

Jermain Taylor Returns Dec. 30

Written by The Sweet Science
Monday, 12 December 2011 17:38



NEW YORK (Dec. 12, 2011) – Long regarded as one of the world's premier super middleweight contenders, **Andre Dirrell** will return to the ring for the first time in 21 months when he faces **Darryl Cunningham** in the co-feature of a special edition of **ShoBox**

: ***The New Generation***

on
Friday

,
Dec. 30

, live on
SHOWTIME

®

(11 p.m. ET/PT, delayed on the West Coast) from
Morongo Casino Resort & Spa
in
Cabazon, Calif.

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Dirrell (19-1, 13 KOs), of Flint, Mich., has not fought since winning by 11th-round disqualification over **Arthur Abraham** in

The Super Six World Boxing Classic

on March 27, 2010. Cunningham (24-2, 10 KOs), of Detroit, has been victorious in 17 consecutive starts and has not lost since December 2007.

The *ShoBox* main event will spotlight another comeback — that of former undisputed middleweight world champion **Jermain Taylor** (28-4-1, 17 KOs), of Little Rock, Ark., in a scheduled 10-round middleweight bout. Taylor's first start in 26 months represents a return to the division he once dominated. Taylor will face

Jessie Nicklow

(22-2-3, 8 KOs) of Baltimore, Md.

In the opening bout of the telecast, former Cuban amateur standout **Luis "El Leon" Garcia** (11-0, 9 KOs) of Cork, Ireland, meets southpaw

Alexander

"The Great"

Johnson

(12-0, 5 KOs, 1 NC) of Oxon Hill, Md., in an eight-round showdown of undefeated light heavyweights.

Dirrell anticipates challenging for a world title in 2012 but for now the 2004 Olympic Games bronze medalist is content to be fighting again and focused on Dec. 30.

"I've been waiting for this for the longest time," he said. "(The time off) seemed like forever."

Dirrell's last fight – a Super Six Group Stage 2 bout against Abraham in Detroit – ended abruptly after an illegal Abraham right hand to the head rendered Dirrell unconscious. The illicit punch came while Dirrell, who had slipped in Abraham's corner, was down on one knee. The referee halted the contest at 1:13 of the 11th round, ruling Dirrell the winner by DQ. Dirrell was comfortably ahead at the time by the scores of 98-91 and 97-92 twice.

The athletically gifted Dirrell, 28, cited neurological problems stemming from the Abraham bout

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and dropped out of the Super Six tournament. He now says he has a clean bill of health and is ready to not only resume his promising career but make a statement in his first bout back.

“It’s real important I go in and give a good showing,” said Dirrell, who trains at the Mayweather Boxing Club in Las Vegas. “I’m not worried about what happened in the past. The only thing I’m worried about is that I haven’t been in there (for a long time).”

Dirrell, whose only defeat came on a 12-round split decision to World Boxing Council (WBC) 168-pound champion **Carl Froch** in Group Stage 1 of the Super Six tournament on Oct. 17, 2009, expects to have some jitters for Cunningham.

“They’re nothing I can’t handle. I’m just more anxious than anything,” Dirrell said.

With a possible world title shot in the future, Dirrell wanted to face a solid foe. He gets that in Cunningham, a tough, veteran lefty who possesses a lot of hand speed and decent power. Cunningham was scheduled to face **Kelly Pavlik** earlier this year, but Pavlik withdrew.

In his most recent outing, the confident Cunningham, 37, took a unanimous decision over **Dante Craig**

last Oct. 6 in Detroit. Cunningham also has notable victories over the likes of

Antwun Echols

,
Rubin Williams

and

Pat Coleman

. All but two of Cunningham’s fights have taken place in Michigan.

“I’m always coming to win,” said Cunningham, a personal trainer who says he does 800-900 sit-ups a day. “This is my opportunity to shine. I’m not going to lie down. People don’t know me now. They don’t know my heart, what’s inside me. But the whole world is going to know me after this fight.”

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In the telecast's opener, Garcia, a six-footer who turns 24 on Dec. 23, and the 5-foot-11 1/2 Johnson, who turns 30 on Dec. 22, will be making their *ShoBox* debuts.

In his most recent outing and lone fight in 2011, Garcia scored a second-round TKO over former world champion **Byron Mitchell** on Nov. 6. Mitchell, cut near his left eye, was counted out at 0:51 in the second.

Until this year when he was a victim of several fights falling out, Garcia had maintained a busy schedule. He fought five times in 2010 and four times in 2009.

Garcia was a stellar amateur and a world junior champion. He thought he'd earned a trip to the 2008 Olympic Games but his spot on the team went to a boxer he'd beaten, **Emilio Correa**, who went on to win a silver medal.

Disillusioned with what he claimed were the politics of amateur boxing, Garcia defected to Cork shortly thereafter and turned pro in September 2008. He's trained by **Glenn McCrory** in Newcastle, England.

Johnson will be making his fourth start this year. He is coming off a fourth-round TKO over **Keon Johnson** (no relation) last July 16 in Washington, D.C.

A pro since March 2007, Alexander Johnson won his start before last on an impressive 10-round majority decision over fellow unbeaten and highly touted prospect, **Farah Ennis**, on April 2 in Atlantic City. Performing with calm intensity and passion, Johnson was victorious in his most noteworthy triumph by the upset scores of 98-93, 97-93 and 95-95.

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the Roast says:

Interesting. The returns of Dirrell and Taylor on ShoBox. Could be a trainwreck. I hope nobody

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gets hurt. I think JT should have stayed away, think about the long run.

DaveB says:

Taylor coming back scares me. I'm glad I'm not a family member. It's his life but he has taken some bad, bad beatings lately.

the Roast says:

You got that right DaveB. If I was in JT's family I'd watch this fight through my fingers, like a kid would watch a horror film.