

## Brian Vitoria, once written off, now set for historic flyweight unification with Marquez

Written by Ryan Songalia

Saturday, 17 November 2012 09:46

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**Brian Vitoria (right) against Julio Cesar Miranda in an Associated Press file photo.**

### ***Special to the Filipino Reporter***

It wasn't too long ago that Brian Vitoria was considered damaged goods.

The promising prospect from the 2000 U.S. Olympic boxing team had won the light flyweight title twice, but after losing to Carlos Tamara by twelfth round stoppage, it seemed that those days were gone for good.

Had Vitoria retired after the Tamara defeat, as many had suggested he should, he'd be

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remembered as a fighter who accomplished more than most, but fell short of career expectations.

But he didn't, continuing on and annexing the WBO flyweight title by defeating Julio Cesar Miranda, then stopping pound-for-pound talent Giovanni Segura and knocking out old rival Omar Nino.

Now, as the Filipino-American boxer from Waipahu, Hawaii prepares to unify the 112 pound championship with WBA title claimant Hernan "Tyson" Marquez this Saturday at the Sports Arena in Los Angeles, Vitoria's career is beginning to appear more and more Hall of Fame-worthy.

But even Vitoria had doubts himself about whether he'd ever compete at this level again.

"There had been times where I was thinking, 'Man, am I done?'" Vitoria admits.

"I doubted myself a few times but when you dig deeper and figure out what you want, at that point it was that I didn't want it to end that way. If I decided to retire, this is a bad note for me to retire on. I felt like I really had enough left in the tank to make another great run and I think I am showing it right now."

Vitoria-Segura will be aired live on WealthTV in the United States, beginning at 9 p.m. ET/6 p.m. PT and on GMA in the Philippines.

Vitoria, whose record stands at 31-3 (18 knockouts), has returned to the Wild Card Gym in L.A. for this latest challenge, which will be the first time the flyweight belts will be unified since 1965.

Vitoria had been training out of the Wild Card when he first became champion in 2005 — when he separated Eric Ortiz from his senses and the WBC light flyweight belt.

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It'd been years since Vitoria had trained at Wild Card, but when his trainer Mario Morales had issues returning to the United States following Vitoria's conquest of Nino in May, Vitoria needed a new trainer.

He found one in Marvin Somodio, a young upstart from Iloilo handpicked from Pacquiao's training camps in Baguio as Roach's protege.

"He knows his boxing," said Vitoria of Somodio, who will turn 29 on Nov. 27 three days after Vitoria turns 32.

"Freddie has been mentoring him and he's understanding how to train a fighter. Marvin's been coming into his own and it's a pleasure working with him."

Somodio has worked with Roach as an assistant for each Pacquiao fight since 2009's Miguel Cotto fight.

His amateur credentials include a Philippine National championship in 2006, in which he was named the Best Boxer of the tournament.

He had a brief pro career, racking up a 2-1 record in 2011, but only turned pro at Roach's behest to gain experience and insight.

Vitoria's opponent — the 34-2 (25 KOs) Marquez of Empalme, Sonora, Mexico — also has a new trainer.

Marquez hired Vitoria's former trainer Robert Garcia, with whom Vitoria had worked from 2008-2010.

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García had left Viloría's camp just weeks prior to his 2010 bout with Omar Soto, citing a disagreement about whether Viloría had trained sufficiently for the bout (Viloría won by split decision).

Now García resurfaces in his career, this time for the other side.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel kinda betrayed, it was like a little slap in the face," said Viloría.

"But it all comes with the territory, it was his decision, I respect that. At the same time, I hope he understands that I'm a completely different fighter than I was when I was with him, so anything that he's trying to exploit from then, it's not going to work. It also works both ways, I know how he trains fighters so I know hard he'll prepare his fighters so that kinda motivated me a lot more than usual."

A voicemail to García was not returned.

The southpaw Marquez — known as "Tyson" for his punching power — is much younger than Viloría at 24 and has beaten three Filipinos in his last four fights.

Marquez's only career defeats are a unanimous decision loss to *Pinoy* Richie Mepranum and an eighth round TKO to the much larger Nonito Donaire Jr., who coincidentally also trains with García.

"Fighting a Mexican is always a challenge," said Viloría.

"You know they're always going to bring their A-game into the fight and try to bring the best, so you always have to prepare yourself 110 percent. Marquez is going to bring everything he has up to the point where he looked for an old trainer of mine to find my weaknesses and stuff."

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Somodjo, in assessment of Marquez: "He can punch but he has not fought a strong puncher like Brian yet."

As Vitoria heads towards another defining fight in his career, he takes a moment to put his career into perspective.

He's been a pro since 2001, and his career rise has run parallel to that of Pacquiao, who ushered in a Golden Age for Philippine boxing.

While many pundits are busy searching for the next Manny Pacquiao, they should take a moment to appreciate the first Brian Vitoria.

"You wanna be remembered long after you're gone in the sport," said Vitoria.

"For me, my time's been limited. I'm going to be turning 32 this year, my years are coming to an end pretty much. I'm going to have to take every fight like it's my last fight. It's been a long, up-and-down road for me, everybody has been looking for the next Manny Pacquiao, which I tell them is really hard to find another Manny Pacquiao. Everybody is looking for the next Michael Jordan in the sport of basketball, but if you can make your own mark in the sport, make people remember you by what you've done.

"I'm trying to make my own name and try to be remember as that Filipino fighter from Hawaii that went to the Olympics and all that. Hopefully they will remember me as that fighter who was resilient and never stayed on the ground for too long. He always got right back on his feet and kept fighting."

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