

Win gives De La Hoya golden choices

LAS VEGAS (AP) - When Oscar De La Hoya gets back to his adopted home in Puerto Rico, he'll have plenty of lucrative choices to make about his revitalized career — who to fight, when to fight, and when to stop.

Deciding to stay at home with his wife and son might be the bravest choice of all.

De La Hoya got the boxing world buzzing Saturday night after a 20-month absence from the ring, pounding Ricardo Mayorga from the opening-minute knockdown to the final flurry of head punches in the sixth round to claim the WBC 154-pound title.

The Golden Boy provided both a blast from the past and a thrilling taste of his potential future, in any one of several big-money matches that will be his for the choosing.

But De La Hoya already might have accomplished everything he needed to do by going out as a winner and a champion. Just minutes after pounding Mayorga, De La Hoya's conflicting feelings were obvious.

"I always want to fight the best challenge out there, but there's nothing on the table right now," he said. "The decision I'll be making in the next few weeks, I'm sure will catch a lot of people by surprise."

That surprise might be the decision to end a prolific ca-

reer and move on to the full-time management of his extensive business interests, including his burgeoning career as a boxing promoter.

But against Mayorga, the 33-year-old recaptured his youth — or at least his 2002 form when he beat Fernando Vargas in the last match that showcased the best in the former Olympic gold medalist. De La Hoya said he couldn't allow his September 2004 loss to Bernard Hopkins to be the last memory of his boxing career.

Almost everybody outside of De La Hoya's immediate family will want him to fight again. But now that De La Hoya is resting on the laurels of a standout performance, he said there's "a good chance" every sack of cash in the boxing world couldn't draw him back into the ring against Floyd Mayweather Jr., Winky Wright, Antonio Margarito or even Felix Trinidad.

A fight with Mayweather, generally considered the world's best pound-for-pound fighter, obviously is the most intriguing — a clash of titans that should sell phenomenally on pay-per-view. Mayweather himself called it "the biggest fight in boxing history," calling for a meeting on Sept. 16.

But don't get excited: Mayweather's father, who's also De La Hoya's trainer and strategist, might not allow it,

and De La Hoya won't fight without him. Floyd Mayweather Sr.'s relationship with his son has been rocky, but paternal bonds run deep.

"What kind of father am I if I let my son get knocked out?" Mayweather Sr. asked. "I'm not saying my son can't win the fight, because he can. ...Everybody is talking about it, but ain't nobody else got to lay down with that burden over their head."

If the elder Mayweather

can't be swayed by a potential eight-figure payday for both fighters, De La Hoya will have no shortage of suitors.

Margarito, the WBO welterweight champ, volunteered to fight his friend at the post-fight news conference. De La Hoya publicly contemplated meeting Wright, the longtime light middleweight champion who will first fight Jermain Taylor on June 17 — but don't expect a rematch with

Trinidad, because De La Hoya has no intention of moving back up to 160 pounds.

But nobody can doubt De La Hoya's courage after his dominance over Mayorga, who threatened the Golden Boy's family and vowed to stop his heart. What's more, De La Hoya has been fighting with a torn right rotator cuff for three years, and he aggravated it three weeks ago while training for Mayorga.

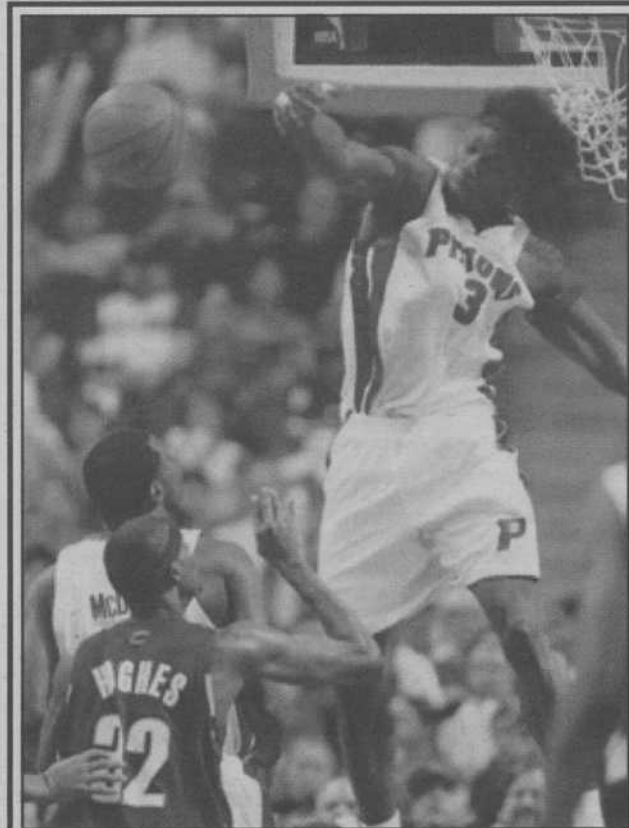
De La Hoya also has con-

cerns outside the ring befitting a rising business leader: He walked into the ring wearing a white sweatband on his head that read: "No To H.R. 4437."

Richard Schaeffer, CEO of Golden Boy Promotions, said it was De La Hoya's way of opposing immigration legislation passed by the House of Representatives.

"He wanted to make a statement," Schaeffer said.

Boxing fans can't wait for the next one.



THE INTIMIDATOR
Detroit Pistons center Ben Wallace blocks a shot in front of Cleveland Cavaliers guard Larry Hughes during Game 1 of the Eastern Conference semi-finals at the Palace in Auburn Hills, Mich., on Sunday. Wallace, a defensive presence, was named the NBA's 2005-06 Defensive Player of the Year prior to the game.

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