

Friday, January 28, 2011

Fernando Vargas to make comeback

By Brett Okamoto
ESPN.com

After a three-year hiatus, former world champion Fernando Vargas will return to the boxing ring in 2011.

Vargas, 33, announced Friday he'll face super middleweight Henry Buchanan on April 16 at Hard Rock Casino in Las Vegas. It will be his first fight since suffering a majority decision loss to Ricardo Mayorga in November 2007.

"I have one thing to say: I'm back," Vargas told ESPN.com. "I took three years off and I'm still young. I'm excited about fighting again and I know I can win another world title."

Vargas has hinted at a comeback before, but says it became a real goal eight months ago when he moved out of his long-time home in Southern California to Las Vegas to train under Floyd Mayweather Sr.

In those eight months, Vargas has slowly prepared himself for a comeback, dropping from well over 200 pounds to his current-weight of 187.

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” -- *Fernando Vargas on his weight gain*

"It's unofficial, but my wife says I got on the scale and it said 270," Vargas said. "I don't believe her, but I was definitely up there. I started seeing pictures of myself and said, 'Man. Where's my chin? My pants don't fit anymore. What the hell happened?'"

In addition to his work with Mayweather, Vargas got his weight down with the help of Los Angeles-based nutritionist Drew Prinz. The former champ had a reputation for struggling to keep his weight down in-between fights.

According to Vargas, problems with managing his weight were actually a major factor in his decision to leave the sport. Although he fought the majority of his career at 154 pounds, he said that getting there each time took a huge toll on his body.

"I was tired of these guys never fighting me unless it was at 154," Vargas said. "Oscar [De La Hoya], Shane [Mosley] -- none of them would fight me if it wasn't at 154. I was always crunching down my body and not eating."

That shouldn't be a problem for Vargas this time around, as he's serving as his own promoter and will only book fights at 168 pounds.

In his first fight back, Vargas (26-5, 22 KO) will look to stop Buchanan (20-2, 13 KO) sometime early -- a

move he believes would be significant since current WBA title holder Andre Ward was unable to finish Buchanan in a 2009 fight.

"I think it's a good fight for him," Mayweather said. "Andre Ward went the distance with him, so we'll see what Vargas can do with him. I'm pretty sure Vargas has got more power than Andre Ward, so if he can get [Buchanan] out and Ward couldn't, I think it's something that would give him boost."

That fight might still be a good three months away, but that hasn't stopped Vargas from contemplating what his next challenge could be.

Just this week, mixed martial artist and Strikeforce welterweight champion Nick Diaz mentioned he'd like a professional boxing match and named Vargas as a potential opponent. Diaz is scheduled to defend his belt this weekend in San Jose.

Diaz's comments did not go unnoticed.

"Right now, I'm thinking about [Buchanan]," Vargas said. "But listen, there's another guy that's been opening his mouth that's in MMA -- and that's Nick Diaz.

"He's been calling me out saying he wants to fight me. I'm like, 'Who is this guy? You're not an elite mixed martial artist. You're not even in the UFC.' That's definitely a fight that interests me. He got my attention."

Vargas claimed his first title when he captured the IBF light middleweight belt with a win over Luis Ramon Campas in December 1998, five days after his 21st birthday.

He defended the belt until 2000, when he suffered a brutal twelfth-round TKO loss to Felix Trinidad. He left the sport on a three-fight losing streak, including back-to-back stoppage losses to Shane Mosely in 2006.

Brett Okamoto covers boxing for ESPN.com. Follow him on Twitter at bokamotoESPN.
