

# Sports Friday

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B O X I N G

## De La Hoya Aims to Put Doubters in Their Place

By RICK WEINBERG

For almost one year, Oscar De La Hoya has listened to the rhetoric.

"People keep saying I haven't fought any big-name, experienced fighters," he said.

But all that will change tonight at the MGM Grand Garden in Las Vegas, Nev.

"Everyone will get what they've been waiting for," said De La Hoya, who faces his toughest challenge when he meets Jorge Paez for the vacant World Boxing Organization lightweight championship.

### Lashes Out at Critics

De La Hoya, the personable former Olympic champion, is unaccustomed to absorbing blows from the press or public and was obviously disturbed by criticism that he has avoided fighters with name recognition.

"I disagree with the critics," he said, "but after this fight, there's no more to say, no more criticism. Everyone wants me to prove something, and I intend to do that."

For De La Hoya, the 21-year-old W.B.O. junior lightweight champion who is 13-0 with 12 knockouts, this marks his first bout at 135 pounds. He previously fought at 130, a weight he claims left him weak in the late rounds. The five-pound increase has also increased his power, confidence and stamina, he said.

"This is the best I've ever felt," he said. "I feel very, very strong. I feel like a new fighter with a new attitude and purpose. I'm stronger, physically

and mentally. I can't wait to get into the ring and show off my power."

Paez, the No. 1 W.B.O. lightweight contender, is 53-6-4 with 35 knockouts. His edge in experience is overwhelming: The 28-year-old Paez has fought in nearly as many title bouts, 11, as De La Hoya has total pro fights.

Paez, however, is known more for his outlandish, eccentric antics in the ring than for his experience. He has entered the ring suited up as a cowboy, brandishing toy six-shooters, and as a Dr. Seuss character with hat and sequined white shirt. He has also been known to kiss ring-card girls and carve messages such as "Use Condoms" and "No Drugs" into his hair.

His repertoire has distracted many boxers, but De La Hoya says he won't be one of them.

"I'm prepared for his clown act," De La Hoya said.

There are questions as to how much Paez has left and if his high number of fights have taken a toll on him.

"He can't keep up with me," De La Hoya said. "He has a lot of wear and tear. I think my jab, which I've improved, will do a lot of damage to his face. He cuts easily. The use of my quick, hard jab will be the key to this fight."

The De La Hoya-Paez match is the evening's feature event. The undefeated International Boxing Federation champion, James Toney, faces Charles Williams, the I.B.F.'s No. 1 contender, in the first bout. The card is scheduled to begin at 9 P.M.