

Wilder To Meet Liakhovich, Now Trained by Mike McCallum

Written by The Sweet Science
Wednesday, 07 August 2013 16:10

UNDEFEATED DEONTAY WILDER FACES

FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION SERGEI LIAKHOVICH

IN SHOBOX: THE NEW GENERATION MAIN EVENT

THIS FRIDAY, AUG. 9, LIVE ON SHOWTIME®

FROM FANTASY SPRINGS RESORT CASINO IN INDIO, CALIF.

Tripleheader Features Two Outstanding 10-Round Co-Featured Fights –

Francisco Vargas vs. Brandon Bennett and Jermall Charlo vs. Antwone Smith

Telecast Begins at 10 p.m. ET/PT

Tickets On Sale

NEW YORK (Aug. 7, 2013) – Undefeated heavyweight **Deontay Wilder**, most would agree, is a work in progress. He's not your typical work in progress, however -- unless you consider his record of 28-0 with 28 knockouts run of the mill.

Still, the question on most everyone's mind: Does the former amateur standout and the last male American to medal in the Olympic Games possess the skills and talent to one day become

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a world champion?

The 6-foot-7, 27-year-old Wilder, of Tuscaloosa, Ala., will try to extend his winning and knockout streaks when he faces former world heavyweight champion **Sergei “White Wolf” Liakhovich** (25-5, 16 KO’s), of Scottsdale, Ariz., by way of Vitebsk, Belarus, in the 10-round main event of a tripleheader this

Friday

,
Aug. 9

,
on

ShoBox: The New Generation

live on

SHOWTIME

®

(10 p.m. ET/PT, delayed on the West Coast) from

Fantasy Springs Resort Casino

in

Indio, Calif.

In two excellent 10-round co-featured scraps, **Francisco “El Bandito” Vargas** (16-0-1, 13 KO’s), of Tijuana, Mexico, takes on southpaw

Brandon “The Untouchable” Bennett

(16-0, 7 KO’s), of Cincinnati, Ohio, in a clash of unbeaten junior lightweights with almost identical resumes, while up-and-coming unbeaten junior middleweight

Jermall “The Hitman” Charlo

(14-0, 10 KO’s), of Houston, Texas, gets tested for class when he opposes world-ranked

Antwone Smith

(23-4-1, 12 KO’s), of Miami, Fla.

The event is presented by Golden Boy Promotions and sponsored by Corona. Tickets, priced at \$25, \$35 and \$45, are available at the Fantasy Springs Box Office, by calling [\(800\) 827-2946](tel:8008272946) or online at

www.fantasyspringsresort.com

. Doors open at 5 p.m. PT. The first live fight is at 5:30 p.m. PT.

ShoBox expert analyst **Steve Farhood** is looking forward to Friday’s triple treat, particularly the two televised fights that will precede the heavyweight bout.

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“The jury is still out, of course, on Wilder, who is taking at least a baby step up by fighting a former world champion,” Farhood said. “The other two fights are really good, solid matchups, with the two unbeaten fighters fighting their toughest opponents to date.

“Vargas is clearly taking a step up in class. He turned pro at 25, which is obviously much older than the usual Mexican prospect, but he is very exciting and throws a lot of punches. Bennett is a lefty who’s been brought along carefully. This is definitely a step up for him, too. But both guys are highly schooled and have looked very good in their fights. This is a prototypical ShoBox matchup.

“Jermall Charlo is beginning to emerge from his twin brother, Jermell’s shadow. It is inevitable that they are going to be compared because they fight in the same division. This is a big step up for Jermall, facing a fighter who has made a career of beating unbeaten prospects. This should be a supreme test for Charlo, who has never gone past six rounds while Smith has been six rounds or more 13 times.”

Wilder, who didn’t start to box until he was 21, only had 30-35 fights in the amateurs but earned the bronze medalist at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China. He was the least experienced member on the U.S. team yet was the only one to medal.

Since turning pro in November 2008, Wilder has feasted on his foes, mostly demolishing each and every one of them. He has not gone four full rounds in a fight. Sixteen of his fights have ended in the first round, including a 70-second destruction of 2000 Olympic super heavyweight gold medalist **Audley Harrison** in his last start on April 27. Six of his fights were over in the second, three were done in the third and three were finished in the fourth.

Currently ranked No. 6 in the WBA and WBO, No. 15 in the IBF and No. 30 in the WBC, Wilder has had one scheduled 12-round fight and three scheduled 10-rounders. This will be his third start in 2013 after fighting six times in 2010, 2011 and 2012. To his credit, he doesn’t take long layoffs between outings.

“I honestly don't have any time off,” he said. “I'm always up in the gym. When people call

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somebody a 'gym rat,' I am definitely that. This is my job and I take it seriously whether I'm outside the ring or inside. The only way to get better is to train and practice hard. The most time I'm off after a fight is maybe a week. After that, I'm training and waiting on the next fight. When I go to camp, I don't go to camp to get in shape. I go to camp to put shape on top of shape. I'm never out of shape."

