

Selfless Fighter Guerrero Gets His Big Title Shot

Robert Guerrero has taken thousands of punches—literally—during his professional boxing career from some of the world's best fighters. As a fervent believer in Jesus Christ, he's also endured some pretty fierce life-jabs from the enemy, including his wife's struggle with cancer and a near career-ending injury in 2011.

In both arenas, the fighter nicknamed "The Ghost" has been knocked down more times than he'd like to remember, only to get up before being counted out. All of that—and his faith—he says, has only strengthened and prepared him for the biggest night of his professional life.

Saturday night, he's set to take on undefeated Floyd Mayweather—one of the best the sport has ever seen—for the World Boxing Council (WBC) and *Ring Magazine* Welterweight championships of the world. Not surprisingly, Guerrero is a big underdog for the bout at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, to be televised by Showtime pay-per-view.

"The fact that I'm even in this position is only by God's grace and His divine intervention," says Guerrero, a former six-time world champion with a record of 31-1-1. "With everything we've been through, I really do believe that God not only has placed me in this position to be thankful and enjoy my life, but also to step into that ring and be a shining light for Him.

"With all He's done for me and my family, for me to ignore the privilege of spreading the gospel would be selfish and irresponsible. Win or lose this fight, all the glory belongs to Him."

Selflessness has become one of Guerrero's defining

characteristics. A few months after winning the International Boxing Federation (IBF) Super Featherweight crown, he relinquished his title to stay home and care for his wife, Casey, who was diagnosed with leukemia.

Giving up a championship he had worked so hard to earn wasn't something his wife asked him to do. With two small children under the age of 5, however, Guerrero knew it was the right thing to do.

"It wasn't a question of if he was going to do it. Robert never hesitated because that's the type of man that he is," Casey Guerrero says. "He didn't give putting his career on hold a second thought when it came to being by my side and taking care of our family. He didn't know how long it was going to take or what he was going to do in the meantime to provide for us. All he knew is that he was going to trust God and know that He was going to work things out."

Of course, Robert Guerrero is only human, and questions of why God would allow him to work so hard simply to give it up entered his head and his heart.

"Simply not knowing what was going to happen and how you were going to make a living, that takes a big toll on you," he says. "If there's one thing with boxing, it's that when you're out of sight, you're out of mind. To not be able to be in the ring and to show off the talents that God gave me, it was difficult to go through that.

"I was very happy to step up and take care of our kids, and it was difficult to have to explain to them where their mother was and how she was fighting for her life. Casey's the real trooper for what she had to go through, and I praise God for her healing every day."

After extensive treatments, including bone-marrow transplants, Casey Guerrero's condition began to improve and, in a matter of months, with her leukemia in remission, Robert Guerrero was

back in the ring. In his first fight following his return, Guerrero scored a TKO over Roberto Arrieta.

In July 2011, Guerrero became the first of three fighters in history to win both a Featherweight and Welterweight world title when he moved up two weight classes and beat former undefeated Turkish fighter Selcuk Aydin. The other two fighters to accomplish the feat are Henry Armstrong and Manny Pacquiao. Guerrero also became only the second Mexican-American fighter—next to Hall of Famer Oscar de la Hoya—to win championships in four divisions.

It was at that time that Guerrero was offered a substantial amount of money by Golden Boy Promotions to have his likeness appear in advertisements for Corona beer. Because of his Christian convictions, Guerrero quickly declined the offer.

“Robert’s the real deal when it comes to his relationship with Jesus Christ,” says Bob Santos, Guerrero’s manager. “That was a tremendous promotion he turned down, and I knew what the answer was going to be right away when I called him about it. His character really amazes me.

“It took a tremendous amount of courage for him to step away from his career when he decided to take care of Casey. He basically said he would do what he would have to do support his family. He knew it was the right thing to do.”

Surprisingly, less than a month after winning the Welterweight crown, it appeared as if Guerrero’s career would come to a screeching halt. He suffered a shoulder injury while sparring for a fight with Marcos Maidana. He underwent arthroscopic surgery, and his future remained uncertain for more than a year.

“At that point I was thinking, ‘Maybe God has a different calling for me,’” says Guerrero, who got saved in 2005 at the age of 21. “He’s the master planner, not me. Things happen for a reason, and the injury was just one of those things. I

believe it was a test to see if I would stay faithful, and I think I have. That's why I now have this title shot."

The Guerreros have a plaque hanging in the bedroom hallway of their home with Philippians 4:13 embossed on it: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Another favorite scripture of Guerrero's is Acts 2:38, which says, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

"I let the Holy Spirit guide me every day," Guerrero says. "I know I need to repent every day and be thankful for what God has given me."

Guerrero says he admires fellow boxer Andre Ward, the World Boxing Association/WBC Middleweight champion of the world and another warrior for Christ in the ring. "Andre's doing it the right way," Guerrero says. "I hope that I am too."

Eventually, Guerrero's shoulder healed up. It was then that he turned his attention to Mayweather, whom Guerrero has been hoping to fight for quite some time. It took a few months for the promoters to sign the contracts, which was yet another test of Guerrero's faith and patience.

And during his training period for the Mayweather fight, the enemy put another obstacle in his path. On a promotional trip to New York, he was arrested at JFK Airport for possession of an illegal handgun, which he never tried to conceal. He has a license to carry the weapon in his home state of California but not in New York, one of the toughest states on gun laws.

Guerrero's public relations representative, Mario Serrano, says Guerrero underwent the proper procedure when he checked into the airport. Because Guerrero has a California license and the gun is registered in his name, Serrano says he expects the charges to be dropped in the weeks following the fight.

Guerrero calls Mayweather (43-0), also known as “Money,” the “ultimate challenge.”

“He is the best fighter in boxing right now, hands down,” Guerrero says. “I am like those throwback fighters; I want to fight the best. As a champion, you catch the eyes and hearts of others and plant seeds. I hope that I will continue to do that no matter what the outcome of this fight will be.”