



Conte steps into ring as backer of clean boxing

BY MITCH ABRAMSON
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HE WASN'T present at Thursday's press conference, but Victor Conte, the infamous founder of BALCO — the lab at the center of baseball's steroid scandal a decade ago — cast a large shadow over the proceedings at the Barclays Center.

After serving four months in prison for distributing steroids, Conte has emerged a reformer, an outspoken advocate of clean sports who found a second career and a receptive audience in the world of boxing. Starting with Nonito Donaire, Conte has worked with a number of elite fighters, employing creative training techniques and strict nutritional regimens. Boxers make up the majority of his client list these days.

Conte's latest pupil is Shawn Porter, a welterweight from Akron, Ohio, who will challenge Devon Alexander for the IBF championship Saturday night at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn. It's by far the biggest fight of Porter's career since Porter (22-0-1, 14 KO's) hasn't fought anyone close to Alexander's level.

In other words, Porter needs Conte more than ever.

But Porter isn't the only fighter on the card with ties to Conte. He also briefly worked with Zab Judah, counseling him on nutritional supplements. Judah will face Paulie Malignaggi in the main event on Saturday in a battle of Brooklyn fighters. Conte's reach also extends to Amir Khan, who is doing commentary for Showtime and has worked with Conte for his last two fights.

Conte, 63, also has a relationship with Alexander. The two worked together for Alexander's split-decision victory against Lucas Matthyse in 2011. After the fight, Alexander discontinued the relationship, saying it wasn't right for him. Now, Alexander believes that Porter is using Conte as a crutch to pump up his confidence.

"My thoughts are they're scared," Alexander said on Thursday. "It's a mental thing. They need an edge. They know they can't match skill for skill."

"He knows he better be clean and be fair," Alexander added. "But I'm not worried about that."

That is precisely why Shawn and his father and trainer, Ken Porter, sought out Conte — to gain an edge. And it's also why Conte makes a point to bring up his past with all the athletes

he works with since he wants to make them aware of the potential consequences, including the slurs that might come along with it. Conte says he doesn't charge his clients a dime, viewing his work with them as "restitution" for past wrongs.

"I want them to understand that there's a price that they will pay for their association with me," said Conte, who was scheduled to fly to New York Thursday afternoon. "There will be suspicion. There will be questions. And listen, I'm an anti-doping advocate now — I have been for five years and the bottom line is this: all these athletes that I work with are clean. And there's nothing to hide."

Conte, who believes that perhaps 50% of the top fighters are currently using some form of PEDs, started working with Porter roughly two months before his last fight with Julio Diaz in September, a unanimous decision victory after he fought to a draw with Diaz last year. Ken Porter said he asked around about Conte before deciding to work with him.

"I had a question about (his past)," Ken Porter said. "And I felt like he was straight up with me about it."

Conte made arrangements to have Porter's blood collected in Las Vegas, where Porter trains, to determine a nutritional program to put him on. He next had Porter and his father travel to San Carlos, Calif., after he signed to fight Alexander (25-1, 14 KO's) for a nearly two-week "minicamp" at the Undisputed Boxing Gym just a few blocks from Conte's offices at the Scientific Nutrition for Advanced Conditioning (SNAC), the sports supplementary company he currently runs.

Porter did interval training with the Ukraine track guru Remi Korchemny (who was also involved in the BALCO doping scandal) and high-exertion hypoxic training, using a hypoxicator mask, a device that reduces the amount of oxygen to facilitate compensatory measures. Porter received deep tissue massage and went to Conte's offices and spent time in his hyperbaric chamber to further aid in the recovery process. Conte advised him on how to drop weight by eliminating carbohydrates and taking hot baths. Porter loved the experience and believes it will give him an edge on Saturday.

"I felt strong after and before workouts," Porter said. "If anything, we're a little bit stronger, a little bit quicker, a little bit faster, a little bit of everything just due to adding what we did."