



How Mikey Garcia secured his release from Top Rank after drawn-out legal battle

By: [Mike Coppinger](#) | July 30, 2016 4:26 pm [Follow @MikeCoppinger](#)

NEW YORK — Mikey Garcia heard the whispers loud and clear. They were impossible to ignore.

Media pundits questioned his love for boxing; that it was simply something he happened to be good at — a career.

The little brother of renowned trainer Robert Garcia, boxing was in Mikey's blood. But after two-plus years out of the ring and with no end in sight to his hiatus, many fans wondered whether the graduate of the Ventura County (Calif.) Police Academy truly cared.

Of course, Mikey always did. He simply wished to be treated fairly.

The former two-division champion was fed up with longtime promoter Top Rank and believed his contract legally expired. Bob Arum and Co. felt quite differently.

And so a long, drawn-out court battle ensued that resulted in Garcia earning a clean release in April from the Las Vegas-based promotional outfit. Best of all for Mikey, he didn't have to pay a single cent (other than the legal fees, of course).

Now 28 years old, Garcia lost some prime years, a lot of momentum and even more money. But he's finally set to return to the ring for the first time since a January 2014 win against Juan Carlos Burgos.

Garcia has yet to sign with a promoter or manager, but will face former champ Elio Rojas in a junior welterweight bout Saturday in Brooklyn, N.Y., on Showtime. The main event features Al Haymon fighters and is promoted by Lou DiBella.

"I'm happy I'm free to resume my career," said Garcia (34-0, 28 KOs). "It wasn't an easy fight, but I finally got what I wanted. I fought to the end just like in a boxing match. This was to prove that fighters can win against promoters. I read my contract and didn't see how Top Rank could enforce an extension on me.

"You cannot enforce a world title extension when you're not champion. That's why I fought them; fought for what I truly believe is right. I'm free and very excited to get back. I will come back stronger, better than ever. I'm taking over."

To secure his release from Top Rank, Garcia enlisted the services of entertainment and sports attorney Bryan J. Freedman.

The Beverly Hills-based lawyer was confident the contract was no longer valid and was determined they would win in court. But he cautioned Mikey that going through with the trial likely meant a long process and a lot of time on the sideline.

Much like Andre Ward, who had a lengthy hiatus from the ring after a court battle with promoter Dan Goossen, Garcia was willing to wait it out to fight for what he believed. Even if that meant plenty of critics who felt he was acting entitled and ungrateful to his legendary promoter.

In late 2013, Garcia made the decision "knowing full well that this could go on two years and he could be out a lot of money," Freedman told USA TODAY Sports.

"The contract was running out. Our argument was that the contract was a good contract but at best it would run out in August," Arum, a Harvard Law School graduate, told USA TODAY Sports. "What was the point of running up legal fees if the contract had very little room to go? It was a few months. Enough is enough.

"I think we had proved our point. We had stood up for our rights so that he was unable to break the contract and leave us. It took him over two years."

Arum argued that the company extended a generous offer for Garcia to fight champion Terence Crawford in what would be a marquee fight. But Arum claims Garcia priced himself out by asking for a \$2 million purse.

Arum said that Garcia, upon earning his release, agreed to dismiss claims with prejudice and that in return Top Rank agreed to drop counter claims against him.

"Mikey Garcia, good luck to him, I wish him well. I really do," Arum said. "Unfortunately, that's another example of a guy who had a different view of his value from what we had. We believe that we were offering him a good amount of money. Again, I'm not in a position to take a huge loss because a guy has an opinion about his value. That's not to say he's not entitled to his own opinion. But I just couldn't meet his expectations."

Freedman has a very different view of how it all went down. He says Arum's statement about the Crawford offer is "an absolute lie."

"The statement that they let Mikey out of the contract because enough is enough is also an absolute mistrust," Freedman said. "They let Mikey out of the contract because a Federal judge was about to issue a ruling that they didn't want the rest of the fighters to see. And that ruling was that Mikey was not bound to fight solely for Top Rank.

"That ruling would have called into question the legitimacy of every single Top Rank with their fighters. I would fight Bob Arum in any Federal court, state court or arbitration venue on the issue of whether that statement that he made is truthful. I would bet everything that I have and I will ever have on the fact that that was a complete and utter misrepresentation of any version of the truth."

Freedman said that earlier in April, Top Rank wanted millions to let Garcia out of the contract. Then, an unfavorable trial hearing scared Top Rank and the company only requested a confidentiality agreement to sever ties.

Freedman declined to give them confidentiality because they "wanted everybody to know the truth. That Mikey did this for all fighters that they could realize they could stand up to anything they think is unfair and win."

It's common in many fighter-promoter agreements to have language stating that if a fighter wins a title, the contract is extended. That was a big point of contention in the case because Garcia eventually was stripped of his belt due to inactivity.

The case is sure to be referenced when fighters try to break free from promoters in the future. Freedman wonders why fighters need to have exclusive promotional contracts at all.

Now, though, Garcia can put this behind him, resume his career and try to get back to where he was as one of the best fighters in the sport.

"It's been a while since I've done this but I'm very excited to be back," he said. "... I have better skills than any fighter put in front of me. This will be the beginning of the next stage of my career. The most memorable part of my career."

(Photo of Garcia by Joe Camporeale-USA TODAY Sports)