

## Floyd Mayweather Jr. Still Searching For Superstardom

Written by Jake Donovan

Thursday, 20 January 2005 18:00

---

It was a little over six years ago when **Floyd Mayweather, Jr.** and greatness started to get mentioned in the same sentence. The first hint of it for the 1996 Olympian came in his eighteenth pro fight, when he delivered a flawless performance in dismantling two-time junior lightweight champion **Genaro**

**“Chicanito” Hernandez**

, lifting the WBC title in the process. As impressive as the effort was, he barely gave fans and critics time to appreciate it. Eleven weeks later, he went to Miami and stopped then-top contender

**Angel Manfredy**

in less than two rounds. His debut in South Beach capped a year so impressive that he was universally recognized as 1998’s Fighter of the Year.

Six years, a lengthy stay in the pound for pound rankings and more than a dozen wins later, Floyd (32-0, 21KO) finds himself returning to Miami, no further along in terms of popularity and mainstream appeal as he takes on tough yet unheralded **Henry Bruseles** (live on HBO, January 22, 10PM ET/7PM PT). In associating fighters with movies, Floyd’s talent and in-the-ring accomplishments could be referred to as “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” Yet, somehow, his marketability and out-of-the ring activities are more reminiscent of “Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Misfortunate Events.”

As of late, part of the reason for the leveling off of his career is his dubious business decisions. Having long raised the bar for level of competition, Floyd’s arrival in the super lightweight division has been little more than an ordinary run thus far. It was assumed that Floyd’s plans to abandon the lightweight division, coupled with his past penchant for seeking out the absolute best, would help liven up things in the division, arguably the deepest in the sport. Instead, he ultimately settled for former WBO 140 lb champ **DeMarcus “Chop Chop” Corley**, in hopes that it would lead to a mandatory title shot against WBC champ and latest matinee idol

**Arturo Gatti**

On the surface, it’s a sound plan. With **Kostya Tszyu** on the sidelines at the time and already obligated to face then IBF interim champion

**Sharmba Mitchell**

, who better to face than the most popular name in the division in Gatti. However, in looking back at Floyd’s career, what makes the scenario disturbing is the fact that he managed to arrive at the point where he’s dependent upon another fighter in order to make himself a household name.

Part of the misfortune stemmed from comments Floyd made a few years ago, in regard to a looming HBO contract. When presented with the contract offer, Floyd was not satisfied with the numbers, and stated that it was “slave wages compared to what **Naseem Hamed** was making.” Simply put, he demanded that he be paid closer to the heavyweight-like numbers Naseem was

## Floyd Mayweather Jr. Still Searching For Superstardom

Written by Jake Donovan

Thursday, 20 January 2005 18:00

---

making. Unfortunately for Floyd, many in the press elected to only use part of the quote, dropping the “compared to...” part. The end result was Mayweather coming across as yet another spoiled potential superstar.

Also looming at the time was his well-publicized feud with his father, who at the time was his head trainer. Everyone from the media all the way up to Top Rank and HBO seemed to have a field day with Floyd’s out-of-the-ring troubles. While they were busy painting him as a monster of sorts, Top Rank was busy grooming its next lower weight star in the making, **Diego “Chico” Corrales**

Having smoked

Roberto “Grandpa” Garcia

in winning the IBF junior lightweight title the year prior on a Mike Tyson under card, Chico was an instant hit. His penchant for slugging and his eye-popping two-fisted power was easy to fall in love with. So much so, that when news broke of his being involved in a violent domestic dispute, the media seemingly gave him the benefit of the doubt. Floyd was afforded no such luxury, and was forced to play the role of villain going into their January 2001 super fight.

As the old saying goes, “Winning cures many things.” With fifty-seven wins and zero losses between Floyd and Chico – three years ago tonight, as this article is written – there shouldn’t be much to cure. Yet somehow, neither fighter had garnered much in the form of sympathy heading in. Not even appeasing HBO’s demands of appearing on their lowly-regarded and now defunct “KO Nation” series was enough for Floyd to gain support. So he took matters into his own hands, as he and manager **James Prince** guaranteed not only a win, but would declare such as a victory for battered housewives across America.

The comments didn’t gain him any more fans, but his near-perfect performance over the next ten rounds would force the hate to come to a screeching halt, if only for an evening. Ten dominant rounds later, a reversal of fortunes took place. In one corner, it was a teary-eyed Floyd Jr. and his father embracing, not only for the victory in the ring, but to let the world – and more importantly each other – know that the time had come for reconciliation. In the other, the now-defeated Chico was irate in launching a profanity-laced tirade at his trainer and father, Ray Woods, for having been forced to quit what would be his last fight for the next two years. While Floyd was once again revered as a hero and the recipient of the same HBO contract he had rejected a year earlier, Chico was now seen – and convicted in a court of law – as a wife-beater.

