

Canelo Mania Is Here

Written by Kelsey McCarson
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Last Thursday, Canelo Alvarez and Austin Trout visited Houston, Texas as part of their three-city, two-day press tour to promote their WBC and WBA Super Welterweight World Championship Unification bout. The highly anticipated encounter is set for Saturday, April 20 at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas and will be televised live on Showtime.

An eight-piece mariachi band strums gallant war hymns in anticipation of his arrival. Some of Mexico's finest and most recognizable music fills the air, as anxious onlookers line the specially brought in barrier gates hoping to catch a glimpse of the fair-skinned, redheaded fighter called Canelo.

The PlazAmericas mall has become the frequent home of such boxing related events as of late. Press tours, weigh-ins, fan events—PlazAmericas is Houston's de facto home of pre-fight proceedings. Many have appeared here. Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. has strolled through these halls at least twice already, toting with him Mexican legend and father, Chavez Sr. The old man almost always brings telecast partner Marco Antonio Barrera along, who in any other tandem would stand a chance at being the most recognizable Mexican in the building. Erik Morales stepped on the scales here in 2012, before his first valiant effort against rising force Danny Garcia. Jorge Arce and Nonito Donaire stood on this very same stage back in November, a makeshift encampment sandwiched between some escalators and the food court.

Yes, fight fans flocked in droves to see these men, but no one -- no one-- packed them in the way Canelo Alvarez did last week.

"Viva Mexico!" an admirer screams at him, as the undefeated junior middleweight strides in with unassuming confidence just as the band triumphantly finishes its final song.

The obvious is apparent. At the tender age of 22, Canelo Alvarez (*seen in above photo by Rachel McCarson*) is already Mexico's biggest boxing star. More than that, though, he's also one of the country's most recognizable pop celebrities. In fact, Paul Magno, editor of The Boxing Tribune, told me Canelo was as big as a celebrity can get in Mexico.

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“How big is Canelo here? Mention boxing to any mainstream, casual fan and Canelo is the name you'll immediately hear,” said Magno, a U.S. expatriate who now calls Mexico home.

Even in Texas, Magno's words rang true. When the 23-year-old walked onto the stage, many of the women in attendance blushed and gushed over his cinnamon-colored hair and fair, freckled face as if Brad Pitt had just walked into the room. The men were no better, only more interested in what he does with his fists than his boyish charms. He was adored by everyone in attendance and he seemed to know it.

Canelo is calm and relaxed on the stage. He doesn't even turn his head when his opponent, Austin Trout, enters the fray. The man who just went into hell and beat the devil (as Paulie Malignaggi described fighting Miguel Cotto at MSG) seems different than Canelo. He's nervous, even agitated at times. Sometimes, he just stares off into space smiling. Other times, he's distracted by the colored pixels on the slick little device he carries around in his pocket.

Both men are stylishly dressed, each carrying a far away intensity in their eyes, but the photographers in attendance only seem interested in capturing the Mexican's. Canelo is stoic. His green WBC belt rests in front of him as he sits with a slight slouch next to Golden Boy Promotions' head honcho and namesake, Oscar de la Hoya. Trout is on the other side, the podium acting as a barricade to the men who will intend much harm to each other April 20th in San Antonio. Trout's WBA strap is conspicuously absent, but no matter. Those in attendance know the fight means more than those trivial titles can offer. Each man is top of his class, primed and ready for the pinnacle of their careers.

The crowd has quieted a bit now, perhaps in awe of the spectacle. San Antonio's mayor pro tem, Ed Gonzalez, is here. He has made the 200-mile trip over to represent the host city. He steps to the center of the stage and admonishes the fans for being subdued. They respond in full force with chants of CA-NE-LO, CA-NE-LO, CA-NE-LO.

Their fervor heightens as De La Hoya takes the mic.

“We have a very special event between Austin Trout and Canelo Alvarez,” says De La Hoya. “Not in Las Vegas...not on PPV...it will be a memorable event in Texas!”

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De La Hoya tells the crowd what they already know. It's a great matchup between two young, undefeated titlists at the top of their games. It's the kind of fight that gets made way less often than it should in boxing.

"The future is right here," says Oscar. "Boxing is alive and well. Boxing is strong!"

San Antonio's top promotional team, Mike Battah and Jesse James Leija, agree. Leija-Battah Promotions is a fast rising force in the state of Texas, where more and more fights seem to get made every year. Over the past two years, the company has become the premier local promotional company of the Lone Star state.

"We pushed to have it in Texas," says Battah. "We fought for it! This is where the fight fans are!"

"We've been fighting so hard to bring a big time fight to Texas," Leija confirms. Then, with a mischievous smile he adds: "I told Oscar to bring a big event to Texas or else we're going to get back in the ring for a rematch!"

Austin Trout is the first of the combatants to come to the podium. He is greeted by a polite applause.

