start reflecting on your victories and achievements, then you are not going to be hungry anymore, right?

AW: Yeah, I mean, everybody's mindset is different but that's how we've done it. Even when I was a young kid fighting in national tournaments, hey, we'd win the nationals and talk about it for a day or two then it was on to the next tournament. Hey, we got the Blue and Gold coming up or we got the Silver Gloves coming up. That is just the way it is. It seems like it is not right but that is just the way it is.

RM: Right.

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AW: It is like a writer putting out a great story and you have a deadline two weeks from now. Everyone tells you how great your last story was and it was the best story you've ever wrote. You can't stay there and risk not showing up for the other deadlines and become mediocre. So you have to take it and appreciate the compliments and say 'thanks man, I appreciate it. Thank you.' Don't get me wrong Ray;, we are going to be happy about this performance. We are going to celebrate it. We are. But in the front of my mind I know, we are just getting started.

RM: So about your next opponent, Kessler and Bute are names being thrown out there. Virgil and I have talked about a possible Kessler rematch for you even before the Froch fight. Some people want to see you fight Lucian Bute. He was in Atlantic City to watch and seems thirsting to get you in the ring. Is there anyone in particular that you want to fight next?

AW: No, I am not going to call anyone out, Ray. I meant what I said about the Bute situation. I think Bute is a great talent. Obviously he is a great draw in Quebec. I also feel, actually collectively everyone that has been in the Super Six can say that he has laid back. I think Bute needs to beat some significant fighters before he could demand a unification bout. But he is definitely someone I'd like to fight. I would love a rematch with Kessler. You know, they have shown interest. He is fighting in April against Robert Stieglitz for the WBO belt. There is another belt that could be on the line. So there are a lot of options, Ray. We are just going to sit down as a team and see what makes sense. That is the beauty of winning a tournament like this. We are able to make a solid decision. We are not forced to do anything. We have paid our dues up until this point to make a sound decision. All of the names that you mentioned are realistic options. Nobody can say we are ducking anybody. We just fought the best fighters in the division for the last two and a half years. So nobody can say we are ducking anybody. We just have to see what makes sense.

RM: Is moving up in weight is an option?

AW: Yep.

RM: Well, you beat the best at 168, except Bute, who has not fought anyone in the Super Six besides Glen Johnson. And it is going to take at least a year for Bute to beat two or three guys that were in the Super Six.

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AW: Right.

RM: So for you, it is either a Kessler rematch or move up in weight?

AW: Moving up is on my radar. I don't know if I would campaign at light heavyweight. I always wanted to become a multidivisional champion. I think I can fight at 175. That is definitely something that I want to do at some point. And that is the downside to winning a tournament like the Super Six. Because like you said, most of the top guys were in that tournament. Everything was put together and boom we're done so it's like, who do you fight now? So now, there are still some fights at 168 pounds and 175 is an option.

See what else Andre Ward has to say about moving up in weight and fighting Kessler or Bute in part two.

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Radam G says:

Nice interview. SOG is limitless in the sport of sleazy. He has the skills, talent, and blessings to make the fighting part of it easy. Holla!

MisterLee says:

Great interview! Andre Ward '12!

MisterLee says:

Wow! Ward sustained two fractures in round 6, and his jab stats went down. Ward's a Warrior!
Andre Ward 2012 (and beyond)!

amayseng says:

Excellent interview. Ward is a humble and intelligent young man.

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He represents the sport in a positive way.

I'll be rooting for him his entire career.

serious2020 says:

23 December 2011

I feel the same way about this part of the interview as I felt about part 2, which I read first: I like the interview.

It is intelligent, sensible questions were asked and answered, and I learned things that I didn't know. And since I intend to continue following Andre Ward's career, both as a boxing enthusiast and as a photojournalist, I am thankful both for the interviewer being a seemingly sane person, and for Andre continuing to give good interviews and showing humility, respect for the art - and being a superb boxer, with an excellent team of professionals and family/friends/fans supporting him.

Bravo Dre!

Unregistered says:

It shows a kind of fighter he is. With injured wrist, he didn't even slow down. I personally don't see Bute as a competition for ward, regardless what Bute has accomplished. Bute laid back and watched the super six rivalry, in the meantime he conserved his energy for the winner of the super six? Nay, you just don't get awarded so easily by laying your *** around, and demanding an unearned share. Nay, that doesn't happen so easy. Ward said the right thing. Bute was hiding behind the corner to trap in the winner of the super six. Ward fought the best of the super middleweight and beat all of them. Consequently, Bute wasn't among the best of super middleweight, which means Bute wasn't one of the best. The guys with the balls participated in the super six tournament. So, if Bute wants to fight Ward, then he should meet Wards terms, whatever those terms might be. At this juncture, I see no competition for Ward.