No matter what the judges said last Saturday night, Brandon Rios was soundly beaten by Richard Abril. He was outboxed, outfoxed and just plain whipped.

Oh, the best laid plans…

Bob Arum had everything set. Rios and Juan Manual Marquez would steamroll their lesser known opponents in a split-site doubleheader, and then they would face each other in July at Cowboys Stadium in Dallas. It would be Rios, the young, hungry bull, against the 38-year-old master pugilist, Marquez.

Except that it won't, or at least shouldn't be--not now.

Rios looked lethargic and hopeless against Richard Abril, who is technically sound but not near the fighter Marquez is. He had absolutely no answer for Abril's fancy footwork, much less his use of impeccable distance and timing. He was simply outclassed, and trying to sell the crude Rios against a fighter like Marquez would be like selling ice to our friends in Arctic. It just ain't happening. (EDITOR NOTE: Please don't underestimate promoters' powers of persuasion. It is what they do, the best of them, and they do it well. Though it's sounding like JMM wants a lefty for his July date.)

Ah, but when one door closes, perhaps another opens.

If Marquez needs a dance partner in Dallas this July, why not have a look at fellow Mexican legend Erik Morales? Sure, Morales is coming off a loss, but while Rios was outclassed by someone most people had never heard of, "El Terrible" was simply beaten by a younger, stronger and undefeated junior welterweight, Danny Garcia, whose stock is still well on the rise.

Hearken back, now to the early 2000s, when the boxing world was graced with not one, but four great champions fighting in and around the featherweight division. Juan Manuel Marquez, Marco Antonio Barrera, Manny Pacquiao and Erik Morales make up perhaps one of the best four-way round robins in boxing history--except that it remains incomplete.

But all that could change.

Juan Manuel Marquez did his part last Saturday for another big money fight while he waits on the nod from Top Rank for a fourth engagement with nemesis Pacquiao, whom he's fought three times already--once to a hotly contested draw and twice to equally arguable losses. He decisioned Marco Antonio Barrera in 2007 in a "better late than never" bout but has never made it to the ring against Erik Morales.

Ask yourself this question, who stands a better chance right now against Juan Manuel Marquez--Morales or Rios? Who would you pony up the PPV dough for? Which opponent would sell more tickets?

For me, it's Morales.

Sure, Morales lost in both reality and on the scorecards in his last fight, but he wasn't exactly whipped the way Rios was. Watching from ringside, I can tell you it was a pleasure seeing all the tricks the old master still had up his sleeve--the subtle nuances of skill augmented by the still fierce bravado--even in a loss it was the sweetest science.

And let's not forget that Morales came in a bit out of shape versus Swift, and perhaps it had more to do with his recovery from gallbladder surgery, which he underwent just a few months prior to the fight, than it did to his age.

Or maybe he just had an off night. Don't fighters still have those?Didn't Marquez struggle against Chris John in 2006? Or maybe Swift is the real deal. Or maybe it's just the kid's style.

Or maybe none of it matters because Erik Morales would somehow, someway bring his best against Juan Manuel Marquez the same way he did against Marco Antonio Barerra and Manny Pacquiao, both of whom he was able beat once as well as fight brilliantly against when he lost.

The fact of the matter is that every once in a while, an opportunity comes about to do something really special in boxing, and now is one of those times. How long have we pined for this fight, which for some reason or another has never happened? And how many more times might this opportunity come up again?

I say it is now or never.

Maybe it was just his inability to reach 135 pounds, or maybe he’s just that crude a fighter, but Brandon Rios did nothing last Saturday that would convince anyone, other than himself, that he should be in the same ring as Juan Manuel Marquez this July.

Meanwhile, the stage remains set in Dallas for something special.Juan Manuel Marquez needs an opponent worthy of the event, and Erik Morales fits the bill.

It’s a timeless classic no matter when or where it takes place, and it’d cap one of the greatest eras in boxing history.

Juan Manuel Marquez versus Erik Morales is the fight to be made.

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**jzzy says:**

You know, you're onto something here. Nobody wants to see Rios get a shot at Marquez. We don't want Marquez in a firefight with Alvarado. Morales indeed would do
huge PPV against Marquez and in Cowboy Stadium. This would be a Mega summer event
for Boxing, with these great Mexican champions.

**ultimoshogun says:**

To answer the author's question, "Or maybe he just had an off night. Don’t fighters still have those? "....YES, which is why Rios should be in the ring with Marquez come July. The Morales/Marquez matchup isn't even on my radar.