

JuanMa: "I'm The Most Popular Boxer In Puerto Rico"

Written by The Sweet Science
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Undefeated World Boxing Organization (WBO) featherweight champion Juan Manuel Lopez and Hall of Fame promoter Bob Arum participated in media conference call on Friday to discuss Lopez's upcoming title defense against former International Boxing Federation (IBF) 126-pound champ Orlando "Siri" Salido, on Saturday, April 16, live on SHOWTIME® (10:30 p.m. ET/PT, delayed on the West Coast).

The exciting, hard-hitting Lopez (30-0, 27 KOs), of San Juan, P.R., is a two-division world champion who'll be making his third WBO title defense. The talented southpaw is coming off an excellent eighth-round TKO over Mexico's boxing legend and future Hall of Famer, Rafael Marquez, in a tense give-and-take slugfest last Nov. 6 on SHOWTIME. Lopez, 27, has knocked out 90 percent of his opponents.

Salido (34-11-2, 22 KOs), 30, of Ciudad Obregon, Mexico, is more dangerous than his record

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would indicate. In his last start, he scored a knockdown and went the distance against power-punching WBA featherweight champion Yuriorkis Gamboa on Sept. 11, 2010. The points loss came one start after he registered two knockdowns en route to winning a decision and the then-vacant IBF title over Cristobal Cruz.

The fight will originate from Ruben Rodriguez Coliseo in Bayamon, Puerto Rico and is promoted by Top Rank, Inc.

Here's what Lopez and Arum had to say on Friday:

ARUM: "JuanMa Lopez is one of the great fighters in the sport today. He has another tough test on April 16 when he fights Orlando Salido, who is one of the top featherweights in the world. I know that many of you have followed the progress of JuanMa Lopez as he has gotten better and better and he matures as both a person and a fighter. JuanMa is one of the great stars in boxing today and one of the most exciting fighters around."

LOPEZ: "I'm very happy to be in this fight with SHOWTIME. I'm very happy and I'm ready to go.

"I feel really good. We had our seven day weigh in today and I came in at 130 (pounds). I feel great – it's been a real good camp. We did all we needed to do and we're right there at weight.

"Usually going into this week I weigh one or two more pounds than I did today. That just shows you how hard we're working and how good we've done with training. We're a little surprised that we came in this low.

Juan, do you want to have a better performance against Salido than Gamboa did?

LOPEZ: "I don't think about it that way. Every opponent is tough, every opponent is different. We're all different fighters. To me, it's just what I can do. I certainly want to look good and I want to do as well as I can, but I don't want to compare myself to what he did and what I'm going to do."

Juan, do you not like when people compare your victory over Rogers Mtagwa to Gamboa's victory over Mtagwa?

LOPEZ: "People can say or think what they want about those fights and they're going to do the same with what I do against Salido and what he did against Salido. It's not that important. I think what's important is once we get in the ring – we'll see how we do against each other."

Gamboa said that Top Rank is going to wait to make the fight (Gamboa-Lopez) because Juan doesn't have what it takes to beat him. Juan, did you hear him say that?

LOPEZ: "We're just fighters. I don't think we're afraid of each other. I'm not afraid of fighting Gamboa anytime he's there. We never said we wouldn't fight him. Bob Arum, he's our promoter. He's the best. He'll tell us when the fight is ready."

Is there anything about JuanMa that has surprised you? Has he exceeded your expectations?

ARUM: "The thing that makes him so special is how fan friendly he is. How he lights up a

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room, how the fans drift to him. There's nobody better as far as the Puerto Rican fans are concerned. The Puerto Ricans have embraced JuanMa similar to the way they did with Tito Trinidad and Miguel Cotto. When you put a very popular Puerto Rican, a real top Puerto Rican, on a pay-per-view card you can count on tremendous numbers of buys from the island. That's why we did so well in the Cotto-Mayorga fight – because we had 55,000 Puerto Rican households buy that fight. JuanMa is quickly getting a fan base where he will be able to reach those numbers."

JuanMa, what do you know about Salido. What kind of fight do you expect?

LOPEZ: "He's one of those fighters that comes forward. He won't stop when you put on the pressure. He'll be there all night. I have to be intelligent. I have to know that he's going to be coming at me at all times. I just have to be very smart and be careful and do my job – win every round and win round by round."

Are there any opponents that you could compare to Salido?

LOPEZ: "I think (Gerry) Penalosa was the same kind of fighter – a guy that came forward and was there all night and was a very strong fighter. The only difference was he was lefthanded."

JuanMa, who was your favorite Puerto Rican fighter growing up and is it important for you to be considered one of the best fighters from Puerto Rico?

LOPEZ: "I know the great tradition that there is in Puerto Rico with the boxers. I'm very proud to be part of that tradition. Without a doubt, growing up my idol and still is Felix Trinidad."

Bob, congrats on being in boxing 45 years. What are the biggest differences now in the sport?

ARUM: "Well, you have to understand when I first started in the sport in the mid-'60s there were no satellites – no international satellites, no domestic satellites. So the communication, we would look at it as being in the dark ages. When we did a closed circuit fight it was a whole different business model because of how limited we were in communication. Now, we have all of the satellites, we have pay-per-view, we have stuff that no one even contemplated 45 years ago. In the next 10 or 15 years people will be buying a pay-per-view fight on their iPad. They won't only be buying it on their iPad but they'll be electing which corner to watch between rounds and which camera angle to watch a fight from. Everything changes yet everything stays the same because, ultimately, it's two guys in the ring facing off against each other."

Do you see any comparisons between the first Leonard-Hearns fight and a potential fight between Gamboa and Lopez?

ARUM: "Everyone likes that comparison because the first Leonard-Hearns fight was such a tremendous event. There had been such anticipation over the years because they both fought other people. I believe if this could be even 50 percent of the excitement which we went into with the Leonard-Hearns fight I would be very grateful."

JuanMa, you had some scary moments with Marquez in your last fight and Salido is a pretty decent puncher. Can you afford to continue to be reckless?

LOPEZ: "Every fight you have to adapt to whatever is happening in the ring. With Marquez, I did what I needed to do and with Salido I'll do what I need to do. Everybody knows that I love to engage and if that's what I have to do then that's what I'll do. I'm young, I'm strong and I'm

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ready for whatever he brings.”

JuanMa, if the Gamboa fight isn't ready yet for pay-per-view do you feel that your body can wait or do you feel like you'll have to move up soon to 130?

LOPEZ: “I don't think I have a lot of time here at 126. I think if the fight comes along this year it will be at 126, if it doesn't I think it will be at 130 next year.”

After the tremendous fight against Marquez, are you able to walk the streets in Puerto Rico or are you mobbed with autographs?

LOPEZ: “It's hard for me to move anywhere in Puerto Rico. It takes a lot longer to get things done that I want to get done. People are always talking to me, always stopping me, but you just always go with the flow. With all due respect to Miguel Cotto and Ivan Calderon – two great champions – I feel that I'm the most popular boxer in Puerto Rico.”

JuanMa, is there any chance that you feel like you could experience a letdown against Salido?

LOPEZ: “I know how important every fight is for my career and I'm going to be at my best no matter who the opponent is. I believe that Salido is going to give me a real tough fight. I know how good he is and I know that I have to be well-prepared to beat him.”

“I just want to thank everyone, especially the fans, for all the support they've given me. I hope they watch the fight. I think it will be a great fight and I hope they enjoy it.

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