



Galing Pinoy showcases the triumph of the Filipino spirit—the Filipino's innate perseverance to rise above. A double entendre, **Galing Pinoy** literally translates to both coming from (or brought to you by) the Filipino and Filipino ingenuity.



Mayol, Bert Batawang and Glenn Donaire didn't stand a chance against Solis.

But Vitoria did the impossible.

Battling the overwhelming odds against him before the fight and through 11 tough rounds, Vitoria ducked underneath a wild Solis, performed a faint and connected on a beautifully thrown sweet straight right hand to the head of his opponent's chin.

Solis was down and out for the count.

After the referee signaled the fight over, Vitoria lay on the canvas and wept openly with his arms raised in victory like a snow angel on the ground. The full house at the Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City roared.

Members of Vitoria's team picked the newly crowned champ and carried him over their shoulders.

For Vitoria, winning the fight against Solis meant more than being a champion.

It was redemption.

"If people knew what I had to go through to reach this point again," said Vitoria. "I mean this is the best victory in my career better than the first world title I won because of all the struggles I had to do to get to this."

Rise and fall

For those who have never heard of Brian Vitoria, he was the Manny Pacquiao hype before Manny Pacquiao. He was one of Freddie Roach's original Filipino prodigy (other than Gerry Penalosa).

Vitoria was the National Junior Olympics champion at 100 pounds in 1995, the National Golden Gloves Flyweight Champion and Amateur Light Flyweight Champion in 1999. He was a member of the US Olympic boxing team in 2000.

In his eighth professional bout, Vitoria captured the WBC Youth World flyweight title. In his 10th bout, he won the vacant NABF title. He racked up 17 wins in his first 18 bouts (1 no contest). Boxing reporters nicknamed Vitoria the "Hawaiian Punch" for his devastating, fast hands.

And in his then biggest fight of his career, he knocked out Eric

Brian Vitoria

The comeback kid

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL / AJPress

WALKING around the MGM Grand Casino, you can't miss boxer Brian Vitoria. The short Fil-Am guy is sporting a frohawk, the latest 'cool' hairstyle and wearing a grin from ear to ear.

Fresh from his trip to the Philippines where he captured a championship belt from a "Filipino Killer," the newly crowned IBF Junior Flyweight champion is beaming.

"It just feels good. It feels really, really good," said Vitoria to the *Asian Journal* about his win. "It feels right."

Vitoria (25-2 15 KO's 2 NC) should feel great about his impressive win over Ulises Solis. Solis is nicknamed the "Filipino Killer" after besting many of Vitoria's kababayans. Rodel

Ortiz in the first round to capture the WBC Flyweight title in 2005.

Everything seemed too easy for him, admits Vitoria.

"I won the world title by a first round knock out. I didn't even have to work for it," said Vitoria.

But with fame comes misfortune especially if one is not prepared.

A few months before his title match against Ortiz, Vitoria sent a man to the hospital. Vitoria was facing Ruben Contreras. It would be Contreras' last match.

Vitoria overwhelmed the Mexican and cruised in for an easy victory. Contreras quit in the sixth round.

After complaining of a headache, Contreras immediately fell into a seizure. The Mexican boxer was immediately rushed to a hospital where he fell in a coma for almost a week before reviving.

"It was tough for me," said Vitoria about that ordeal. "You know, I'm Hawaiian and Filipino. You know we're all about family. It's one thing to hurt a boxer but another to hurt a family. I know hurt is the name of the game in boxing but I never want to hurt a family... I had a lot of sleepless nights [after that fight]."

Vitoria said that experience of winning the title so early in his career and putting a man to the hospital changed him.

Expectations of him rose through the roof. Family members began to give him "issues" he did not want to disclose.

Being on top of the boxing world, Vitoria said he began to grow complacent.

"I don't know. I just didn't have that love and passion anymore for boxing," said Vitoria. "It's human nature to grow complacent."

Vitoria lost the title to Mexican boxer Omar Nino Romero in his second title defense. He tried to regain it but the bout was scored a no contest after Romero tested positive for drugs.

In 2007, Vitoria again tried to go for a championship. He fought Edgar Sosa for the vacant WBC title but lost a decision.

Comeback

After the fight, Vitoria knew it was due or die time.

He was only 27-years-old and was at a crucial point in his career. Does he continue to box or pursue a different career?

Vitoria's manager Gary Gittlesohn met with Vitoria. Gittlesohn, one of the most respected managers in boxing, was wondering the same thing about his once prized fighter. Gittlesohn saw Vitoria's fall from grace and needed answers.

