

Hard Rock Fight Card Features Lucas Matthyse, Melinda Cooper and More

Written by David A. Avila

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Matthyse's power shots impressed viewers against Soto (left). Will he be able to unload in the same fashion on Olusegun? (Hogan Photos)

Argentina's human blunt instrument Lucas Matthyse on Saturday steps into the ring against undefeated Ajose Olusegun before a nationally televised audience at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. So far, his destructive tendencies have captured the eye of boxing fans.

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Matthyse (31-2, 29 KOs) brutally knocked out former lightweight world champion Humberto Soto of Mexico this past June at the Staples Center. Now he faces Nigeria's Olusegun (30-0, 14 KOs) who fights out of London, England. They'll headline the main event at Hard Rock Hotel and Casino.

Showtime will televise.

Olusegun is hesitant to predict any outcome at the moment. Who can blame him?

"He's never fought me before. Regardless of how many lefties he's fought, it doesn't matter. Every opponent is different. I can't say I have an advantage because I'm left handed," stated Olusegun. "He's got his weak side and his strengths, and so do I. I've got more speed, more skills, more experience and that's what's going to make me successful against him."

In Matthyse's last fight the pure violence he displayed against Soto's usually durable chin was shocking. It catapulted the Argentine into the center of boxing's public eye. He's also considered the most dangerous junior welterweight in the world. The only two losses on Matthyse's record came against Devon Alexander and Zab Judah. In both fights he knocked them down but lost by close decision.

"He lost twice, but I think he was robbed both times. I know he comes to fight, but I only saw two of his fights - against Devon Alexander and Zab Judah," said Olusegun who studies tapes of both fights.

Melinda Cooper vs. Celina Salazar

A clash between top female prizefighters Melinda "La Maravilla" Cooper and Celina Salazar is the other intriguing bout on the fight card.

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Cooper (21-2, 11 KOs) and Salazar (4-0-2) meet in a six-round junior featherweight fight at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. Golden Boy Promotions is staging the female prizefight to support the main event between Lucas Matthyse and Ajose Olusegun.

Based out of Las Vegas, Cooper is a former flyweight world champion with a Riverside County connection. Her manager is Corona businessman Bill Bamish and her promoter is Riverside's Katherine Rodriguez of Arqangel Promotions.

"I see it as an honor. I'm super excited. I don't think I can ask of anything better than to be on this card," says Cooper, 27, a rapid firing bantamweight who looks like a ballerina, not a prizefighter.

Salazar fights out of San Antonio, Texas and has a strong amateur background. Don't be fooled that she only has six pro fights.

"I had about 40 to 45 amateur fights," said Salazar, 23, who began in karate. "After a while, pretty much nobody wanted to fight me."

Both Cooper and Salazar share the same problem: getting opponents willing to fight them.

"Sometimes I forget who I'm fighting," said Cooper who many consider one of the best female fighters pound for pound. "My trainer James (Pena) just tells me I'm fighting on this day and I go fight."

Cooper never declines a fight. Neither does Salazar. Both realize you can't pick and choose easy opponents. You have to fight the best to be recognized.

It should be a firefight.

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Fights on television

Sat. Fox Sports, 8 p.m., Luis Ramos (22-0) vs. Noe Bolanos (24-6-1).

Sat. Showtime, 9 p.m., Lucas Matthyse (32-0) vs. Ajose Olesegun (30-0).

Sat. HBO, 9:45 p.m., Andre Ward (25-0) vs. Chad Dawson (31-1).

Sat. Telefutura, 10 p.m., Ivan Morales (17-0) vs. Luis Maldonado (36-9-1).

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