

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34



All right, fight fans, it's pop quiz time. Your question for today:

Guillermo "El Chacal" Rigondeaux is ... well, what, exactly?

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34

A: A relative boxing neophyte, still a bit wet behind the ears and learning as he goes along.

B: So wise in the ways of the ring he should he should be sitting in a temple atop some snow-capped mountain, dispensing knowledge to visiting acolytes who seek to learn from the master.

C: Both of the above.

Determining the right answer is a conundrum, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

Because there is no way of really knowing which one of the possible choices is the more accurate, at least until the night of April 13, when Rigondeaux (11-0, 8 KOs), the WBA super bantamweight champion, and Nonito Donaire (31-1, 20 KOs), the WBO junior featherweight titlist and 2012 Fighter of the Year, square off in a 122-pound unification showdown.

The much-anticipated matchup will be televised by HBO Championship Boxing from Radio City Music Hall in New York.

“Rigondeaux is a great fighter, but I believe that he still needs experience,” Donaire, noting the Cuban defector’s relatively skimpy professional resume, said at the press conference to announce the bout. A supremely confident Donaire – and why shouldn’t he be, having been named Fighter of the Year by the Boxing Writers Association of America, ESPN, Yahoo!Sports, *Sports Illustrated* and several boxing web sites, including (along with co-winner Robert Guerrero) Thesweetscience.com – added that, “I don’t really make predictions, but if I can take the fight early, I’ll take the fight early.”

If that isn’t a prediction of a knockout, then ostriches soar high in the sky with eagles.

The 32-year-old Rigondeaux (*seen above in Chris Farina-Top Rank photo, with Donaire, on the*

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34

left) hears the whispered and not-so-whispered doubts about his legitimacy as a top-tier pro and he shrugs them off with a laugh or a bellow of outrage, depending on his mood at any given moment. How can anyone call a two-time Olympic gold medalist (2000 and 2004), a fighter with a reputed amateur record of 400-12 record, remain something of a question mark simply because he now does his punching for pay instead of for trophies? Is the pro version of the pugilistic arts really that different from the amateur brand?

“At the end of the day, he’ll find out,” Rigondeaux said in response to Donaire’s suggestion that he is too lacking in pro experience to spoil the Filipino-born Donaire’s 2013 debut. “I’ll show him what I’m all about. Let Donaire keep thinking that. I’m going to give him an ass-whipping he won’t forget.”

There are, of course, quite a few highly accomplished amateur boxers who sparkled just as brightly as pros. There also are Olympic legends that flopped once the headgear came off, the computers were stowed away and the number of scheduled rounds increased. Even Rigondeaux acknowledges that comparing professional boxing to amateur boxing can be a tricky proposition.

“There is always a transition,” Rigondeaux said. “But based on my personal experience and my career, it’s a little different for me because I’m a seasoned veteran. I’ve been able to change a few things here and there. I haven’t had a problem making necessary adjustments. I think I’ve shown that.

“Look, all fights are different. All fighters are different. I’ve gotten better each step of the way since I turned pro. You just have to know who you’re fighting, (formulate) the proper strategy and to execute that strategy to the best of your ability. But you also have to be flexible enough to tweak your strategy when the occasion calls for it.”

Rigondeaux’s strategy in most fights has been to work at a controlled pace, to probe for weaknesses in his opponent’s defense and to counterpunch. It isn’t particularly frenetic or crowd-pleasing at all times, but when he does connect solidly, it often is with concussive force. He can methodically outbox the other guy from the get-go, seemingly headed to a points victory, when a properly placed shot ends matters with the suddenness of a striking viper.

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34

Freddie Roach, who was then training Rigondeaux (his current trainer is Pedro Diaz), had this to say about “El Chacal’s” first-round stoppage of Adolfo Landeras on Feb. 5, 2010. “I went to sit down,” Roach laughed, “and the fight was over.”

But whether he concludes his night’s business quickly and brutally, or over time with precision craftsmanship, Rigondeaux usually makes a favorable impression on those who know and appreciate what they’re seeing. In defending his WBA super bantam title on a fifth-round technical knockout of Teon Kennedy last June 9 – a rout in which Rigondeaux floored the Philadelphian five times – the winner scored big with the HBO broadcast crew.

“This is gym work for Rigondeaux,” Max Kellerman said.

“I think (Rigondeaux) would be considered with the great Teofilo Stevenson as one of the greatest amateur boxers in history,” opined Emanuel Steward, who, sadly, has passed away since that telecast.

Stevenson, of course, is the benchmark against which almost all amateur boxers are assessed. The heavyweight wrecking machine is one of only three amateurs to have won three Olympic gold medals (in 1972, ’76 and ’80), a feat matched only by fellow Cuban Felix Savon and Hungary’s Laszlo Papp. Rigondeaux might have joined that highly exclusive club, but he was prohibited from participating in the 2008 Beijing Olympics by Cuban president Fidel Castro for having attempted to defect during the 2007 Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

“The Cuban athlete who deserts his delegation is like a soldier who deserts his unit in the midst of combat,” Castro said of Rigondeaux’s bid to slip away from his government’s control, also made by his teammate, Erislandy Lara.

Publicly chastened in their homeland but undeterred in their goal to find freedom, Lara escaped to Germany, then the United States, in 2008, Rigondeaux in 2009. Rigondeaux, who now resides in Miami, left behind a wife and a son.

“I’m surprised on one level because he left home at the end of January saying he was going to

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34

Santiago,” Rigondeaux’s wife, Farah Colina, told OTB Sports, referring to the eastern city that is Cuba’s second-largest. “But on another level, I think he was obligated to do this.”