The rediscovered fame did not last for long, though. In a May defense against future belt holder **Carlos “Famoso” Hernandez**

, Floyd managed to injure both of his hands and was forced to deliver a less than thrilling performance en route to victory. The bout was also the only time that he had ever visited the canvas, despite not having been hit prior to the knockdown. In fact, he had landed a punch, and then took a knee in trying to recover from the pain felt in his now broken hand. To date, it was the only time he has ever been officially called for a knockdown. However, it wasn’t the last time that he would deliver a performance that left a lot to be desired.

In April 2002, after having become the first and only fighter to stop the tough **Jesus Chavez** for his eighth title defense, Floyd abandoned the title, and set his sights on WBC lightweight

## Floyd Mayweather Jr. Still Searching For Superstardom

Written by Jake Donovan

Thursday, 20 January 2005 18:00

---

champion

Jose Luis Castillo

. It was his fourth straight fight against a current or future world champion. But much as he had done so early into his championship run, Floyd had spoiled fans to the point where the ridiculously impressive level of competition was no longer reward enough to the general public. Not after reports had leaked out about "Pretty Boy" being involved in not one, but two domestic disputes, both involving women who were mothers to his children. The news, coupled with his renewed quarrel with Top Rank, had once again made Floyd public enemy number one.

Such was reflected in the fans reaction at the end of his fight with Castillo, the first of two times they would square off in 2002. Despite once again injuring his hands, Floyd pulled out a unanimous decision that was scored wider on the official scorecards than according to the paying public. In fact, many in attendance, as well as the HBO broadcast team, seemingly no longer in love with Floyd any longer either, insisted that Castillo was screwed out of the decision and his title.

Castillo was given a rematch in Vegas, and **Bob Arum** was given more grief by Floyd. Why am I fighting on the West Coast, where nobody gives a damn about African-American fighters, Floyd had questioned. Arum's response was that he was impossible to market, though Floyd felt that he'd be a much better sell on the East coast, where he could also better promote his rap label, Philthy Rich Records. Instead, Arum not only kept the rematch in Vegas, but demoted the fight from main event to co-feature, allowing the long-awaited (though ultimately disappointing) Wladimir Klitschko-Jameel McCline heavyweight bout to play headliner that evening. Floyd responded by doing just enough to win, averaging less than 35 punches a round yet still decisively beating Castillo to confirm his claim as lightweight champion. Arum's response? "Three more fights (left on his promotional contract), and I'm counting every one of them."

By the time 2003 had rolled around, Floyd was basically a man without a country. More out-of-the-ring occurrences had transpired. He and his father had permanently split, his promoter seemed all but disinterested in further elevating his mainstream status, and reports of a bouncer allegedly being attacked by Floyd and his crew had surfaced. And after having announced **Victoriano Sosa** as his next challenger, those who had grown accustomed to Floyd calling out and facing the best groaned at the thought of a potential mismatch. Forget for a moment that the "easiest" fight in the past three years for Floyd just happened to be the then-toughest fight for another divisional champ, IBF lightweight titlist

**Paul Spadafora**

, who oddly enough was preparing for a unification bout with WBA champ Leo Dorin at the time.

After breezing through Sosa en route to a unanimous decision, Mayweather had set his sights on bigger game, hoping to conjure up the mainstream appeal he felt was befitting of his God-given talent. Mayweather had flirted with the idea of heading toward the super lightweight division, which at the time was the deepest division in boxing. Before doing so, he opted for one last defense, this to be a hometown (Grand Rapids, MI) against all-action knockout artist **Phillip "Time Bomb" N'Dou**

. The knock on N'Dou was that he was a junior lightweight moving up in weight, and that he was somewhat chinny. His power seemed to come up with him, but unfortunately so did his chin

## Floyd Mayweather Jr. Still Searching For Superstardom

Written by Jake Donovan

Thursday, 20 January 2005 18:00

---

issues, as Mayweather walked through him, scoring three knockdowns en route to his first stoppage win in almost two years. Finally, it seemed, Mayweather was on his way toward superstardom.

2004 was supposed to be the year in which Floyd would leave no doubt as to who was the best in the sport. But after having called out everyone from Kostya Tszyu at 140, all the way up to **Oscar de la Hoya**

at 154, Floyd settled on a WBC junior welterweight elimination bout with Spadafora. However, Spadafora passed, not liking what was offered, in addition to enduring multiple run-ins with the law himself. Lazcano once again passed on the fight, instead opting for tough-as-nails Jose Luis Castillo for far less money and a shot at Floyd's now vacant WBC lightweight crown. Lazcano lost, and Floyd wound up with Corley, and a long awaited return to the Northeast.

