

Forrest-Mayorga II: Forrest Faces Boxing's Toughest Foe

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Six Months ago, welterweight contender Vernon Forrest was on top of the boxing world. He was the WBA-WBC champ fresh off two big wins over his rival, former champ Shane Mosley. Going into his first fight with Ricardo Mayorga, many considered Forrest one of the top five fighters in the world.

In a short time, Forrest will have to deal with one of the meanest, toughest and scariest opponents that a fighter can face in his career: the hour before going out to face the fighter who just took him apart in his last fight. Sitting around the dressing room on fight night, watching the preliminaries on the monitor, time will seem to fly, and yet it will drag on at the same time. Whatever doubts or trepidations Forrest has had since the last meeting with Mayorga, will no doubt filter their way into his mind. How he handles them will go a long way in deciding how the rematch will turn out. He will be under monumental pressure in the last minutes before the bell for round one.

Another problem Forrest faces is that he's confronting an extremely cocky and confident fighter in Ricardo Mayorga. Mayorga is flying on top of the world and doesn't believe he can lose, especially to Forrest. I think Mayorga believes that he totally has Forrest psyched out and has not a single doubt that he will not only win this fight, but will go through Forrest without much resistance. You can be sure the cocky Mayorga will be doing everything and anything in his power to project to Forrest, "You can't beat me." The last thing Forrest can do is let Ricardo sense that he has even the slightest doubt, if he does. If Mayorga feels he has Vernon second-guessing himself, he'll be even more formidable and tougher to beat in this fight. It wouldn't surprise me at all if Mayorga came out in the first round and tried to end it, even more so than he usually does.

Since being stopped by Mayorga on January 25 of this year, Forrest has wrestled with two questions in his mind. First, did I just have an off night last time, and maybe looked past him, and secondly, does he possibly have my number and it wasn't a fluke he beat me, because I know I really did prepare for the fight? You can be certain that Forrest has wrestled with these two thoughts religiously for the past six months. Also, during the months since Mayorga, I'm sure he's been getting bombarded with thoughts and advice by those close to him and who care about him. He's been hearing it all: "Ya gotta box him this time and keep him at the end of your jab," and "Don't let him get inside." I'll bet some have even suggested going right at him in the first round and getting his respect.

Many broadcasters and pundits have also shared their thoughts over the airwaves and via the headlines. I've heard some say that this fight will tell a lot about Forrest. For instance, if he loses again to Mayorga, they'll rationalize he just had Mosley's number and he's not all that great after all. However, if he beats Mayorga, then he'll get all due praise and most will view the first fight as a fluke and say he really is a special fighter. I land somewhere in the middle. After he beat Mosley the first time, I thought he was very good, but not quite as good as he looked. The second fight confirmed this for me. Although Forrest fought well, the fight was very close.

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However, I do believe he matches up well with Mosley, but I don't particularly feel he is the better overall fighter. Against a common opponent like De La Hoya, I would give Mosley a much better chance to win than Forrest. This isn't just because Mosley has already beaten De La Hoya, it's based more on the fact that I think Mosley is a better and more complete fighter than Forrest.

I think the key for Forrest in this fight depends on how much of his confidence Mayorga took. When an undefeated fighter or champion is decisively beat, it's not a given that he'll recover and be the same fighter that he was before being defeated. However, it's not out of the question. Boxing history has shown that some fighters have come back and gone on to have great careers after suffering a devastating first loss. Whether or not Forrest falls into that category fighter remains to be seen. One thing is certain, the only way Forrest has a chance to come back, depends on what he believes in his heart. If he really believes he lost because of having an off night or was caught off guard and fought the wrong fight, then he can beat Mayorga in the rematch. The other possible scenario is that maybe Mayorga took a little piece of Forrest and convinced him that he (Mayorga) is the better fighter. It could be that getting stopped early makes it easier for Forrest to justify that he just got caught and the loss is nothing more than a bump in the road, opposed to taking a one sided beating over twelve rounds like he gave Mosley.

If Forrest really believes he lost more because of himself and what he didn't do or let Mayorga do, he is more than halfway there. This doesn't assure him a win; Mayorga may just have his number, just like when Forrest beat Mosley in their first fight. As thorough as the victory was, you can tell the way Mosley fought in the rematch that he felt he lost more because of himself than because of Forrest. Though Mosley lost the rematch, he was clearly in the fight and did all he could to try to win it. What we found was that although Forrest has Mosley's number, he didn't take a piece of his heart or confidence. Mosley is still capable of winning a piece of the title again, as long as he doesn't have to beat Forrest to get it. When Forrest meets Mayorga in the rematch, we'll find out whether or not Mayorga took a piece of him, or if he's just better.