

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Sergiy Dzinziruk hopes to follow in the footsteps of Sergio Martinez by defeating, well, Sergio Martinez.

The junior middleweight champion from the Ukraine faces Martinez on March 12 from the MGM Grand Arena at Foxwoods Resort and Casino in Mashantucket, Conn.

Dzinziruk is not well known

in the United States, but neither was Martinez when he burst onto the scene a couple years ago. He also hasn't fought at middleweight, much like Martinez had rarely touched 160 pounds before beating Kelly Pavlik for the title last year.

"It's a lifetime opportunity for me," Dzinziruk said this week. "Yes, I'm a 154-pounder, but I'm going to fight at 160 and let's see what happens. I feel very confident with this weight."

Evidently, Martinez (46-2-2, 25 KOs) does as well.

The WBC titleholder from Argentina is coming off a banner two-fight swing at middleweight that earned him Fighter of the Year honors from most publications. He followed his bloody pounding of Pavlik by defending his title against Paul Williams last November, a stunning one-punch knockout that also earned him "Knockout of the Year" honors from most critics.

Those victories, along with his movie star-like looks and natural charisma, have finally endeared him to the American fight fan. It only took about 40 fights to get there.

"Sergiy isn't well known here but he is the top '54 pounder," promoter Lou DiBella said. "It's a terribly difficult fight for Sergio, but it's what he wants. HBO has a very good fight. I'm worried, but I have faith in my champion who understands the challenge."

Written by Administrator

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It was facing some of the most dangerous boxers in the world that finally allowed Martinez to gain some acclaim, and it took moving up in weight to get a big-money fight against Pavlik.

Now, Dzinziruk is seeking out one of the most dangerous fighters in the world in Martinez, and he too will be moving up a division to challenge for the title. Dzinziruk doesn't seem concerned about the weight, though, as much as the man who'll be standing across from him.

"We have watched (tapes) in the past and more recently of Sergio's fights. He is a great fighter and a great champion, but there's nothing special," Dzinziruk said. "He is just another fighter in front of me and I hope to win."

Dzinziruk (37-0, 23 KOs) built a flashy record fighting primarily in Poland, Germany and the Ukraine, but realized he would have to fight in the U.S. to make big money. So after winning the WBO 154-pound title from Daniel Santos in 2005 and defending it five times in Europe, he finally crossed over the Atlantic last year and defended it against Daniel Dawson.

The 35-year-old Dzinziruk dominated the fight, scoring a 10th-round knockout at the Chumash Casino in Santa Ynez, Calif. The victory was so emphatic that it won Dzinziruk numerous fans but also scared away a lot of potential opponents.

He hasn't fought since that night last May.

"He's never lost. He doesn't know how to lose. And it's not like he's been protected, he's 7-0 in world title fights," said Josh Roy of Banner Promotions, Dzinziruk's co-promoter. "He has made a concerted effort to come here (to the United States)."

And he's hoping that another victory, this time over Martinez, will be enough to finally raise his profile to the point that he believes he deserves.

"Fighting is my life, my world. All I know is how to box," Dzinziruk said. "I'm healthy, I love

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fighting and want to win a few more titles."

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