Wilder has been trained since the outset of his pro career by **Mark Breland**, the 1984 Olympic gold medalist and former two-time WBA welterweight world champion.

"Deontay is great to work with, he does what I tell him to and he's willing to try anything I say, which is all I can ask," Breland said. "He's sparring 10 rounds and we're coming off a great camp. He's really improved a lot since we started. Honestly, we did not anticipate the knockouts; in fact, we are trying to get him to box and move more, which he's beginning to do. He's got good power in his right hand and a great 1-2 punch. So we're trying to develop his jab. But his power his just overwhelming right now.

"Two greats thing about Deontay are his willingness to learn and his work ethic. He knows he's still learning and has the right attitude. He's hungry and works hard in the gym. His shoulders are too tight when he boxes; once he relaxes a little and is able to loosen his shoulders, he will be even more dangerous. It's all about relaxing, but that comes with experience.

"This is another stepping stone, but there's no way we take Liakhovich lightly. There are still little things he can do that Deontay's never seen. Deontay knows he has to be at the top of his game every fight."

Wilder, who went pro at age 23 in November 2008, will be making his ShoBox debut. He won the WBC Continental Americas heavyweight title with an eye-opening third-round knockout over previously undefeated **Kelvin Prince** last Dec. 15 on **SHOWTIME EXTREME**.

"I'm excited to be in the main event on ShoBox on SHOWTIME," Wilder said. "I was on the (network) when I broke Price's jaw. We're just trying to reach our goal. I'm glad to have a great opponent. I can't wait to perform on Aug. 9. It's the Bomb Squad!"

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Liakhovich won the WBO heavyweight title with a 12-round decision over **Lamon Brewster** on April 1, 2006, and lost it on a 12

th

-round TKO to

Shannon Briggs

the following Nov. 4. He's fought only five times since and is coming off a ninth-round TKO loss to

Bryant Jennings

on March 24, 2012.

The 6-foot-4, 37-year-old Liakhovich, who'll be making his first start for trainer and former WBA super welterweight, WBA middleweight and WBC light heavyweight world champion **Mike "The Body Snatcher" McCallum**

, didn't perform well against Jennings. But the usually tough and durable 14-year-pro is confident he still has what it takes and has enough left to score what would be a major upset.

"I've been working with Mike McCallum in Las Vegas for over two months," said Liakhovich, who's counting on his vast advantage in experience and natural athletic ability to take Wilder into uncharted waters. "My main sparring partner is a tall guy like Wilder. I've fought a lot of tall guys – (6-foot-6½-inch unbeaten **Robert) Helenius**, (7-foot-tall, former WBA heavyweight champion **Nicolay) Valuev**. You need to find the key how to do certain things for this kind of opponent, but it's not so difficult.

"Wilder is a good fighter, his record speaks for itself. But I'm not looking over him, I'm looking forward. On Aug. 9, I will put everything on the line, and I'm coming to win."

Vargas and Bennett will be making their ShoBox debuts. Both have similarities besides their records. They are close in age (Vargas is 28, Bennett is 25), both were terrific amateurs (Vargas was a 2008 Olympian for Mexico, Vargas won the majority of his 300 bouts), both have about the same amount of experience as professionals, both are stepping up in class and both need to win this kind of fight, by far their toughest to date, to take the next step in making the transition from prospect to contender.

One major difference between the fighters: Vargas is known more for his punching prowess, Bennett for his boxing ability.

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The 5-foot-9 Vargas didn't turn pro until he was 25. But the three-year pro has been kept busy, fighting four times in 2010, five times in 2011, six times in 2012 and twice this year. Three of his fights were aired on SHOWTIME EXTREME, the most recent last Jan. 26 when he knocked out

Ira Terry

in the second round. Vargas, the WBC's No. 25-ranked contender, scored three knockdowns en route to a third-round TKO over

Christian Arrazola

in his last outing on May 17.

"Francisco usually comes to L.A. to train, but he trained in Mexico for this fight," manager **Joel De Hoya**

said. "It's always complicated fighting a southpaw, but hopefully everything comes out all right. I think Bennett's going to be a little slicker than the last guy Francisco fought, but I don't think Bennett has faced anyone like Vargas. It will be a great fight for both kids."

Said Vargas, an eight-time Mexican national amateur champion, "I like to dominate the ring. I plateaued a bit after my pro debut, but we're making up time, ready to take that place we seek. We are on track. I love Mexico, but work is in the United States. I will not waste more time. I'm ready for success."

The 5-foot-6 Bennett is a stablemate and lifelong friend of **Adrien Broner** and **Rau'shee Warren**. All are

co-managed by

Al Haymon

and

Mike Stafford

, and trained by Stafford. This will be his third outing in 2013 after one fight in 2011 and 2012. Bennett's been triumphant via points in his last four starts, including a unanimous six-round decision over

Arturo Santiago

this past July 5.

