

## Costa Rica's Bryan Vasquez Faces Yet Another Tough Mexican

Written by David A. Avila  
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LAS VEGAS—Unlike many boxers, Costa Rica's Bryan Vasquez looks to fight and beat the best prizefighters in the world.

That fearless attitude comes from being overlooked and underappreciated. Vasquez knows there's no easy route to the top.

With the WBA interim junior lightweight title as the prize, Vasquez (32-1, 17 KOs) faces Mexico's hard-hitting Jose Felix Jr. (26-0-1, 21 KOs) on Saturday, April 12, at the MGM Grand Hotel. The bout will be televised on HBO pay-per-view, before the Manny Pacquiao-Timothy Bradley main event.

Almost like a gypsy, the 26-year-old Costa Rican has trained in various gyms throughout the U.S., including at Floyd Mayweather's gym in Las Vegas. For this fight he worked in the no mercy confines of Azteca Boxing Club and Ponce De Leon's Boxing Club. Dozens of willing sparring partners can be found in those fighting establishments.

Costa Rica's preeminent prizefighter was never immersed in the sport from childhood, like so many others experienced.

"I come from Escazu, a town in Costa Rica. Boxing is not part of the culture there but it has fans," said Vasquez.

Vasquez chose to take a direct route to the world title. In the last three years whoever was

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placed in front was the fighter he fought.

In July 2012, the fair skinned Vasquez agreed to fight Mexico's grizzled veteran Jorge Lacierva at Auditorio Municipal in Tijuana, Mexico. The temperatures outside were near 90 but inside the thermometer must have easily topped 100. Everyone sitting in the boxing oven was rooting for Lacierva, who entered with a well-known reputation for advancing the art of illegal boxing tactics. If there were a Master's program Lacierva would be heading the dishonor roll.

Lacierva had a Mexican audience, a Mexican referee and a judge or two willing to look away at the sack-full of low blows, head butts, back hands, holds and pushes being used against Vasquez. It was almost comical in their repetition. On one occasion Lacierva hit Vasquez's kneecap with a blow.

A fist to the kneecap.

I've never ever seen that happen in the thousands of fights I've witnessed in person or on television.

Vasquez endured it all and finally began to find a target for his body punches. It didn't take long for the Costa Rican to fine-tune his blows and take the heart out of the illegal practices of dear Mr. Lacierva. The crowd cheered for Vasquez heartily. Maybe because of his ability to withstand the rabbit punches and groin removing hits of the Mexican fighter or maybe because they saw he had heart.

Heart is what Vasquez does have.

"I really didn't choose boxing. Boxing chose me and I fell in love," he said.

The next fight came against WBA champion Takashi Uchiyama in Tokyo, Japan. In this fight Vasquez did not need to fear illegalities but the precision blows of the Japanese warrior.

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Despite the loss, the experience of participating in a world championship fight was enlightening.

“It was an awesome sensation. I don't think I have the words to describe it,” said Vasquez of fighting in Japan before the very courteous and respectful fight fans there.

Once again, after three successive wins to climb his way back to the top of the junior lightweight rankings, Vasquez faces Mexico's powerful Felix.

It's a matchup between a puncher and a boxer/puncher.

Can Vasquez be Costa Rica's next world champion?

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