

"Friday Night Fights" Preview: Mendez Defends Vs. Usmanee

Written by Aaron Lowinger, Special To TSS
Tuesday, 20 August 2013 10:41



As anyone who witnessed Manny Pacquiao's loss to the pecking hands of Tim Bradley well knows, decisions in boxing are made by the fans when the judges falter. For his controversial loss, Pacquiao was handed another marquee big money bout while Bradley had to fight for his [boxing] life in a brutal slugfest with the relatively unknown Ruslan Provodnikov.

Argenis "La Tormenta" Mendez (*pictured above*) and the challenger for his IBF super featherweight belt, Arash Usmanee, both know a thing or two about controversial decisions heading into their primetime showdown on ESPN's *Friday Night Fights* on August 23rd in Verona, NY.

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There's every reason to expect both fighters to stay aggressive and look to earn a decisive KO victory on Friday night for the inaugural bout on Mike Tyson's newly-launched Iron Mike Productions.

Although "[the same, old disgraceful](#)" judges claimed Usmanee lost [his match](#) on the Cuban Rances Barthelemy's home soil in South Florida early this year, his entertaining work in the trenches won him favor in the form of a return to national television and a shot at a championship.

Mendez, on the other hand, is coming off a dominating revenge victory against Juan Carlos Salgado, on whose home territory in Mexico City, Mendez was given his career's second questionable loss in 2011 – the first was a split decision in 2008.

No boxer who suffers a bad decision regrets not going for the knockout. Given a second chance, Mendez beat Salgado down into the dust of the fourth round in their March rematch.

Mendez is the clear favorite. His hand speed, his cat-like smoothness of movement, and his runway looks are downright Suagry. He's never been down (neither has Usmanee, for that matter), he's fought bigger names, he's younger and has 20 rounds more experience as a pro.

For some, Usmanee's athletic tool box reflects the sport's overall lack of master carpenters; a reminder that the elite athletes who used to populate the ring are seeking fortune elsewhere. His style is lurching, his power is mediocre. His hand speed is underwhelming, his footwork is sloppy at times. But, as it has been said about certain fighters a million times since antiquity, the kid's got heart.

Hardly a kid at the sturdy age of 31, Usmanee has lived the prerequisite hard life required of boxing's great chins. As the story goes, Usmanee witnessed his father's death by Soviet warhead as a child, and made it out of his native Afghanistan around age 12, bearing passage to Alberta, Canada.

After an amateur career with the Canadian national team, he turned pro in 2009 and moved to

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Montreal to join a flourishing postcolonial scene of ex-pat boxers from everywhere, among whom, light heavyweight champ Adonis Stevenson is one. You can expect a home-ish crowd for Usmanee in Verona, a mere four and half hour drive from Montreal.

His grit, stamina (his twelfth round against Barthelemy was a hair-raising, three minute burst of energy), and chin will exact no small amount of blood, sweat, and tears from Mendez. Mendez has the tendency to fight in bursts and then look to clinch his partner for a few seconds respite to recharge the batteries.

And that's where Usmanee might have a strategic advantage. We saw in his fight against Barthelemy where he was getting stuffed with jabs through the first two rounds, he changed his approach and neutralized it perfectly. The longer the fight goes, the better chance Usmanee will have to use his endurance and ring smarts to keep Mendez guessing.

In interviews, he speaks near fluent Canadian; his humility is reminiscent of a hockey player. "God willing, if it's my destiny to be a world champion, I'll be a world champ," he told a [Quebecois radio station](#)

During the same interview, he might have let a piece of his strategy slip when speaking about Argenis Mendez: "He's slick. He wants to box, he wants to look pretty. He wants to stand around and do everything at his own time. He's probably the toughest guy for me to fight right now." He clearly wants to disrupt Mendez and plans to counter in between flurries when he's admiring his own work.

And even though he won't have to worry as much about fighting on another fighter's home turf, he's still hungry for a decisive win. "I wanna knock them all out, like, I wanna be like Tyson. I want to knock out everybody. But it doesn't go like that, he knows that, he comes to fight, he's not just gonna let me knock him out. I'm going to try, going to try a lot harder than my last fight."

Well, Tyson will be ringside.

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The co-feature on the undercard of Mike Tyson's promotional debut is a WBA interim featherweight title bout featuring another quick-punching Dominican prospect Claudio "The Matrix" Marrero (14-0-0, KO 11) against the KO-threat Jesus Marcelo Andres Cuellar (22-1-0, KO 18).

It'll mark the first time Cuellar has fought in North America, and the first time he has fought outside of Argentina since 2008. It appears to be a big step up in competition and exposure for the 26 year-old from Buenos Aires, who has shown some heavy punching ability but has never performed on Marrero's level.

The 24-year-old Marrero, like his countryman Argenis Mendez, is a prospect in Tyson's nascent stable and his matchup with Cuellar has all the looks of an easy victory to set the stage for something bigger down the line.

Rounding out the undercard are a couple ten rounders with featherweights Alexei Collado (16-0, KO 15) and Hugo Partida (19-4-2, KO 15) and welterweights Ed Paredes (33-3-1, KO 22) and Noe Bolanos (24-8-1, KO 16); a six-rounder with undefeated middleweight Antoine Douglas (8-0, 6 KO) vs. Rochester, New York's Russell Jordan (15-10, 10 KO), and junior lightweights Albert Bell and Angel Siguenza for four rounds in what will be only the second pro fight for each fighter.

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