NEW YORK (September 20, 2012) - Bay State boxers Edwin "La Bomba" Rodriguez and Danny O'Connor have come almost full circle since their amateur days, training together in Houston and now fighting on DiBella Entertainment's "Road To Glory" card, September 29 on a special HBO Boxing After Dark tripleheader, live from the MGM Grand Theater at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, Connecticut.

Rodriguez (21-0, 14 KOs) defends his United States Boxing Association (USBA) title against unbeaten power-puncher Jason "Monstruo" Escalera (13-0-1, 12 KOs) in the 10-round main event, while super lightweight prospect Danny O'Connor (18-1, 6 KOs) faces Josh "Nino Assasino" Sosa (10-3, 5 KOs), providing chief support for the three HBO-televised fights, in an eight-round bout.

Unbeaten Luis Orlando "Orlandito" Del Valle (16-0, 11 KOs) takes on former three-time, two-division world champion Vic "Raging Bull" Darchinyan (37-5-1, 27 KOs) in the 10-round co-feature on HBO for the vacant North American Boxing Federation (NABF) super bantamweight title.

Completing the HBO tripleheader is a World Boxing Council (WBC) International welterweight title fight between champion Antonin Decarie and the undefeated Alex Perez (16-0, 9 KOs). Decarie-Perez replaced a Special Light Heavyweight Attraction bout between world-rated Isaac "Golden Boy" Chilemba (19-1-1, 9 KOs) and former two-time, two-division world champion Zsolt Erdei, who was forced to withdraw due to suffering two broken ribs during training camp.

The "Road To Glory" event is promoted by DiBella Entertainment, in association with Joe DeGuardia's Star Boxing and Gary Shaw Productions. All three bouts will be aired on HBO's Boxing After Dark, beginning at 9:30 p.m. ET/PT.

Dominican Republic-born Rodriguez moved to Worcester (MA) with his family 14 years ago when he was 13. O'Connor was born and raised in Framingham (MA), which is less than 30 miles from Worcester. O'Connor's third amateur bout was at the old Boys & Girls Club in Worcester on a show in which hometown hero Rodriguez was in the main event. The now 27-year-olds first met then, both developed into national amateur champions, and turned pro in 2008.

Back when they were amateurs, Rodriguez, O'Connor and Providence's Demetrius Andrade, a 2008 US Olympian, were roommates as members of USA traveling teams. "We dreamed of becoming world champions as professionals at the same time," Rodriguez remembered. "And we're getting close."

Rodriguez is the closest of that trio to fighting for a world championship. He is rated No. 4 by the International Boxing Federation (IBF) and World Boxing Council (WBC), as well as No. 8 by the World Boxing Association (WBA) and No. 9 by *The Ring Magazine*.

"I love fighting on the same cards as Edwin," O'Connor said. "He's headlining on HBO. We train and travel together; he's my best friend in boxing. But it's different for us right now. He's fighting in front of the lights and I'm trying to get there. He has to perform well September 29 to keep fighting on HBO and I need to impress the people from HBO."

The two took a circuitous route to Houston, joining trainer Ronnie Shields, in his new state-of-the-art boxing facility at Plex in Stafford, Texas. O'Connor quickly outgrew the Framingham PAL and started training at the Worcester Boys & Girls, rejoining Rodriguez there as young prizefighters. They traveled throughout New England, searching for sparring partners and a base, until they both landed at Manfredo's Gym in Pawtucket (RI) but with different trainers.

Rodriguez' manager, Larry Army, then made a critical change sending Edwin out of New England to Shields in Houston. After losing his first professional fight, O'Connor decided it was time for a change. His new manager, Ken Casey, founder and lead singer of the popular Boston-based band Dropkick Murphys, has opened up a new world, marketing-wise, for O'Connor, who did some research and came up with a list of potential trainers. His co-promoter, Leon Margules (DiBella Entertainment promotes Rodriguez and co-promotes O'Connor), has been friends with Shields for 20 years and a connection was made. O'Connor left Framingham without money or a place to live, nothing but the clothes on his back and his gym bag. "I hooked up with Edwin in Houston, where he let me stay with him," O'Connor noted. "But that's the type of person Edwin is, always helping."

"Danny came down here and I love it," Rodriguez added. "He pushes me. There are days I don't like running and he pushes me. We push each other."

Rodriguez originally was supposed to fight this summer and he will be in training camp for 14 weeks by September 29, missing his wedding anniversary with his wife, Stephanie, and being away from his twins of special needs who will turn six on the night of his fight against Escalera. The only time he was away from Shields was for a week on vacation back home, but Edwin pointed out that he trained daily and wasn't really on a vacation.

Shields has been nothing short of a boxing professor for his two protégés from Massachusetts. They love working with the former "Trainer of the Year" and two-time world title challenger, who has been where the duo wants to get. Many may feel that Shields has changed Rodriguez from a brawler to boxer, O'Connor from boxer to puncher, but Coach Ronnie is turning both into complete fighters.

"Edwin always came forward, throwing punches, and when you hit him, he hit you back," Ronnie explained. "There's nothing wrong with that attitude, but you don't want to trade shots with an opponent who hits harder. You don't go head-to-head with an opponent like Donovan George who was stronger. Edwin boxed in the middle of the ring and won rounds, catching everything George threw on his gloves instead of his chin. Edwin agrees that he doesn't have to punch it out. I'm not taking the fight out of a fighter like Edwin. I'm making him more of a complete fighter like I'm doing with Danny, too. Complete fighters are smart fighters. If Edwin is losing late in a fight and needs a round or two, he can still do that if he needs to, but he has perfected his defense.

"When Danny first came here, I watched tapes of his fights and all he did was box against everybody. I asked him if he thought there was any other way to fight. He didn't know how to fight any differently. We worked on getting him to fight inside, not just to go in there throwing punches. He needed defense to create offense. He's done that perfectly in his last few fights and I've been impressed by his defense. He's knocking people out now. He's never going to be a power puncher, but he's punching harder and sitting down on his punches. He's a tough kid who sacrifices whatever I take to do it. I love working with him and Edwin.

"It's very important that there down here together. One feeds off of the other. If Edwin is having a down day, Danny picks him up, and vice-versa."

The journey doesn't end for Rodriguez or O'Connor until they reach their dreams of capturing a

world title. Shields has both of them headed in the right direction and not too far away from achieving their goals. They've almost come full circle.

"Road to Glory" is the highly anticipated HBO Boxing After Dark tripleheader, featuring some of the brightest young fighters in all of boxing looking to continue on their paths toward their respective world championships. The card will take place on Saturday, September 29, at MGM Grand at Foxwoods. Tickets are on sale now and can be purchased through the Foxwoods box office by calling 1 (800) 200-2882 . Tickets are priced at $45, $75, $100 and $200.