





IN YOUR HONOR

**SAM HOUSTON'S MIGUEL FLORES DREAMED OF ONE DAY STANDING NEXT TO HIS
OLDER BROTHER AS THEY HOISTED WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS IN THE AIR.
NOW HE'S DETERMINED TO WIN A TITLE IN TRIBUTE TO HIS HERO.**

WORDS BY MATT REMSBERG | PHOTOS BY TROY FIELDS



"I WANT TO WIN A WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP FOR MY BROTHER."

Miguel Flores took a deep breath. His older brother, Ben, had just absorbed a stinging blow in the first round of his fight against Al Seeger for the NABF super bantamweight title last April in Dallas. Miguel noticed his brother stumble and then freeze uncharacteristically for an instant before righting himself and continuing on.

It was just a split-second hesitation, nothing out of the ordinary considering the power behind Seeger's punch. Miguel had never seen Ben stagger like that, but he figured he was probably the only one who noticed it. Anyway, now Ben was back in the flow. Now he was turning the tables on Seeger. Now he looked like the fighter Miguel had idolized all his life.

Miguel exhaled.

Ben got better and better with each round, and he landed a few of his best punches in the seventh. He came out in the eighth intent on continuing the attack. But suddenly he was stumbling back toward his corner. Then he was slumping down on the ropes, seemingly trying to sit down. Confused, Seeger followed and landed three quick shots before the referee jumped in.

Miguel's mind flashed back to that first-round punch. Something wasn't right. He pushed past audience members and jumped into the ring in time

to hear Ben inexplicably repeat the phrase "let him lay down" three times before losing consciousness. Now Miguel knew his brother's mind wasn't right — Ben spoke almost exclusively in Spanish.

"Everyone was trying to keep me calm, people were pulling me back, but I knew something was wrong," Miguel says. "I was screaming and screaming. It was serious. I just knew it was."

Paramedics worked on Ben in the ring, and he was rushed to nearby Parkland Hospital to undergo emergency surgery to relieve swelling on his brain. Riding with his brother in the ambulance, Miguel noticed a tear trickle down Ben's cheek.

Deep breath. Exhale.

MIGUEL FLORES

School: Sam Houston // Class: 2011 // Weight Class: Super Bantamweight
Ht: 5-8 // Wt: 125 // Nickname: Mikey

Date	Opponent	Location	Result
Aug. 14, 2009	Cody Gardner	Houston	1st-round TKO
Sept. 30, 2009	Breuntre Miller	Texarkana, Ark.	2nd-round TKO
Oct. 23, 2009	Edson Renteria	Houston	1st-round TKO

TRAINING PARTNER NAGY AGUILERA ON FLORES' STYLE IN THE RING: "I'm a boxer, but I'm a fan, too, and Miguel is the kind of fighter I love to watch. He is exciting and he has no fear. He's the kind of fighter you root for."



**"HE'S BEEN IN A 100-DEGREE GYM
SIX DAYS A WEEK ALL HIS LIFE.
IT'S WHO HE IS."**



Finally, he was allowed to take up the sport at 8 years old, and Ben was extremely protective of his younger brother from Day 1. So much so that Miguel didn't realize his amateur career had started until his third fight. To keep Miguel from getting scared or nervous, Ben told his young brother that the fights were just sparring sessions.

Miguel didn't lose as an amateur until his eighth bout, at which point he heard from both Ben and his father (also named Miguel) that no boxing match could ever be taken lightly and proper preparation was a necessity. It's a lesson he has never forgotten.

From there, Miguel began a steady climb up the amateur ranks. He traveled the country for tournaments and won Ringside World Championships in 2006 and 2008. During workouts and long runs, Miguel and Ben concocted dream scenarios for how their careers would play out. Their ultimate fantasy was to each win a world championship while fighting as co-headliners on the same card. Deep down, though, Ben seemed to sense Miguel was destined to reach the top alone.

"He used to tell me, 'I may not make it in boxing, but I can see you have the potential to be a champion. If anything happens to me, you keep going,'" Miguel says.

So with those words guiding him, Miguel

returned to the ring two months after Ben passed away. His mother, Oliva, pleaded with him to give up the sport. His sister, Carmen, told him she could never watch another one of his fights. But Miguel never wavered, despite the emotions that going back to the gym drudged up. And there were some very tough moments.

Ben usually picked up Miguel after school so the two could head downtown to Main Boxing Gym together. One day on his way out of school, Miguel grabbed his phone and called his brother to let him know he was ready to go. As it was ringing, it hit him that no one was going to pick up.

Deep breath. Exhale.

"It had to be hard for him, though he always seemed composed," says Miguel's longtime trainer Aaron Navarro. "This is a kid who never did high school dances, he never spent a week at the beach over the summer. He's been in a 100-degree gym six days a week all his life. It's who he is, and I think part of him had to be relieved to get back to what he knew."

Miguel was already considered an extremely mature kid by those who knew him, and Ben's passing only served to strengthen that characteristic in him. If he's not at school or in the gym, he's helping care for Ben's infant son, Christopher. When Seeger called the hospital to

check on Ben after the fight, it was Miguel who spoke to the grief-stricken fighter.

"How he has handled this is beyond the level I would think any other 17-year-old could manage," Navarro says. "He has been there for his family and somehow returned to his career more focused than ever. He is a remarkable young man."

Miguel's first professional fight came 101 days after his brother died. It lasted 31 seconds. The 5-foot-8, 125-pounder knocked out his next two opponents in similar fashion.

"I want to win a world championship for my brother," Miguel says. "That's what I'm fighting for."

On March 12, Miguel will return to Dallas for his next professional bout as part of the run-up to Manny Pacquiao's much-anticipated fight with Joshua Clottey at Cowboys Stadium on the 13th. It will undoubtedly be the toughest test of Miguel's young career.

He will walk into the ring with "R.I.P. Ben" sewn into his white, red and green trunks. The crowd will cheer. The bell will ring.

Deep breath. Exhale. Fight. 



For more coverage of Miguel Flores, including video of him in action, head to the all-new ESPNRISE.COM