

## Boxing Predictions: Gatti vs. Leija

Written by Chris Gielty

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### The boxing writers at TheSweetScience.com return with their picks for Saturday night's main event - Arturo Gatti vs. Jesse James Leija.

I'll take Leija in the upset.

#### **Mitch Abramson**

Jesse James Leija is a crafty veteran. He is a survivor. His career should have ended a while back, but good matchmaking and a champion's heart have kept him in the limelight. I never thought he would defeat the talented, hard punching Bojado. Still, Leija toughed out the rough times and exposed Bojado's weaknesses to win. This will be Leija's last major fight. Arturo will prove to be too good. Gatti's a cash cow and this bout is just to showcase him for more serious bouts down the road. Gatti to win by stoppage within ten rounds.

#### **Jim Amato**

Gatti, who has come so far boxing under Buddy McGirt, may be better served to brawl again for this one, considering his advantages in strength and power. Remember what Oscar De La Hoya did to him 10 years ago? But he'll probably start out boxing, which will play right into Leija's hands - because Jesse James is better in that regard. By the time Gatti figures out that forcing the issue would better suit him, he'll be behind on points. But he'll come back in the late rounds, hurt Leija and win a close and controversial split decision. Afterwards, he won't look like a 5-1 favorite. And Floyd Mayweather will be licking his chops.

#### **Matt Aguilar**

Gatti by unanimous decision: I want to pick Leija here, because I think Gatti's power is slightly overstated and Leija is craftier than most of Gatti's opponents since he began working with Buddy McGirt.

#### **Steve Argeris**

Arturo Gatti squares off with Jesse James Leija in a real showdown of veterans. Gatti is three inches taller at 5'8", and six years younger, and is no longer the "Ultimate Warrior," preferring to box instead. Leija has won four in a row, against more modest opposition, but came on to deflate the Bojado myth, while Gatti was dispatching Leonard Dorin in the main event in their last fight on July 24. Gatti has made a remarkable transformation to boxer, after once losing three fights in a row to Angel Manfredy and Ivan Robinson (twice) in 1998. But I predict that Gatti will be too quick for the straight-ahead Texan, and possibly stop him because Leija has a real penchant to bleed. You can never count Leija out, but at 47-6-2 (19), he's contemplated retirement for years. Gatti could also get cut, if only because Leija comes in straight with his shaved head. I don't think this fight will be the thriller we used to expect from Gatti, but he's 38-6 (29), and has given fans so many rousing battles, he's unquestionably one of the best action fighters in the history of the sport.

#### **Jim Brady**

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Any fighter who can beat Azumah Nelson has a shot against anyone. Leija's credentials are very good. But remember, he's coming up to junior welterweight from featherweight. That's a long way. You can argue that Gatti was a junior lightweight. That's true. But he's naturally bigger and stronger than Leija. And that will make the difference. Leija is very tough, he takes a good shot, so he'll hang in there. But he's been kayoed by Sugar Shane Mosley and Oscar De La Hoya. And Gatti is a big puncher. Gatti is just too big and too strong. And at this point of his career, Gatti has improved; he's a better all-around fighter now. I pick Gatti by 7th round knockout.

### **"Irish" Bobby Cassidy, Sr.**

I think I would have preferred to see this fight three or four years ago. Leija is 38 and Gatti is 32. But they are a pair of throwback fighters who always give an honest effort in the ring. Ultimately, Gatti's physical advantages will be too much to overcome. He is too strong and too big for Leija. I think Gatti stops him in the 9th round.

### **Robert Cassidy, Jr.**

Many are looking (hoping?) for the upset here, but I just can't see it. Jesse James Leija is a great guy, and a fun fighter to watch. But way too much has been made of his upset win over Panchito Bojado. Against Gatti, Jesse will soon realize that he's not in there with an unmotivated, underachieving youngster. He'll still put up a good account of himself, but I think Gatti will be too much for him across the board. Not sure that Arturo knocks him out, but it's not unreasonable to believe that cuts will prevent this one from going twelve. Gatti TKO10.

### **Jake Donovan**

A couple of great old pros, a couple of world-class bleeders, go at it at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City Saturday night. This should be a close fight, with whoever doesn't fall apart first (cuts, broken hands) taking the decision. I lean toward Gatti, because he's younger, bigger, stronger, and has learned to adapt in order to win. But both these pugs both gotta lotta class – any way you cut it. This looks like a fight not to miss.

