

## ShoBox Preview: Angelo Santana-Hank Lundy

Written by John Nguyen

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“Prospect” is a term that has lost all meaning in the fight game. Often, it’s applied far too early in the career of a fighter who hasn’t proven much. Of course, it’s all business; if a young fighter can be branded with that label and matched carefully, suddenly a marketable attraction emerges.

On the surface, there doesn’t appear to be anything wrong with this; however, in reality, unintended side effects of over-diagnosing prospects are far-reaching. Soft matchmaking to build padded records has created a surplus of fighters whose glossy records outshine their in-ring accomplishments. Valuable learning experiences, some of which take the form of an “L” in the record books, are avoided in the interest of preserving prospect status. When a loss finally does occur, young fighters are dismissed quickly as frauds when they may end up as better fighters after losing.

Angelo Santana is one such fighter who has lost some luster after losing for the first time in his last outing. The 25-year old Miami-based Cuban went into his fight with Baha Mamadjonov with a nice looking record, a harrowing story of his escape from Cuba at the age of eighteen, and the heavy hands by which stars are made. Santana was also one of the last remaining glimmers of hope in Don King’s ever-dwindling stable of talent. Though he lacked the deep amateur pedigree and subtle craft of other Cuban standouts like Erislandy Lara and Guillermo Rigondeaux, Santana’s fan-friendly style looked like it could make some waves.

Then he lost, which isn’t (or, rather, shouldn’t be) a huge deal in and of itself. Mamadjonov is an underrated fighter whose determination and scrappiness would produce a tough outing for many. The weightier problem for Santana is the manner in which he lost; Baha Mamadjonov is by no means a slick craftsman, but his hustle and head movement puzzled Santana throughout the fight. Santana simply had no answers as the busy and aggressive Mamadjonov pushed forward, building a head of steam in the middle rounds of the fight. While it ended in a ninth-round TKO, Santana looked more bewildered than battered when the bout came to a halt.

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For some, Santana became the latest big bust. That assessment might be a bit premature; sure, the loss to Mamadjonov might be an indicator of irreparable flaws, but it might also be the type of lesson that few young fighters experience anymore. Really, the loss was not a career-breaker; Santana didn't absorb excessive punishment, and close viewings of the fight tape could yield countless areas for improvement. It all may depend on how Santana and his team approach the unexpected setback.

Many questions will be answered when Santana, 14-1 (11 KO), returns to the ring on Friday night (Feb. 21) against tough junior welterweight veteran Hank Lundy, 23-3-1 (11 KO), at Cleveland's Wolstein Center. The 30-year old Lundy is himself familiar with the turbulent tides of fortune in boxing. Just two years ago, the Philadelphia native was progressing through the ESPN2 circuit toward some big-fight options before unexpected losses to Ray Beltran and Viktor Postol temporarily derailed Lundy's progress. A comeback win last summer against Olusegun Ajose put Lundy back in position to make some big things happen, provided he can get past Angelo Santana on Friday.

The decision by Santana's handlers to fight Lundy following the loss to Mamadjonov is a bold one, considering Lundy's experience, speed, and movement all surpass what Santana encountered in his lone defeat. Team Santana's willingness to fight Lundy is either a demonstration of supreme confidence in their man or a serious error in matchmaking judgment for a fighter looking to rebound from his first loss. Either way, his handlers deserve credit for avoiding the easy path of worthless knockouts that would do little to enhance their man.

All this leads to a genuinely intriguing matchup that is a classic crossroads fight for each man. In one corner stands Santana, who seeks to prove that all the praise he garnered early in his career was warranted. Across from him stands Lundy, who desperately wants to grasp the opportunities that once slipped through his fingers. The one commonality between the two fighters is that the outcome will dramatically impact the career trajectory of each. In addition, each fighter possesses traits that could expose the other's weaknesses. As illustrated in his loss, Santana's inability to adapt in the heat of battle could be his undoing against a versatile boxer-puncher like Lundy, who could create endless riddles for Santana to solve. For Lundy, he's had his share of problems with big punchers, specifically in his first career defeat at the hands of John Molina in a fight Lundy was winning handily until the gritty Molina scored the comeback KO in the eleventh round. If Santana pressure Lundy effectively, he might be able to reap similar rewards.

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High stakes and well-matched styles make for potentially terrific fights. Santana-Lundy certainly fits the bill, which gives fight fans reason enough to tune in.

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