Written by Raymond Markarian
Friday, 28 January 2011 16:28

*Hunter (r) does a good job keeping his guy fired up, and doing some of the smack talking Ward's personality keeps him from engaging in.*Despite all of the recognition Andre Ward has received over the past couple of years, there is still a sense of lack of appreciation coming from his camp. According to his trainer Virgil Hunter, Ward is searching for respect, globally.

Ward's fight against the Armenian Arthur Abraham is tentatively scheduled for May 14th, so now is considered a downtime for the young champion. Since the beginning of the year, Ward has been going into the gym about three times a week to stay sharp. But there is no need to rush, he says. However, Virgil Hunter works with his other fighters at King's Gym in Oakland, Ca at least five days a week.

During a visit to King's Gym, I spoke with Hunter about Ward's upcoming Super Six bout against Abraham, lack of respect from European boxing fans, and dealing with adversity.

RM: What I am hearing is that the fight with Arthur Abraham might happen in Los Angeles. How would you feel about facing a potentially hostile Armenian crowd in the L.A. area?
VH: I have no problem with it. What is the difference? It might actually be better for us. That way you won't have people saying that we have an advantage by fighting in front of our home crowd. As a matter of fact, Abraham has aunts and uncles there in Glendale. So quite naturally he is going to have a huge crowd there. And that makes the fight much more interesting.

RM: Has Ward handled a hostile crowd in the past?
VH: You can't face anymore adversity than the Olympics. Because in Olympics, you don't just have one country booing you, you have the entire world booing you. I don't think any professional fighter has ever experienced getting booed by half of the world. The Olympics were in Greece. But it was not just the Greeks that were booing us; it was people from all over the world.

RM: So Ward got booed in the Olympics. Some people might think that the amateurs cannot be compared to the professional ranks. And at this point for you, the amateurs do not matter.
VH: Well, it all matters because Andre was programmed to deal with it. And he rose to the occasion. When you are in the ring and you are throwing punches, it matters.
RM: Right.

VH: Show me where the difference is. It matters. Show me where the difference is. There is no difference. You show me the difference. And since we are talking about hostile crowds, in the pros, you only have to face boos for one night. Andre had to do it five times in the Olympics. He heard five nights of booing. And he did what he was supposed to do. He took it personal. And he shined. He quieted the booing down like he would do anywhere else.

RM: So you are telling me that you do not care where the fight takes place.
VH: No, it does not make a difference because we don't pay attention to that. You got sore losers in this game and they are going to make excuses about how we win. But no fights of ours had to be determined by a judge or referee because Andre did what he was supposed to do. We only had one guy that came across the pond, Kessler. He came across confident, thinking that it would be no contest because Andre did not have enough experience. But all of a sudden when it back fired on him, this Super Six has turned into a continent thing. Kessler's fans are looking for an excuse because they cannot accept what happened to him. But that is European fans for you. God bless them.

RM: Do you feel disrespected by European boxing fans?
VH: No, we don't feel disrespected. European boxing fans are very passionate. They support their fighters. There is nothing wrong with that. But when their fighters lose, the fans turn into sore losers. But I could respect a sore loser. You know, I've been a sore loser. That is human nature. I don't think that they disrespect us. I think that those types of passionate fans are necessary. But at some point, you have to bend them and break them and make them respect you, that's all. At some point you are just going to have to stop being a sore loser and make excuses about why your fighters are losing against us. At some point you are going to have to give us our respect.

RM: Do you use the doubt as motivation?
VH: It is very much motivation. If they were intelligent enough to see that it motivates us, then maybe those European fans would stop talking. We use it as tremendous motivation. And we thank them for it.

RM: When it comes to the Super Six, why do you feel like it has turned into battle between continents as opposed to a battle between fighters? Do you feel resentment from European fight fans?
VH: Well why wouldn't it be? I look at the boxing websites from time to time, and certain ones cater to European fans, making it quite obvious that it is a continent thing. But again, European boxing fans get behind their fighters. Amir Khan is a big star in the UK. Kessler is a big star in Europe. So is Felix Sturm. You know, they support their fighters. And I respect them for it. We have not gotten that yet in the U.S. But that is just the way it is. But again, we need the motivation.

RM: Why do you feel like fans in the United States do not support their fighters the same way?
VH: I am not really sure. In the United States we have so many other sports to follow. In some of the other countries, boxing might be one of only two sports that the fans follow.

RM: How do you feel about Abraham taking an interim fight before he steps into the ring against

Andre in May?
VH: If he feels the need to take an interim fight, then that is good for him. We understand that we are going to be fighting an Arthur Abraham who has his back against the wall. We consider the Arthur Abraham that we are fighting as probably the most dangerous Arthur Abraham that there has ever stepped in the ring. He will not be taken lightly. Instead, he will be thoroughly prepared for.

RM: Why do you think he is going to be dangerous?
VH: Well, his back is against the wall and his pride has been wounded. One fight can redeem him in the sight of the fans in the boxing world. And it is up to us to prevent his redemption from happening.

RM: Do you expect Abraham to come into the fight any differently?
VH: Well, we'll make the proper adjustments for whatever he does. I assume that there will be some things different about him. But we will thoroughly prepare for it. We have a good, lethal game plan. It is always easier from the outside looking in to fight Andre Ward. But in the fight, the opponent quits fighting, and gets confused. So it does not make a difference what the plan is because we are going to have an answer for it.

RM: You have told me in the past that you have always wanted to fight Carl Froch. What do you think about his upcoming bout against Glen Johnson?
VH: It's true. We do want to fight Carl Froch. Carl Froch is a heck of a fighter. He fought a beautiful fight against Arthur Abraham. His blueprint was a masterpiece. Why wouldn't we want to fight him? He is a confident fighter and he has passionate fans. Froch is the type of fighter that you want to fight. And as far as him fighting Glen... I think Froch has his work cut out for him. I would not be surprised to see Glen Johnson win that fight. In the ring, Johnson brings something to the table that you are going to have to deal with. He forces you to fight him straight up. The spacing in that fight is going to be crucial. The fighter that controls the spacing in that fight is going to win.

Comment on this article

the Roast says:

Easy pick. Ward by UD. AA may win a round. AA better hope Ward slips so he can hit him when he's down. That's his best chance.

Ray Markarian says:

I think Ward gets a TKO in this one man.

the Roast says:

You may be right Ray. Ward is gonna beat the crap out of AA. He may get the KO or AA quits

on the stool. I said from the start that AA was too small and too slow for super middle.

Ray Markarian says:

Yep. And it comes down to boxing skills as well. That is why Froch and Ward have lasted in this tourney. Abraham did not have the skills to compete with Froch. I think he will have a tougher time competing with Ward because the memory of Froch is not far removed.