"That song that was playing when I came up," Trout says. "Drake said it best: started from the bottom now we're here...started from the bottom, now my whole team is here!"

Trout calls Alvarez a true champion. He thanks him for taking the fight and says boxing is in such a state today that Alvarez could have easily taken any fight he wanted. He didn't have to take the toughest fight he could find, but did. The two men nod in respect as he speaks.

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"They think boxing is dying," he says to the fans. "But it's never going to be dead when we have fans like ya'll!"

The crowd is pleased.

Next comes their star, Canelo. The roar of the crowd is deafening. The chanting begins again. It is Canelo mania in full force. CA-NE-LO! CA-NE-LO! CA-NE-LO! The crowd is screaming and chanting. CA-NE-LO!! CA-NE-LO!! CA-NE-LO!! It is louder than ever. The throng of onlookers pushes forward now. Even the writers and media members are bumping elbows now.

There is a gleam in his eye. These people love him. Love. And his smile says he may very well love them, too. He's trying to quiet them down so he can talk, but he can't seem to help himself. He soaks as much of it in as he can before getting out but out a few words in his native Spanish.

"I am very well prepared. It will be a difficult fight but I'm ready," he says in Spanish with a smile. "I'm ready."

And so, it would seem, were the people in Houston last Thursday. We are ready, they say, for a great fight on April 20, ready to witness yet another of their rising Herculean labors, ready to bask in the glory of the presence of the next great Mexican boxing champion. He is here, they say within their hearts. He is here. Our hero has arrived. Canelo Alvarez is here.

Radam G says:

OMFG! I will really like to know what type of jive is going down in this dance. The red-headed hype is on some type of strange-@ss romance. And he should not be in the same zip code with Austin Trout. Matter of fact, if the fix is not in, AT should easily win. Holla!

SouthPaul says:

What time is it ...Cinnamon time! What time is it ...Cinnamon time! What time is it ...Cinnamon time!

Then, you grab your maracas, Radam, shake them fast and hard Say it again and again ... In between the rumba and booty shaking-madness out comes spurts and dashes of brightly

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orange Cinnamon. Holla'!!!!

stormcentre says:

This is going to be a good fight. Interested to hear from some of the regular posters here, who they believe will win this one and why.

SouthPaul says:

I just watched some footage of Canelo training in between my workout. Not much to report but I am leaning toward him to possibly edge out a decision. Of course, I'll change my mind 36 times before April 20th.

riverside says:

who is Austin trout? interesting to see the odds in Vegas, I'll find out thing weekend!! both boxers have a limited journal,with the edge in competition going to the red head. We are comparing Cotto vs Trout and..... Canelo... having similar style fighting the same fight vs Trout. Canelo is a larger and stronger version not same , Trout was not strong enough and couldn't punched hard enough to trade with Cotto. IMO..... Canelo is going to walk him down.

Radam G says:

I'm going with Trout to get the shaft that Sweet Pea Whitaker got back in da day in San Tony! It's gonna be some phony. Trout is gonna so every beatdown, but knock out the red-headed clown. So expect a Texas crooked-arse draw. Holla!

SouthPaul says:

Canelo will be the Antonio Lopez de Santa to Trout's Davy Crockett. Almamo show down , part two.

ali says:

I almost positive Canelois going to stop Austin Trout in the later rounds. I think fans think Troutis elite because he beat Cotto. I don't think Trout takes a punch to the head or the body very well and Canelo will prove me right April 20 watch what I tell u.

stormcentre says:

Thanks guys.

Yeh, for this one I'm not too sure. I think I need to know who each guy is sparring in preparation in order to make a judgment. Does anyone know?

I think that (like most here) that Alvarez seems to have the edge in power, but then he does

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leave himself open a lot when he attacks. Not sure whether Trout will be able to capitalise on that until late; if it goes that far.

I am also not sure about Trout's punch resistance, although he obviously appears the more technical of the two.

I think I need to know whether Trout can hold his game together under the pressure Saul will bring, and whether Alvarez has a plan "B" if Trout starts owning the distance, moving and making Canelo miss. I just haven't seen enough of the two guys in with quality competition. Trout's fight with Cotto is not necessarily a clear indicator of Trout's ability either; as what was not perfectly analysed by Steward's commentating during the Cotto V Mayweather fight, was physically shown by Floyd.

Therefore that combined with how many fights Cotto had already had meant his style and the plan to beat him was pretty well known for a guy like Trout. Still, big up to Trout for confidently bringing it all to town.

And Canelo, what happens if he cant land that jab and starts leaning in with the right. Southpaws that move are tricky, particularly if they don't let you engage and turn it into a war. And not only do I not think that Trout will fall into that trap; I also don't think Canelo will be too comfortable unless Trout does.

bigstinkybug says:

[COLOR="#B22222">*I'm here in san antonio... i'll let u know how it goes... i'll say this, people here LOVE this guy. It's weird.. u feel the love for Marquez... but not like this guy. [/COLOR]