

Miguel Cotto: One of Boxing's Future Stars

Written by Matthew Aguilar
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Miguel Cotto is a future star. And, though he's just 21-0, that future may be sooner rather than later.

The multi-talented junior welterweight blew away a very game and brave Kelson Pinto Saturday - a fighter who had defeated Cotto twice in the amateurs. Some wondered whether Pinto was to Cotto as Vernon Forrest was to Shane Mosley. But, as it turned out, it was Cotto who had Pinto's number in the professional ranks, using an array of short power punches to destroy his archrival.

The root of his success, however, isn't necessarily punching power - even though he has an abundance of it. No, Cotto's primary strength seems to be his boxing instincts and his calm demeanor. Cotto knows when to punch with authority, when to back off, when to move the opposite direction, when to attack and when to take a breather. There were numerous times Saturday when Cotto attacked like a 140-pound Pit-Bull, then backed off just as Pinto was starting to time his punches. There were times he led, and times he countered.

Sometimes he would box; other times he would punch.

Talk about the very definition of a boxer/puncher.

Cotto is often compared to countrymen Felix Trinidad and Wilfredo Gomez, but, stylistically, he bears resemblance more to Gomez. Both were aggressive, but Trinidad was more puncher than boxer - though, with his tall, lean frame, he probably could have boxed an opponent's ears off if he chose to.

Gomez was more versatile. Not only was he a murderous puncher, as he demonstrated against the likes of Derrick Holmes and Carlos Zarate, but he could jab and move with the best of them. Check out his masterful 1984 decision over Juan LaPorte, where he mixed it up and confused the defending champion - and the fight ultimately took the look of a sparring session.

The only knock on the great Puerto Rican duo: Both had unpredictable chins. Trinidad was dropped by Yory Boy Campas and knocked out by Bernard Hopkins. Gomez was knocked out by light-punching Salvador Sanchez and by Azumah Nelson.

Cotto's chin seems to be carved from granite. Which is why - dare we say it - Cotto could end up being greater than either.

His jaw has been severely tested in his last two fights. Back in May, rock-hard Lovemore N'Dou caught Cotto with some big shots, and Cotto responded by changing his strategy from brawler to boxer and winning a decision. Though he was getting nailed, he was aware enough to change strategies mid-stream.

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Saturday, he walked right through Pinto's punches - no minor task considering his two-time amateur conqueror had 18 knockouts in 20 contests. Unlike N'Dou, he chose to go toe-to-toe with Pinto. And the results were overwhelmingly in his favor.

Now, Cotto's future is limitless. After destroying Pinto, it's only a matter of time before he guns for the elite 140-pounders, which includes perhaps the most talented crop of fighters in the sport. Kostya Tsyzu, Shamba Mitchell, Arturo Gatti, Vivian Harris, Ricky Hatton and, perhaps the best pound-for-pound fighter on the planet, Floyd Mayweather will prove whether Cotto is great - or not.

Regardless, Cotto is right there - just about ready to see how far his incredible skills can take him. And if his career is half as exciting as those of Trinidad or Gomez, the boxing fans will be in for some kind of treat.