

Top Rank, Nonito Donaire end dispute with contract extension

Written by Bob Velin
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Bantamweight champion Nonito Donaire, shown knocking out Fernando Montiel last February, has inked a multi-year contract extension to stay with Top Rank Promotions. (Ethan Miller, Getty Images)

USA TODAY

The bitter falling out between unified bantamweight champion Nonito Donaire and Top Rank Promotions has ended, as Donaire, "The Filipino Flash," and Top Rank have agreed to a multi-year contract extension.

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Earlier this year, Donaire (26-1, 18 KOs), who has not fought since knocking out Fernando Montiel in the second round in February, declared himself a free agent and tried to jump to rival promoter Golden Boy, which gave him a \$350,000 signing bonus.

But Top Rank insisted that Donaire was still under contract, sued Golden Boy, and an independent arbitrator ruled that Top Rank indeed retained Donaire's rights.

"I am very happy and pleased to announce a recent reconciliation between Top Rank and myself, and I am also extremely excited to announce that I will be back in the ring this coming October," Donaire said in a statement.

"There were some details that required attention, and I feel confident now that my professional goals are being understood and respected by Top Rank. And we have likewise come to a mutual understanding and agreement as far as our common objectives in boxing and how we can work better together as a team."

The falling out had been simmering for awhile but came to a head after Top Rank chairman and Hall of Famer Bob Arum made some disparaging remarks about Donaire's wife, Rachel.

He has since apologized, which helped repair the rift.

Top Rank President Todd DuBoef described it as a case of miscommunication.

"A lot of times in partnerships, there is sometimes miscommunication or levels of expectations that both parties aren't unified on, and sometimes it takes that communication for everybody to express what it is, so everyone is on the same page," said DuBoef.

"And this was more or less the case, where the expectations and the growth and, he's a terrific

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fighter and a terrific, marketable kid, and lining up the right fights for him at the right times.

"We built toward the Montiel fight and it seems like that was the first launching pad ... for an elite fighter. Obviously there were a lot of grievances he had towards us, and it just wasn't expressed correctly. We got everything out and discussed everything, and now we're unified. He's happy, we're happy and we think it's a promising future for both of us."

Donaire's highly respected manager, Cameron Dunkin, said the reconciliation was as much about wanting to fight as soon as possible as it was Arum's apology.

"He wanted to fight, and I think he was getting concerned because he heard he was going to lose his belts," Dunkin said.

"I had spoken with the organizations (WBC and WBO) and there was some concern. He was concerned because he'd had such a long layoff and he was getting very panicky.

"I think — and I'm not in their heads so I don't know for sure — that Rachel and him decided it was better to just get fighting and that they just didn't have any bad feelings towards anyone. They talked highly of Golden Boy and how they were treated at their events. They felt very bad about that.

"It was a real trying time, and it's over. But there are a lot of bad feelings about how this went down. They just went off and did this themselves, and it left a lot of people with hurt feelings."

Dunkin said Donaire, 28, who has not lost since the second professional fight of his career, will likely fight in October against a yet-to-be-named opponent.

"That's what I'm pushing for," said Dunkin.

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"I've been talking to Todd every couple hours for the last several days, and Todd's working real hard to get this done. We're looking at three guys, and whoever's most viable and makes sense for the organization and for television (Donaire is obligated to HBO), that's the one we'll do."

Dunkin knows one thing for sure — that Donaire is one of the most exciting fighters and powerful punchers out there today.

Donaire has KO'd the last four fighters he's faced, including Montiel in the second round and Vladimir Sidorenko in the fourth round last December.

"Both of them said they've never been hit like that in their life," Dunkin said.

"He's a tremendous puncher and has that ... they used to have a word for it in the old days — eraser. There's just not a lot of those guys, but he's got it. He can get you out of there."

As for which weight class he will be fighting in in the future, DuBoef said, "He's one of those unique individuals who has a very large frame, so weight classes and jumping around is something that's going to be unique to him.

"He's big for 118 (bantamweight), he obviously wants to fight there, depending on the opportunity. Then I think he's going to go very quickly to 122 (pounds) and he could go all the way up to 130 at some point. We've discussed that I just think there's a ton of opportunities for him."

DuBoef mentioned several possibilities, such as the winner of the bantamweight tournament in August between Joseph Agbeko and Abner Mares; at 122, Rafael Marquez, who fights Toshiaki Nishioka for the WBC super bantamweight title in October, as well as WBO super bantamweight champion Jorge Arce; and at 126 or 130, Top Rank star Yuriorkis Gamboa.

"I'm all for it," DuBoef said, "and ready to sit down and talk to everyone, and see what we can

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do."