



**FORMER CHAMPION EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ BATTLES
STREAKING CONTENDER MELVIN LOPEZ FOR VACANT
BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP LIVE ON SHOWTIME®
SATURDAY, AUGUST 12 IN PREMIER BOXING CHAMPIONS
EVENT FROM MGM NATIONAL HARBOR IN MARYLAND**

**Rising 140-Pound Star Gary Antuanne Russell Faces
Undefeated Kent Cruz in Co-Main Event**

**Sensational Top Prospect Travon Marshall Duels Unbeaten
Contender Gabriel Maestre in Telecast Opener at
9 PM ET/6 PM PT**

Tickets on Sale Now!

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD. – July 17, 2023 – Former world champion **Emmanuel Rodriguez** will take on streaking contender **Melvin Lopez** for the vacant IBF Bantamweight World Championship headlining action live on SHOWTIME on Saturday, August 12 in a Premier Boxing Champions event from The Theater at MGM National Harbor in Maryland.

The SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING® telecast begins at 9 p.m. ET/6 p.m. PT and will see undefeated rising star and Capitol Heights, Maryland-native **Gary Antuanne Russell** taking on fellow unbeaten **Kent Cruz** in the 10-round super lightweight co-main event, plus sensational top prospect and Landover, Maryland-native **Travon Marshall** duels unbeaten two-time Olympian **Gabriel Maestre** in the 10-round welterweight telecast opener.

Tickets for the live event, which is promoted by TGB Promotions, are on sale now and can be purchased through www.mgmnationalharbor.com/.

“This show on August 12 is jam-packed with action for boxing fans as they will get an exciting world title clash in addition to some of the area’s top rising talent in tough contests live on SHOWTIME,” said Tom Brown, President of TGB Promotions. “Emmanuel Rodriguez is hungry to make a second run as world champion at bantamweight and will be given all he can handle

by the red-hot Melvin Lopez. With two of Maryland's top rising stars in Gary Antuanne Russell and Travon Marshall stepping in for separate bouts before that showdown, this lines up to be a can't-miss card at MGM National Harbor."

Fighting out of Manati, Puerto Rico, Rodríguez (21-2, 13 KOs) defeated the previously unbeaten Gary Antonio Russell last October by technical decision to put himself back into position to fight for the world title. The 30-year-old originally won the IBF Bantamweight World Title with a unanimous decision victory over Paul Butler in 2018 and successfully defended it against the then-unbeaten Jason Moloney. Rodríguez went on to lose the title to former undisputed champion Naoya Inoue in their May 2019 title bout.

"I'm happy to have this chance to become a world champion again," said Rodríguez. "We're gonna go out there to win in spectacular fashion and my goal is to show that I'm the best fighter in the world at 118-pounds. My goal is to become undisputed at bantamweight, however I'm not overlooking Melvin Lopez, because he's a good fighter and will come to give it his all on August 12."

The 25-year-old Lopez (29-1, 19 KOs) has won eight-straight fights since suffering his only career loss in October 2019. Originally from Nicaragua and now fighting out of Miami, Lopez has fought professionally since 2015 and began competing stateside in 2018. Lopez scored three victories in 2022, starting the year with knockouts of Juan Gabriel Medina and Victor Ruiz, before most recently defeating Jobert Alvarez last December. Out of his last 10 victories, Lopez has ended nine of those inside of the distance.

"I'm very excited that the time is almost here to fight for a world title," said Lopez. "We've had a great training camp and everyone has sacrificed and worked hard so that we're at our best on August 12. I'm going to show everyone why I earned this opportunity and repay my team for all of their efforts. I have a lot of respect for Emmanuel, but the best man will have his hand raised when we share the ring."

Fighting out of his native Capitol Heights, Md., Russell (16-0, 16 KOs) will carry on the legacy left by his late father Gary Sr. A member of one of the sport's preeminent fighting families, Russell trains alongside his older brothers, former WBC Featherweight Champion Gary Jr. and bantamweight contender Gary Antonio. The 26-year-old has yet to allow an opponent to make it to the final bell since turning pro in 2017 following his run representing the U.S. at the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics. Russell defeated his most accomplished foes to date in 2022, stopping former champion Viktor Postol in February before a TKO win against former two-division champion Rances Barthelemy in July.

"When you're a student of the game like me, you have to consider that each step we take is about more than self-gratification. We're doing this for keeps," said Russell. "Kent Cruz has to catch up to me, but there's no need for me to look back. The only direction I'm going is forward and that means putting on a spectacular performance on August 12, and proving I'm the next world champion in this division."

The 30-year-old Cruz (16-0-3, 10 KOs) steps back into the ring after a pair of draws against fellow unbeaten Enriko Gogokhia in February and then November 2022. A native of St. Louis, Mo., Cruz defeated veterans Erik Humberto Castillo and Travis Hartman following a draw against Carlos Mohamed Rodriguez in April 2018. Cruz will pick up his past ring history with the Russell family on August 12, looking to avenge an amateur loss to Gary Allan Russell, Gary Antuanne's older brother.

“I’m very excited for this fight on August 12,” said Cruz. “I’ve been waiting for a fight like this my whole career, so we didn’t hesitate when offered this one. I’m coming in as the underdog and that’s what’s fueling me. I’ve been an underdog my whole life and on August 12 I’m gonna shock the world. When I win this fight, I’ll be in contention to fight for a world title and have my chance to achieve my childhood dream.”

At just 22-years-old, Marshall (8-0, 7 KOs) has quickly shown the skill, power and poise to become a highly regarded prospect in just eight fights. Born in Landover, Md., and now fighting out of Capitol Heights, Md., Marshall is trained by former contender Andrew Council and has already scored two stoppages in 2023. Most recently he dominated veteran contender Justin DeLoach via third-round knockout in March, his most impressive victory to date.

“I’m really excited to be fighting at home in front of my family, friends and fans on August 12,” said Marshall. “I’m working hard every day in the gym so that when fight night comes I’m 100% and ready to put on a great performance for everyone watching. My goal is to show everyone that I belong on the big stage, and that starts with a victory over Gabriel Maestre.”

A two-time Olympian for his home country of Venezuela, Maestre (5-0-1, 4 KOs) had an extensive amateur run that included victories over Brian Castano, Carlos Adames, Alexander Besputin, Oscar Molina and Brian Ceballo. The 36-year-old made his U.S. debut with a controversial decision victory over Mykal Fox in August 2021 before fighting fellow unbeaten Taras Shelestyuk to a draw last March. Most recently, Maestre defeated former two-division champion Devon Alexander after three rounds in April.

“I’m very ready for this fight against Travon Marshall,” said Maestre. “We are focused on the work that we need to put in so that we are victorious on August 12. I’m focused on having my hand raised and putting on a good show. We want to leave a good impression with the fans and move on to fight the big names in the welterweight division.”

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