Bennett, a natural right-hander who turned pro at the age of 20 in May 2008, describes his style "like **Pernell Whitaker** mixed with a little **Sugar Ray Leonard**." He's always felt his style was better suited for the pros. "I felt like I would be a better pro than amateur because I'm a

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counterpuncher," he said. "When a person makes a mistake, I counter off of it. I just feel like it was a better style for the pros."

Bennett is hopeful 2013 is his breakout year. "I've been in camp a long time, this whole year, and haven't had a break," he said. "I went right back to work after my last fight. I've had two fights this year, and I'm with Adrien when he's in training camp. I'm real excited to get on SHOWTIME. I'm ready."

Regarding his opponent, Bennett says, "I've seen Vargas fight. He just tries to bring the pressure. I know that's what he's going to try to do. We've got a game plan for that. He's going to bring the pressure, but I'm going to bring the pressure back to him."

Charlo, who is one minute older than **Jermell**, has won eight consecutive fights by knockout. The virtually untested 6-foot-tall, 23-year-old will be making his ShoBox debut after two appearances on **SHOWTIME EXTREME**. This is his first scheduled 10-round match.

A top amateur before going pro at 18 in November 2008, Charlo dropped **Luis Hernandez** two times in the first round and won by second-round TKO in his last fight on June 1.

"I didn't take any time off after my last fight," Charlo said. "I've been sparring with my brother, too, this camp. We haven't sparred in a long time – probably five years. We don't spar much because it gets kind of intense and a little bit over-the-top, so (trainer) **Ronnie (Shields)** doesn't let us spar that often. I've probably done 30 rounds with Jermell; we've been getting it on. It was real good work."

Shields is delighted with the brothers' progress. "They're absolutely great to work with, and they're both doing great," he said. "I'm very happy with their progress. Jermall is making a name for himself, which is good, and with him going with **Al Haymon** only makes it better. They're totally different fighters. Jermall is more of a puncher than a boxer. But both are very focused."

The trainer acknowledges that Smith, a solid veteran, will likely present Jermall with his

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toughest test but that these are the kinds of fights all young up-and-comers have to take at some point. "Antwone Smith is a tough fighter but we have to fight tough fights to get to the upper echelon," Shields said. "This is the latest step for Jermall, a stepping stone that we have to go through."

Charlo is looking forward to the challenge. "I think Antwone's full of experience," he said, "but everything is an experience to me. He has a lot of tricks and stuff, so I'm going to fight him off of how I've been training and keep the game plan with Ronnie. I'll go at him."

The 5-foot-8 Smith, 26, is the IBF's No. 9-ranked junior middleweight. The seven-year pro has won two fights in a row, including a 10-round decision over former two-time WBC lightweight champion **Jose Luis Castillo** last Feb. 1. In his outing before last, Smith scored one of his career-best victories, a 10-round decision over previously undefeated, hometown favorite **Ronald Cruz** on Sept. 21, 2012.

Smith is 2-1 on ShoBox, winning a 10-round decision over **Richard Gutierrez** and by ninth-round TKO over previously undefeated **Henry Crawford** in May and November 2009, respectively. He lost via TKO 9 to **Lanardo Tyner** in July 2010.

Unlike other young fighters, Smith came up the hard way -- an underdog matched tough, and he only reached his current level by winning a number of fights he was expected to lose (he defeated **Aaron Torres**, 2004 Colombian Olympian **Juan Novoa**, previously undefeated former Mexican national amateur champion **Norberto Gonzalez** and Gutierrez to name a few).

"I've added a strength program to my training since I moved up from 147," Smith said. "This time, it's been my whole camp. I'm real pumped-up to see how I feel and how my power and stamina increases. I feel like I've been born again. I'm more alive. I haven't felt this good, mentally and physically, in years. I'm focused and ready. Charlo is taller than me, but everybody is taller than me. That's not a factor.

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“Charlo's a little arrogant, but I love that. I'm here to give him a reality test. He thinks everything comes easy. Basically, he's been fighting a bunch of cab drivers, a bunch of bus drivers. He thinks he's done something. He's talking big noise, but he's never been past six rounds, and they're worried about that.

“He's looking to go in, get in a couple of hard shots and get the guy out of there. But you hit a guy with experience and he doesn't go anywhere, you've got a problem and the rounds keep going on and on. You're in water you've never been in. When the water gets deep, we're going to see if he can swim.

“I'm just hyped up with his arrogance. He's got a video on YouTube – 'Oh, I'm fighting Antwone Smith. He's ranked number 10 in the world, but I'm going to take that.' Well, I didn't get here easily and he won't take it from me easily. Every day I walk in the gym, I watch that video. It pumps me up for my training session. It motivates me. He ain't been in what I been in.”

Those in attendance will get the opportunity to get up close and personal with Three-Division World Champion “**Sugar**” **Shane Mosley**, who will meet and greet ticketholders, sign autographs and take pictures from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. PT.

Barry Tompkins will call the ShoBox action from ringside with **Steve Farhood** and former World Champion

Raul Marquez

serving as expert analysts. The executive producer is

Gordon Hall

with

Richard Gaughan

producing and

Rick Phillips

directing.