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Las Cruces fighter eyes No. 1 ranking

By Bill Knight / El Paso Times
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Las Cruces boxer Austin Trout is ranked No. 2 in the world WBA rankings. (Mark Lambie / El Paso Times)

EL PASO -- Austin Trout is so close now. The journey has been long and difficult and, in some ways, he has been close before.

Not like this, though.

The 24-year-old Las Cruces boxer has become a road warrior over the last six months, traveling to fight hometown boxers, and the result has paid off handsomely.

"We decided to take some chances," Trout's Houston-based manager, Bob Spagnola, said. "We took Austin on the road. He went to Canada and fought a Canadian fighter. He went to Panama and fought a Panamanian fighter. He went to Mexico and fought a Mexican fighter. Normally, that can be a death march. But he came through it all with flying colors and now he is ranked No. 2 in the world by the WBA."

Trout, who was born at Beaumont Hospital in El Paso, moved to Las Cruces at an early age when his mother was transferred from Fort Bliss to White Sands. He started boxing at age 10 and kept at it, graduating from Mayfield High School in Las Cruces along the way.

"My mother (M.J. Trout) got me into boxing," he said. "I was small for my age and so I was too small for football and basketball. My mother was always a boxing fan and she put me in because you fight people your own size. Right away it felt like a Rocky movie. Even the smell of the gym ... it just seemed like the way a boxing gym was supposed to smell. I wouldn't say I was pretty good in the beginning. It took a while for my skills to come. But the passion was always there."

Trout had a long and successful

amateur career. He had an amateur record of 160-45 and he won the United States Olympic trials. He lost, however, in a box-off and ended up being the alternate in his weight class.

"I went to Athens with the team," he said. "I was sparring the guy I lost to and I felt I had something to prove. I sparred pretty hard because I thought I

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should have been the guy fighting. Still, it was a great experience and I thank God for it. Everything happens for a reason. I got the Olympic experience, I guess, without the pressure of being an Olympian."

Trout was ever so close, and had he been on that Olympic team, he would have found promoters and backers eager to meet him when he returned home. Instead, he had to turn



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professional and start from scratch.

Trout said, "God doesn't make mistakes. What happened, happened and we are making the most and the best of it."

He turned professional four years ago and he has steadily built his résumé. He now has a 21-0 record with 13 knockouts. The 5-foot-10 slick southpaw is now ranked No. 2 in the world among light middleweights by the WBC. And he could be No. 1 after Saturday night.

"Daniel Santos (the WBA champion) is fighting the mandatory bout against the No. 1 challenger, Yuri Foreman," Spagnola said. "Unless there is something weird like a draw, Austin will slip into that No. 1 spot. That fight is part of the (HBO) pay-per-view card with Manny Pacquiao and Miguel Cotto. Austin has come through and he is getting very close."

Trout has fought his way through some tough customers, all on their home turf, over the past six months. Last Thursday, he defeated Taronze Washington in Dallas (120-108 on all three cards) for the vacant WBC Continental Americas belt. On Sept. 5 he went to Panama City, Panama, and defeated Nilson Julio Tapia for the WBA Latin belt. On June 26, he went to Ontario, Canada, and defeated Shawn Garnett. And, on March 14, he went to Torreon, Mexico, and defeated Martin Avila with a fourth round TKO for the WBA Continental Americas belt.

He has continued training at that same gym and with the same trainer, Louie Burke. Now, though, he is looking for that big belt ... that dream belt.

"It's been a long four years as a pro," he said. "As close as I am, I still feel so far away. But that's good. It keeps me hungry. I know I'm so close, so close to those pay-per-view fights, the HBO fights, all the big fights you dream about"

Trout knows that if Santos wins, he will likely take his time defending the title again. If Foreman wins, something could happen in Las Vegas as early as late January. Of course, it is boxing and there are no guarantees until the contracts are signed and, even then, sometimes ...

Trout said he loves boxing as much as he did when he was a wide-eyed 10-year-old, and he has even more motivation now -- his 7-year-old daughter Kaira, his 2-year-old son Elijah and his girlfriend, Taylor Hardardt, is three months away from delivering their newest daughter, Charlotte.

"That's just more motivation for me to get where I need to be," he said. "Make sure they are set. And, like I said, God doesn't make mistakes and I feel he has a definite plan for me."

And Trout knows he is very, very close to reaching those plans, to chasing down those dreams.

So close.

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