His theory on marketability on the Right Coast proved true, as a packed house had filed into the Atlantic City Convention Center for what turned out to be an action packed, if ultimately one-sided, contest. Floyd dropped the former WBO champion twice in taking a lopsided unanimous decision, thus earning a mandatory crack at WBC champ Arturo Gatti. All he had to do was wait out Gatti's fight with Dorin, and he'd be next in line. Or so he thought.

Instead of the WBC doing their job and enforcing a mandatory bout between Gatti and Mayweather, Team Gatti announced that he would be facing **Jesse James Leija**, who had scored an upset in knocking off once-promising prospect

**Francisco "Panchito" Bojado**

. Gatti had even declared that he'd be willing to give up his WBC title if forced into such a position. Instead, the WBC forced Mayweather into a different position and sans Vaseline, in sanctioning a second straight optional defense, despite their own rules to the contrary.

The news had suddenly thrown Mayweather's career for a loop. His contract with both HBO and Top Rank had run out, which meant that he had nobody to promote his next contest, nor the \$3 million + payday he had grown accustomed to making while under the network contract. He passed on a title shot against WBA champion "**Vicious**" **Vivian Harris**, despite a verbal promise from Main Events that should he win, they'd give him a 50/50 split for a 2005 unification match against Gatti. Floyd would rather maintain his position as WBC mandatory than have to worry about a potential unification bout falling through the cracks, it seemed.

The reasoning seemed logical enough, but his next move would be anything but. The WBC, perhaps in an effort to atone for the "oversight" in allowing Gatti to sidestep his mandatory, offered Floyd a chance to fight for the interim title. As silly as interim titles are viewed, the payoff would be the mandatory receiving a 45% purse split against the champion, as opposed to the standard 25% (or 20% if the challenger lands the fight in his hometown). Simply put, Floyd would be ensured the largest payday of his career, all while earning near purse parity with one of the sport's most popular non-heavyweights.

However, Floyd was bothered by the fact that he had to first split a good portion of the \$1.5 million that HBO was offering for the fight with the next highest rated WBC contender, **Gianluca Branco**

## Floyd Mayweather Jr. Still Searching For Superstardom

Written by Jake Donovan

Thursday, 20 January 2005 18:00

---

HBO, nobody's fan when it comes to the alphabets, didn't mind the matchup, because Branco had fought Gatti the year prior and the network loves to showcase "comparison" matches. Floyd did mind, and the fight along with his chances at a near even split with Gatti later in 2005, was instantly squashed.

This is where Bruseles finally fits in. While a tough fighter and having come out victorious against **Wilfredo Negron** in what is considered one of the top fights of 2004, Bruseles is tailor-made for Mayweather. Fun to watch, but extremely hittable, and not really spectacular in any given area. More importantly, for the sake of the fight being made, he comes cheaper than what Branco was asking, or felt to which he was entitled.

While Floyd stands to pocket a little more for this fight, the thing he must realize is that the adage "winning cures many things" no longer applies. Not when you are involved in a series of fights where the outcome is all but a foregone conclusion. Instead, a new term applies, in regard to both his star status and future paydays; cheap is expensive. He's saving now – in addition to the larger split he keeps for this fight, he also stands pat and bides his time while waiting for Gatti. But what he doesn't realize is that next Saturday is Gatti's last fight under HBO contract. Also, Gatti is to the point where he refuses to even discuss Mayweather, despite the fact that he has been Arturo's mandatory for eight months.

If and when negotiations commence, there is no guarantee that enough money is offered to appease both parties. Floyd has already put himself in the position of most likely having to accept 25% of the total purse offered for such a fight. There is also no guarantee that Gatti keeps the title – he may very well lose to Leija, who has been slept on and written off for years now, yet refused to go away. Assuming that Arturo is victorious, who's to say that he doesn't vacate the title? Or even take it one step further, and retire? His management had once hinted after the third fight with Micky Ward that they'd be looking at three more fights and then possibly call it a career. What a coincidence that they signed a three-fight contract with HBO at the time.

If anything were to occur where Floyd and Gatti do not fight each other this year, the likely scenario is that Floyd winds up fighting for a vacant WBC title. That would leave him with a fight against the winner of Branco – **Junior Witter**. On paper, Floyd beats both, though Witter is no walk in the park. In reality, nobody would really care. Which would leave Floyd still no better off than he was six years ago.