

Jose A. Rivera Trying Another Comeback

Written by The Sweet Science
Friday, 08 July 2011 15:45

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (July 8, 2011) – After winning close to 40 fights in 15 years and capturing three world titles, **Jose Antonio Rivera** suddenly reached a point in his career he never thought he'd see three decades ago when he first put on a pair of gloves at 8 years old.

“Boxing wasn't fun anymore,” said the former three-time world champion from Worcester, Mass.

Weighed down by personal problems outside of the ring, Rivera hit the wall in 2007 when he lost his World Boxing Association (WBA) light middleweight title to **Travis Simms**. He announced his retirement shortly thereafter, only to attempt a brief comeback 10 months later that left him with an injured hand.

This time, it appeared Rivera (40-6-1, 24 KOs) was done for good, but the former welterweight and light middleweight title-holder proved you can't keep a champion down for long, making his second comeback in May with a unanimous decision win over **Luis Maysonet** at the Palladium in Worcester.

Only three months removed from his 38th birthday, Rivera now has his sights set on a much bigger prize as he prepares to continue his comeback

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on the undercard of Jimmy Burchfield's Classic Entertainment & Sports' “Heat Wave” show at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Conn.

Rivera will fight in a special eight-round light middleweight attraction on a show that features two championship bouts – a 12-round showdown between **Kevin McBride** (35-9-1, 29 KOs) and **Mariusz Wach**

(24-0, 12 KOs) for the vacant World Boxing Council (WBC) International heavyweight title, and a 10-round intrastate battle between

Elvin Ayala

(23-5-1, 11 KOs) of New Haven, Conn., and rival

Israel “Pito” Cardona

(36-10, 28 KOs) of Hartford for the vacant WBC United States National Boxing Council

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(USNBC) middleweight title.

“I’m trying to push myself and test myself to see how much I have left in the tank,” said Rivera, who was born in Philadelphia and also lived in Puerto Rico before moving to Worcester as a teenager. “My goal is to get back into world-championship form.

“I want to ease my way into a couple of fights this year and by next year hopefully I’ll be knocking on the door of another big fight. ... You’re only as old as you feel.”

Asked how old he feels, Rivera said, “Twenty-eight, both mentally and physically.”

How he feels mentally is arguably more important right now than how Rivera feels physically, especially considering the internal problems that derailed his career four years ago. His first comeback attempt in 2008 ended with a win over **Clarence Taylor**, but Rivera admits he still would’ve walked away again even without the subsequent hand injury because his “mind wasn’t right.”

“The injury was just the icing on the cake,” he said. “That gave me a more convenient excuse to retire, but the truth is I was still dealing with a lot of personal stuff, too.”

The idea of returning to the ring a second time was always in the back of his mind during his retirement phase, but Rivera didn’t pull the trigger until he knew he was mentally ready.

“I had to type up all the loose ends in my life,” he said. “As soon as everything was good, I said to myself, ‘OK, now is the time.’ Being mentally prepared is the key. I don’t care how strong you are. You could be a beast in that ring, but if you’re not mentally ready, then it all goes out the window.

“That’s what got me to take some time off. Everything going on in my life was affecting my performance and my career.”

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On May 20th at the Palladium, Rivera proved he made the right decision with a convincing win over Maysonet, a Hartford native who entered the bout with 32 wins, including 25 by knockout. The former world champion struggled early, but settled into a groove later in the fight after solving Maysonet's game plan. Rivera captured an eight-round unanimous decision, 79-73, on all three scorecards.

"I didn't expect him to try to outbox me," Rivera said. "He seemed hesitant to move inside. We trained for a brawl, and I had to adjust midway through the fight. His style kind of threw me off a little. By the time I warmed up in the sixth, seventh and eighth rounds, I was unloading on him.

"To tell you the truth, it went by so quickly. When I went back to my corner after the eighth round, the referee came to me and said the fight was over. I asked if he had quit and the referee said, 'No, that's eight rounds!'"

Rivera's next bout on July 29th will go a long way toward determining whether his dream of winning a fourth world title – he captured the WBA light middleweight and welterweight titles, in addition to the International Boxing Organization (IBO) welterweight title – is a realistic premise or an improbable fantasy. One thing that's certain is Rivera views his age as an advantage, not a roadblock, as he aims to follow in the footsteps of legends

George Foreman

and

Bernard Hopkins

, who beat the odds to win world titles at the ages of 45 and 46, respectively (Hopkins accomplished the feat by beating

Jean Pascal

the night after Rivera's comeback win over Maysonet).

"A lot of people knock it, and that's fine because it just gives me more motivation, but the great thing about being an older fighter is I bring a lot of experience to the ring," Rivera said. "I know my body. Conditioning has always been the key to my success, and it's one of the main reasons I became champion, but some of my losses were a result of overtraining when I was younger; I left it all in the gym. The things I took for granted back then are things I no longer take for granted anymore. That's what makes it enjoyable."

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Rivera's having fun again, and that could be bad news for the elite fighters in the 154-pound division.

"I just want another chance at a title fight, whether it's the WBC, WBA or IBO – any of them," Rivera said. "This is a great opportunity for me, and I'm excited to be on this card. I've always wanted to fight at Mohegan Sun and now I'll have that chance. I'm just thankful Burchfield was able to make it happen."

The undercard of "Heat Wave" features Pawtucket, R.I., middleweight **Thomas Falowo** (3-0, 3 KOs) facing

Russ Niggemyer

(2-2, 2 KOs) of Hilliard, Ohio; New Haven welterweight

Edwin Soto

(6-0-1, 2 KOs) battling

Jose Duran

(6-5-2, 3 KOs) of Sarasota, Fla.; undefeated heavyweight

Artur Spzilka

of Poland (5-0, 3 KOs) facing Philadelphia's

David Williams

(6-4-1, 2 KOs), and New Bedford, Mass., welterweight

Johnathan Vazquez

(4-0, 3 KOs) taking on

Agustine Maurus

of Lawrence, Mass., in Maurus' debut. Cruiserweight

Jose Torres

of Springfield, Mass., will make his debut; super middleweight

Greg McCoy

(2-3-1, 1 KO) of New Haven will fight in a separate four-round bout; and super middleweight

Keith Kozlin

(6-2, 4 KOs) of Warwick, R.I., will face Woonsocket's

Reynaldo Rodriguez

(5-2, 2 KOs) in a six-round intrastate showdown. Also, former "The Contender" reality television star

Jeff Fraza

(17-3, 10 KOs) of Haverhill, Mass., will face Pawtucket, R.I., light middleweight

Eddie Soto

(12-2, 4 KOs) in a six-round bout. All fights and fighters are subject to change.

Tickets for "Heat Wave," which are priced at \$40, \$65 and \$105, can be purchased by calling CES at 401.724.2253/2254 or Ticketmaster at 1.800.745.3000. Fans can also purchase tickets

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online at www.cesboxing.com, www.ticketmaster.com, or at the Mohegan Sun Box Office. For more information on "Heat Wave," visit www.cesboxing.com or www.mohegansun.com. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., with the first bout scheduled for 7:30 p.m.