Rigondeaux said his defection was spurred by a desire to provide better financial support for his relatives because, in Cuba, even celebrated Olympic champions live a virtual hand-to-mouth existence. “My family can and has benefitted from the money I am earning as a pro,” he said.

Part of the transition – making money, and potentially loads of it – can be the most difficult shift in lifestyles for Cubans who make it to this country and are allowed to remain in keeping with the “wet feet, dry land” policy instituted during the Clinton administration and which remains in effect today. Summed up, that policy dictates that political refugees who make it onto American soil are granted sanctuary; those picked up by the Coast Guard while still at sea can be returned to their countries of origin.

“When you come to America from Cuba, basically you coming from having nothing to having something,” Rigondeaux said. “It’s definitely a life-changer, and it can happen almost overnight. But you can’t let that alter the hard work, dedication and sacrifice you always have put into becoming the very best that you can be.

“I keep myself humble. I’m grateful for what I have now. Yes, people can change if they attain fame and money. It can raise issues. It can raise issues if you go from being rich to being poor, too. But whatever life gives you, you have to deal with it. And that is especially so for someone in my position. Being a champion means not going wild outside the ring. Being a champion means always retaining your focus.”

Come April 13, it will matter not how well Rigondeaux stacks up against Stevenson – who never attempted to defect – but only how he stacks up against Donaire, 30, who was a young boy when he and his family left their native Philippines to settle in San Leandro, Calif., in 1994. Should he upset the favored Donaire, he could fast-track himself to the sort of professional acclaim that previously has gone to such esteemed Cuban fighters as Kid Gavilan, Kid Chocolate, Benny Paret, Luis Rodriguez, Sugar Ramos, Jose Napoles and Florentino Fernandez. Heck, he might already have matched one or two of those names, and the prevailing sentiment is that he is the best of the current Cuban pros, a group that includes Lara, Yuriokis Gamboa, Odlanier Solis, Alexei Collado and Joel Casamayor.

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34

“One thing is for sure,” Rigondeaux said of the mission he is about to undertake. “I will be 100 percent ready when I enter the ring. I am preparing for this fight with all my effort, all my dedication, with the idea of giving the best performance of my career. Donaire had better be ready to do the same thing.

“But whether he is or isn’t, I will win. April 13 is going to be a big night for me. It will be a night of celebration. Everyone is going to be talking about that night for years to come because they are going to see something truly special.”

So what is the most likely answer to the question posed at the beginning of this story? Depends on whether you consider his late start and limited number of pro bouts – Rigondeaux won an “interim” world title in just his seventh outing, and a “regular” one in his ninth -- to be a significant hindrance. History is all over the charts with those who took more or less the same path he has.

*Evander Holyfield won his first pro world title in just his 12th pro fight, a split decision over Dwight Muhammad Qawi for the WBA cruiserweight championship in 1986. He went on to capture at least a version of the heavyweight crown a division-record four times.

*Pete Rademacher, a 1956 Olympic gold medalist, fought for the heavyweight title in his pro debut and was stopped in six rounds by champion Floyd Patterson. He finished 15-7-1, with six losses inside the distance.

*Davey Moore fought for the WBA junior middleweight title in just his ninth pro fight, winning it at age 22 on a sixth-round stoppage of Tadashi Mihara in 1982. Two bouts later, Moore’s relative inexperience was exposed when he lost on a savage, eight-round beatdown by Roberto Duran.

*Leon Spinks was 6-0-1 when, at 24, he shocked the world by outpointing Muhammad Ali for the WBA heavyweight championship in 1978. He was dethroned in a rematch seven months later and retired with a 26-17-3 record, nine of his defeats by knockout.

*Kazakhstan’s Beibut Shumenov, the reigning WBA light heavyweight titlist, earned his strap in

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34

his 10th pro outing, on a split decision over the only man to have beaten him to date, Gabriel Campillo.

[Comment on this article](#)

deepwater says:

All right, fight fans, it's pop quiz time. Your question for today:

Guillermo "El Chacal" Rigondeaux is ... well, what, exactly?

A: A relative boxing neophyte, still a bit wet behind the ears and learning as he goes along.

B: So wise in the ways of the ring he should he should be sitting in a temple atop some snow-capped mountain, dispensing knowledge to visiting acolytes who seek to learn from the master.

C: Both of the above.

Determining the right answer is a conundrum, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. this quiz is a joke. makes no sense. contradictions do not exist. you can not be a neopyhte and vastly experienced at the same time. check your premises. an apple is an apple. an orange is an orange. an apple can not be both an apple and an orange at the same time. the 50 year old cuban record proves he is vastly experienced. wait hold on, if he believes in Jesus throw him in the lion pit! the cuban is going to stink out the show until he can try and clip donaire. i will put a little \$ on the 50 year old cuban because of the odds but I like donaire in this one, he has a grudge because the cuban disrespected his female friend sort of like woman hater bill maher would.

amayseng says:

hahahaha deepwater killin me

50 year old cuban

bill maher is all things negative...

ali says:

Quiz time what's going to happen when Rigo gets in the ring with Donaire?

Radam G says:

Quiz answer! He is going to get KTFO! Hehe! Holla!

McHomer says:

I'm afraid this is going to be a stinker. I can see Rigs running around until he finally gets cracked and ktfo. I envision this looking a lot like the Donaire Nishioka fight.

Rigondeaux: The Vastly Experienced Neophyte

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 16:34
