Lee got the better of Craig McEwan here in 2011, but Chavez Jr. is a cut above anyone he has faced. Readers, who do you like in the Lee-Chavez Jr. scrap?

After a decorated amateur career in Ireland, Andy Lee (28-1, 20 KOs) packed his bags in 2006 and moved all the way across the pond to Detroit so he could work under the tutelage of legendary trainer Emmanuel Steward.

Lee wanted to be a world champion, and he believed Steward could get him there.

After a minor setback against slugger Brian Vera in 2008, Lee came back to avenge the only loss of his career by pitching a virtual shut-out against Vera in the rematch just last year. This year, he took a stay-busy fight in Detroit in March while he waited for his world title shot.

Now, it is here.

Andy Lee will face Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. (45-0-1, 31 KOs) for the latter's WBC middleweight title on June 16, 2012 at the Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas. The fight will air live on HBO's World Championship Boxing and will showcase two of the most prominent middleweight contenders in the sport.

I caught up with Lee soon after the news broke about the fight to see what he had to say.

The Sweet Science: Hey Andy, thanks for making the time. I'm really looking forward to the fight with Chavez. On a personal note, I think it's probably the biggest fight out there that can be made at middleweight and I'm really looking forward to it. I'm excited for you…

Andy Lee: Thank you. It's a big fight and it has the makings of good fight. You know…both of us have a lot of knockouts on our record. It's going to be a good fight. It has a lot of the ingredients to be an explosive fight.

TSS: What's it like to be sitting on the verge of a world title shot? It's something you've obviously been working your whole career towards.

Lee: It's mixed emotions. I'm excited, obviously. I'm only one fight away from realizing my dream, and you want to get excited but you don't want to get ahead of yourself knowing what a tough job you've got ahead of yourself training-wise and fight-wise. I'm so close, but I'm not going to appreciate it until after I have the belt on my waist.

TSS: Yeah, you're so close. The only blemish on your record was against Brian Vera in a fight you were clearly winning. You came back and avenged that loss – handily I might add. What do you think you learned from that experience that you've taken with you since then, and also, into this fight?

Lee: I showed in the rematch how much better a fighter I am now and how much I've improved since the first fight both physically and mentally. I think I was just really immature the first fight and I fought a silly fight but I've learned from that mistake and moved on. I think it was a shut-out against Vera [in the rematch] so it just showed a difference in class really. I'm improving all the time, and I'm still learning a lot. And I'll have a lot more to show when I fight Chavez.

TSS: This fight with Chavez…to me it seemed to come about suddenly. I always wanted the fight to happen because to me you guys are the future of the division. I mean, whoever wins this fight I think will be the future middleweight champion, and when I say middleweight champion, I mean obviously dethroning Sergio Martinez. So it just seemed so sudden. Did you see this coming next for you? Did it surprise you, or did you anticipate it?

Lee: It came around suddenly…I'd agree with you…but when we realized we had a chance of getting the fight, we put a lot of pressure on them and I clearly stated that I wanted the fight and really there was no one else they could fight. You know…there's nobody else out there for Chavez to fight. It had to be made.

TSS: It seems to me that Chavez's team has managed him very carefully in his career thus far. I was surprised they'd try and make a fight with you before a potential fight against Sergio Martinez since you would seem to pose such a risk. Were you surprised by that, too?

Lee: He has to fight somebody. He's never fought a southpaw before. If he plans to fight Martinez, then they'd want to get him some practice seeing what a southpaw does. I'm glad they took the fight.

TSS: In his last two fights, Chavez showed different things. Against Manfredo, he seemed to box a little bit more, while against Rubio he seemed to press the action. Which version do you expect to see? Which do you prefer to see?

Lee: I expect to see both really. I mean, yeah, he did…he boxed well against Manfredo and he fought well against Rubio. And certainly we saw lots of signs of improvement in those two fights alone. I have to be prepared for both fights, but I think he'll be aggressive against me. If he stands on the outside with me, I'll pick him apart so he'll have to be aggressive. He'll want to get on the inside and Freddie Roach will be telling him to get there.

TSS: Well, this fight is in El Paso, Texas. Have you ever been down to Texas before?

Lee: I've been to Texas before, yeah, but I've never been to El Paso. I've been to Houston and Austin before. My girlfriend's a singer and she played at SXSW [the music festival] in Austin. We flew into Houston and drove to Austin. We had a good time. It was definitely a lot of fun. It was a good experience for me.

TSS: I'm sure you've seen all the hubbub about officiating and judging here in Texas recently… do you have any trepidation about fighting Chavez in Texas?

Lee: No, I don't…I don't. People make mistakes everywhere. I'm sure I'll get a fair deal, especially with all the recent controversy. They'll be making sure they don't have any more controversy because they don't want to get a bad reputation. And I do know that I can't control what they are going to do. All I can control is what's in the ring and that's all I can worry about.

TSS: What would a win over Chavez mean to you?

Lee: Well, it'll be the biggest fight of my career but more importantly I want to be WBC champion. I've always seen that belt through history growing up and it's been a dream to have that around my waist. Being champion of the world is all I've ever wanted to do, and I'm one fight away from doing it.

TSS: I've had lots of your fans on Twitter tell me that there are lots of folks from Ireland that are going to fly all the way to Texas to cheer you on in June, some taking four flights to do so, can you tell me a bit about what that means to you?