Gittlesohn sat Vitoria down and was forthright about the Fil-Am's options.

"It was like he was going through the motions," said Gittlesohn to the *Asian Journal*. "He didn't care, didn't have the passion. I told him 'do you have the interest of being a professional fighter? If this is what you want to be, you have to solely focus on this. You're going to have to take two steps back in order to take three steps forward.'"



"I said just give me that signal now," added Gittlesohn. "If you're not 100 percent interested in boxing we're going a different direction."

Vitoria thought for a moment. He was being challenged. This time it wasn't in a boxing ring but life.

"That's when I put my foot down. I said, 'let's do it,'" said Vitoria. "I wanted to be a champion again. I wanted to be back up there."

Gittlesohn warned Vitoria of what the Fil-Am had to do in order to get back on top.

"That means you have to eat nails, go to training camp where you're not going to be the big star," said Gittlesohn. "You have to be just one of the boys. You're going to be on the undercard and not make a lot of money."

Thus began Vitoria's journey into the boxing abyss.

After the Sosa debacle, Vitoria took a few months off and began training with Roberto Garcia in Oxnard.

Vitoria wanted to get away from the distractions in Los Angeles. He had to refocus and maintain discipline. Vitoria said they also had to deconstruct everything about him before building him back up.

The first bout Gittlesohn sent Vitoria was at the Alan eda Swap Meet in Los Angeles.

"I was like what the heck is this," said Vitoria about the venue. "We were boxing in a parking lot of a swap meet. I think there were only 20 people in the stands."

"I've fought in some of the best places in the world—New York, Las Vegas, Staples Center Los Angeles—I couldn't believe I was fighting in a parking lot."

It wasn't the first and it wouldn't be the last time Vitoria fought at the Swap Meet during his comeback.

After fighting in a Las Vegas undercard, Gittlesohn sent Vitoria to Mexico. This time at a bullring turned boxing venue. Vitoria said the stench was horrible. His locker room was next to the stable where they kept the bulls. Then Vitoria fought in a parking lot overlooking a San Diego Native American casino. Due to Native American customs, fighters were not allowed to douse themselves with water in between rounds, among other things, said Vitoria.

"It was weird. They told us we couldn't do a lot of stuff," said Vitoria.

Vitoria finally got his big break. Top Rank wanted to host a boxing event in the Philippines and Vitoria and Nonito Donaire Jr. were the co-main events.

While many expected Donaire Jr. to knock out his opponent, it was the complete opposite for Vitoria.

Solis had a reputation to live up to—the Filipino killer—as he was called.

Vitoria wasn't sure if he was ready to face the champion but he had no choice. This is the moment he wanted when he began to make his comeback more than a year ago—a chance to win the championship.

If Vitoria had doubts about winning, his trainers certainly didn't. Throughout training camp, they told Vitoria he was going to be the next champion. They filled his head everyday with positive thoughts. "Come on, champ. You're going to be the next world champion," recalls Vitoria what Garcia said to him. "They kept saying, 'And the new World Champion.' Everyday I told them not to jinx it but he was very serious."

"And the more and more I watched film on Solis, the more I started believing in myself," added Vitoria.

Vitoria stepped into the ring that Sunday morning in Araneta Coliseum determined to bring home the belt.

Solis was a tough opponent, said Vitoria.

Throughout the match Solis was taking all of Vitoria's best punches. He couldn't believe the Mexican's resiliency.

But finally in the 11th round, Vitoria knocked out Solis.

If you want to watch a man tear up, watch Vitoria's reaction after

► PAGE A6



REEVES & ASSOCIATES

A PROFESSIONAL LAW CORPORATION

The Leading & Most Trusted Immigration Law Firm in the U.S.



JEFF L. KHURGEL

FLOMY J. DIZA

NANCY E. MILLER*

MAY ZHANG

JOSEPH I. ELIAS

JEREMIAH JOHNSON

ROBERT L. REEVES*

THE FIRM'S PARTNERS

*CHOSEN BY THEIR PEERS AS SUPER LAWYERS FOR 2006, 2007, 2008 AND 2009

15 Attorneys Devoted Exclusively to the Practice of Immigration Law
It Doesn't Have to Cost More to Hire the Very Best.

free in-office
consultation

(866) 739-3777
www.reeves.com

LOS ANGELES

SAN FRANCISCO

LAS VEGAS

MANILA