

Photo: Aidan

THE PRIZE:
Cordoba (left),
promoter Peters
(centre) and
Dunne flank
the 'world' belt



Big questions asked of Dunne

Danny Flexen says home advantage can help Bernard but champion Cordoba is quality

BERNARD DUNNE faces the biggest fight of his career tomorrow (Saturday, March 21) when he challenges awkward Colombian southpaw **Ricardo Cordoba** for the 'WBA super-bantamweight title' over 12 rounds at Dublin's O2 Arena. Brian Peters promotes.

In terms of world title opportunities, Dunne may never have a better chance. The Dubliner, 27-1 (14), is fighting at home and against a champion who, while formidable, does not appear on the same level as rival claimants Israel Vazquez (WBC Emeritus), Celestino

Caballero (WBA 'Super'/IBF) or Juan Manuel Lopez (WBO).

At 29 Dunne is either at, or approaching, his peak. The rebuilding job from his shock 86-second defeat against Kiko Martinez in 2007 is complete. He has since won three on the bounce against decent opposition. While he has yet to recapture the form that saw him clearly outscore a near-his-best Esham Pickering for the European title in 2006 and defend impressively twice, he remains a fit, skilful, fast operator with a prodigious workrate.

Dunne captured 13 Irish titles as an amateur, so has sound basic skills. Long-time coach Harry Hawkins has set up a superb camp where his charge sparred Italian Alberto Servidei, the undefeated former European champion and William Gonzalez, Nicaragua's former world title challenger.

Cordoba, 34-1-2 (21), is everything a fighter would not want to face. He is a lefty, tall for the weight (5ft 8ins, an inch taller than Dunne), awkward and can punch. His only defeat, in 2005, was a split decision to Thai Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym... in Thailand. That was down at bantam and Ricardo is undefeated at the higher poundage. He holds a 2004 points win over country-

man Caballero, though Celestino has improved since.

His two draws came against the same man: then-WBA bantamweight boss Wladimir Sidorenko. Last time out, in September, Cordoba (24) defeated Nicaraguan southpaw Luis Alberto Perez for the WBA Interim belt, but the Colombian was upgraded when Caballero became 'Super' champion after adding Steve Molitor's IBF belt to his own WBA strap.

"El Maestrito" Cordoba played with the far shorter Perez, dominating an aggressive opponent behind a good jab, looping hooks and uppercuts. Cordoba's movement was also impressive and he knew when to tie Perez up. He does have a tendency to drop his right hand after throwing, leaving room for Dunne's sharp left hook.

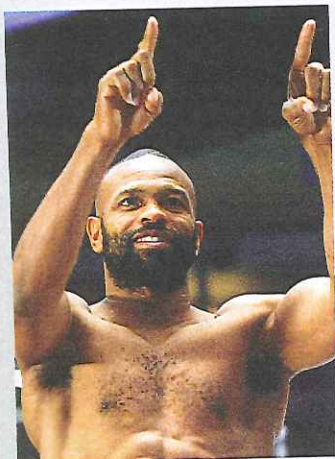
Ricardo has gone the 12-round distance five times to Dunne's twice.

If Bernard can force Cordoba to fight at his pace, he has a chance. The rangy Colombian has a relaxed pot-shooting style, so Dunne will look to disrupt his rhythm and target the body.

Dunne can put in a big effort to be ahead by halfway but Cordoba's economy of punches and experience can see him last the pace better. He can start to pick Dunne off from the middle rounds to take a close, unpopular, unanimous decision. Dunne will, however, have proved he belongs at this level.

Undercard highlights of this pro-am show are middleweight **Andy Lee** in a 10-rounder against **Alexander Sipos** of Germany, plus **Andrew Murray** challenging Spain's **Daniel Rasilla** for the vacant EU lightweight title.

BN Jones comes home



JONES: Not totally shot just yet

ROY JONES looks to prove there's life in the old dog yet when he faces former Joe Calzaghe and Jeff Lacy victim **OMAR SHEIKA** over 12 rounds tomorrow (Saturday, March 21) at the Civic Center in Roy's hometown of Pensacola, Florida. Jones' Square Ring Inc promote the mixed boxing and MMA bill and a home win is very much on the cards.

Jones, aged 40 and 52-5 (38), lost last time out in Joe Calzaghe's farewell fight but proved in his previous three contests - points wins over Prince Badi Ajamu, Anthony Hanshaw and blown-up former welter Felix Trinidad - that he is still a force at the level below.

Sheika, 27-8 (18), certainly fits

into that mould, and probably did even at his peak in 2004-2005 when he extended Lacy and then-WBC super-middle boss Markus Beyer. The Paterson, New Jersey man also gave it a real go against Calzaghe in 2000, though was stopped in five. A disputed win the same year over Glen Johnson aside, he has lost every time he's stepped up.

Jones, even this pale imitation of the former pound-for-pound king, should have too much for Sheika, whose cause is not aided by this being his first fight in 18 months. Jones may even get his first stoppage since 2002 (Clinton Woods).

It will be interesting to see how this boxing/MMA concept fares.