Lee: It means a lot, you know? I know it's going to be mostly Mexican fans, but there will be a good section of Irish fans there, especially from Ireland but also lots of people from the east coast – New York, Chicago and here from Detroit there will be a lot of people coming. So I'll have my own fans, too. It'll mean a lot to me. You know, my family is coming over for it as well. They travel to a lot of my fights but this will be the farthest they've ever traveled so it gives me that extra incentive to go out and win the fight.

TSS: Ok, last thing, Andy. You train with Emanuel Steward who also trains Wladimir Klitsckho. I know you guys train together sometimes and spar a little bit. It seems like that'd give you a leg up on the middleweight competition…does it?

Lee: No, not really…I don't think Wladimir has ever actually tried to hurt me. I work on speed with him…mostly speed work. It's more of a chess match really, but when you're in there with the heavyweight champion it really gives you a lot of confidence.

TSS: Well thanks for chatting, Andy. Good luck and see you in El Paso in June.

Lee: Thanks. See you there.

Comment on this article

mortcola says:

I like Andy. I like his spirit and the way he punches. I just don't think he can take it on the chin, and I think he gets hit way too easily for a guy who can't take it on the chin - nearly out on his feet after being tagged by a guy named McEwan. Chavez Jr. is, it seems, durable, and probably wins this fight easily.

deepwater says:

Andy Lee is one of the most protected boxers .name an opponant that had a chance. manny steward has had this guy living in his bedroom for almost a decade just waiting for the easiest way to grab a belt. go to boxrec and see for youself. andy lee will not fight any man anywhere anytime. andy lee will only take fights manny steward sets up for him. you guys are too lazy so here you go. 3/12 saul duran 40-20 who just got knocked out in 7 of his last fights before lee, he beat vera in the rematch a few years and 5 losses later since vera knocked him out.troy lowry just lost 8 fights straight before lee tuned him up. and the list goes on and on.

deepwater says:

chavez by tko. andy has not been in tough, chavez will rough him up. i wonder if manny will kick andy lee out of his house after he blows it.

brownsugar says:

I think Lee is much more than a bum,.. Mort and Deepwater highlighted some of his deficiencies, but overall the guy can fight, and has known success on an international level as an amateur. (something Chavez knows nothing about) And Sparring with Wlad Klitschko has to count for something. Lee also had good wins over decent fighters like Sharpe, Vera, Gibbs and McEwan, ... If Lee forgets how to move his feet and allows Chavez to crowd him out all night long,.. he can only blame himself... But if Lee gives himself some punching room and uses a little lateral movement, I can see him rocking Chavez all night. Roach has built Chavez up from being a casual, mediocre wanna-be type into a true athletic force in the ring. Chavez uses is newfound conditioning and swarming tactics to mask his less than stellar boxing skills.... Roach's stragey of having Jr push Rubio around the ring and into the ropes where he had little fear in the way of any incoming offense was a brilliant plan(against Rubio)... However Lee is the best Jr ever faced and he will not be sucked-in by such an elementary scheme. If Lee can't win this,.. he's got some serious contemplating to do. But if Chavez wins... he'll finally have the confidence to finally meet Martinez,.. as that fight becomes less and less of a mismatch everyday that confrontation is delayed.

ultimoshogun says:

Having only seen Lee once, against McEwan, this may not be a fair assessment....and maybe he's looked better in previous fights. But I wasn't impressed...I think Jr. beats this guy.

Real Talk says:

Happy Easter. I'm taking Lee. I think he's the better boxer and better fighter, Nuff said. Dueces

the Roast says:

What has become of TSS? An Easter without the Eastar bunny, #1 Pacfan has fallen out of the rankings, Salt Lover is not back and DP69 is where? Back in the slammer all ready? I wish TSS could push the boulder away and rise from the dead but alas it may never happen. Where is the Fighter4JC when we need him most? Great God in Heaven you know that I ..... question you. Show me what I'm looking for. Kiss me, kill me, strike me dead.

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=the Roast;15249]What has become of TSS? An Easter without the Eastar bunny, #1 Pacfan has fallen out of the rankings, Salt Lover is not back and DP69 is where? Back in the slammer all ready? I wish TSS could push the boulder away and rise from the dead but alas it may never happen. Where is the Fighter4JC when we need him most? Great God in Heaven you know that I ..... question you. Show me what I'm looking for. Kiss me, kill me, strike me dead.[/QUOTE]

My Roast, my Roast, why have you forsaken us? Yee Roast of so little faith. The last will be first and the first will be last going through the eye of a tornado, er, needle. In a haystack. On a Tuesday. Around Noonish.

mortcola says:

Roast - are you angry with me for smiting F4JC? Was I wrong? I wish to be forgiving and leave room for all my diverse brethren. I also wish to pummel a-hole-brethren and make them stay away. Have we done more harm than good? Or is the remembrance of the resurrection rose-coloring our memories of TSS-gone-by?

the Roast says:

No way Mortcola, I'm not angry with you at all. Fighter4JC dug his own grave. He made a crazy statement. He went too far. All he had to do was apologize but he wouldnt do it. It wasnt your decision to ban him. I was just doing a little Easter-Eastar, Jesus-JC rant for the holiday. Mort, you are one of the top guys around here. If you went away I'd pine for you. I miss the not so old days of TSS when AFN, Son of Sam Peter, Man Boobs the Great, and many others roamed the earth. Sat Lover said he was back, DP69 returned for a bit, and #1Pacfan drops in once in a while. We don't ever hear much from your old sparring partner, the plummy one, Robert Curtis. I'll let it go, move forward, roll on with the crew we have now, I'll put away the rose colored glasses until the next holiday.