

Trinidad-Mayorga: Credit Where Credit Is Due

Written by Joey Knish
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This past weekend fight fans both casual and die-hard were treated to an excellent battle of skill versus will as Ricardo 'El Matador' Mayorga and Felix 'Tito' Trinidad put on a display that demonstrated boxing at its best. There was no questionable decision, no wavering heart, no mismatch, and no doubt we had all witnessed a great fight.

While the fight itself will live on until we see another as good or better, what shouldn't be lost is the fact that a fight of that magnitude was even made when considering all the questions heading in. Both men took great risks in accepting the contract under the conditions, and with great risk come great rewards. And we were greatly rewarded.

Questions ran rampant heading into the Don King production and only the fight itself could provide the answers. Felix Trinidad had been a great champion starting at welterweight and successfully moved up in weight to become the WBA Middleweight champion when he TKO'd William Joppy in May of 2001. His victories were almost always memorable, as his habit of getting knocked down only to storm back and knock out his opponent made for exciting fights. That was until he faced Bernard Hopkins.

The Executioner dominated Trinidad for most of twelve rounds before Papa Trinidad rescued his son and fighter from further pugilistic abuses and possible permanent damage. While Tito went on to fight again, he came back into this weekend's bout with Mayorga having been dormant for nearly two-and-a-half years. Post-Hopkins would Trinidad be the same accurate puncher or did absorbing too many shots during his 12-year career slow him down a notch or two?

Being away from enemy fire for such an extended period of time meant for certain that Trinidad would have to shake off some ring rust for a round or two. Fighting a mad bomber that throws caution to the wind like Ricardo Mayorga was risky business – if Trinidad wasn't afforded any early rounds to get his groove back, how would he respond being thrown straight into the fire?

Finally, was it a sound strategy to take on the heavy-handed Nicaraguan who had knocked out 23 opponents in his 27 victories? That question is even more profound when considering the number of times - now 10 and counting - Trinidad had been sent to the canvas in his professional career. If Tito happened to show signs of ring rust and came out slow against the hard-hitting Mayorga, well, we know his chin had already been tried and found wanting.

The biggest gamble Ricardo Mayorga was taking had to be the huge jump in weight. The man who recently made the 147-pound Welter limit while eating a chicken wing and had just one fight at 154 under his belt was now jumping in weight again, to Middleweight. Less than one year ago he was fighting 147 pound opponents and now would do battle 13-pounds heavier. If Mayorga could still make Welterweight limit of 147 pounds, why challenge one of our era's best at 160? In the end the answer likely had much to do with Ricardo's determined belief that he was capable of absorbing Trinidad's punches on his iron jaw better than Tito could take the

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free-swinging Mayorga's blows.

Behind the scenes much had been made of problems that 'El Matador' had in his native Nicaragua. There was a reported high-speed traffic accident that left Mayorga and a partner dangling in a wreck. Then charges were brought against him for an alleged rape incident which continues with a court date just days after this biggest fight of his career against Trinidad. Would out of ring distractions affect Mayorga's inside the ring performance and preparation?

The answers came early and often, as it was clear that Mayorga could handle Trinidad's power and that Tito was able to work the rust off. After a tentative start for Trinidad he began to find his groove as early as the second round and Mayorga demonstrated his iron chin as he stuck out it for Tito to hammer with his hook. Trinidad obliged with consecutive concussive left hooks – Mayorga took them and the tone for the fight was set. Mayorga had made his point that he could take what was given, and Trinidad was more than content to give it.

Interestingly it was Trinidad who would first touch the canvas when, in the third round, he was the recipient of a short right and his balance failed him. However, as the fight wore on the accurate combination punching of the Boricua easily found its mark on Mayorga's face – and it painted a bloody picture as the warrior bled from the nose and was cut under his left eye. The additional weight did seem to slow Mayorga and by the third round his punches had lost some pop and his hands were being carried low. Mayorga took astounding punishment and we were often left awestruck that 'El Matador' was still standing, albeit sometimes on shaky legs.

In sticking with his technical dominance of the fight, Trinidad began to reassert his focus on the body with left jabs and straight rights up top, followed by debilitating left hooks and upper cuts to the body. In the end, the fateful eighth round, Ricardo Mayorga went down for the third time in less than three minutes and referee Steve Smoger rightfully closed the book on a great boxing story.

The answers to all the pundits' questions added up to one great fight. Felix Trinidad, Ricardo Mayorga, Don King—for risking his moneymaker Trinidad—and referee Steve Smoger—for exercising just the right amount of influence in the ring—all deserve credit for their parts in putting on a great show.

It was The Sweet Science at its best.