### **Robert Ecksel**

An interesting matchup between 2 of the easiest to cheer for fighters in the game. Since Buddy McGirt took over, there hasn't been much 'thunder' in the Gatti game plan at all. Crafty and experienced as Leija is, under McGirt's guiding hand, Gatti's edge in movement and speed should carry Gatti to a decision victory.

### **Chris Gielty**

Gatti by decision unless the fight is stopped by cuts. Thanks to Buddy McGirt, Gatti will simply outbox Leija and not try to slug it out with him.

### **Rick Folstad**

We found out in the Leija-Bojado fight that Leija, at 38, is motivated and able to deal with a blitzing left hooker. Straight punches were the key against the young Bojado's wide, power-offensive bravado. Gatti will fight inside only in spots, working behind his left jab and selecting his moments to bomb. Leija's quick, straight handed flurries will be a problem for Gatti, if Gatti's stoppage of Dorin has him knockout crazed, as in his mid-career, highlight reel phase.

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Then all hell could break loose! Gatti TKO 10 Leija.

### **Patrick Kehoe**

Win or lose, Gatti will probably get busted up, and there's always the danger he could be stopped on cuts. But betting against Gatti is like picking against the Patriots in a big game. Gatti by middle-round TKO.

### **George Kimball**

Arturo Gatti will make short work of Jesse James Leija. This is not to take anything away from the classy, consummate professional Leija, but will attest to Gatti's battle-ready approach to prove to the boxing world that Leija wasn't taken lightly and that boxing's "pound-for-pound most exciting fighter" is indeed ready to move up to HBO Pay-Per-View status and worthy to face the mega-talented Floyd Mayweather. Gatti TKO within 6 rounds.

### **Mike Indri**

We all know that Gatti has improved as far as technique goes but he is still Arturo Gatti and that means we are going to see him engage Leija and let the fists fly. If Gatti moves and boxes, Leija will stalk around the clock until they meet and then it becomes a fight he can win. Both men cut, and it may end up deciding this bout, and the fact that Gatti continues to have problems with his hands at this stage in his career may be the wildcard. A convenient pick may be Gatti, but this is a fight Leija can win in an upset just as he did against Francisco Bojado. I think he does it again. Leija by late TKO.

### **Joey Knish**

It feels like they're trying too hard to create a typical Arturo Gatti fight. On paper this should be a war as Leija is as tough as they come. However things rarely happen in the way you expect. I see Gatti comfortably boxing and building a lead over a game but outclassed Leija. There will be a few good exchanges, but Gatti will not resort to his brawling ways. Midway through the fight, Leija will get busted open. He'll try to fight on, but the doctor will eventually stop the fight due to a cut in the 9th or 10th.

### **Marc Lichtenfeld**

This fight was made for one reason, and only one reason: To keep Gatti sharp and in front of the public. The handwriting is on the wall signaling Gatti is being lined up for a fight with Floyd Mayweather. As good as Mayweather is, his fights don't draw flies. He actually needs the exposure Gatti can bring to him. Leija is tough so he should stick around for a while. Unless Gatti makes this fight tougher than it should be, he should win relatively easy.

### **Frank Lotierzo**

Gatti is something like -600, which totally blows my mind. He is the legitimate favorite because of venue, recent results, and ruination of a Gatti-Mayweather windfall if Leija wins (wink-wink), but come on. If they don't sprint out of their corners at opening bell and split open each other's foreheads with a mutual head butt, Leija is in the fight. Hey, the man fought Azumah Nelson four times. I'll pick Gatti by eighth-round technical decision. But I suspect the scorecards might leave us seeing more red than just the blood streaming down the face(s) of the fighter(s).

### **David Mayo**

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I could make a compelling argument for either fighter: Gatti being outboxed and outslicked by a re-invigorated Leija, or Gatti roughing up and busting up Leija. Something tells me that because Gatti's thinking ahead to Mayweather, Leija makes it a lot closer than it has to be. Gatti W 12.

### **Robert Mladinich**

Intriguing bout, pitting two true blue-collar warriors together. Not since Ward will Gatti face such a seasoned and determined opponent and the question of whether the usually irrepressible Gatti can maintain focus with Mayweather on the horizon does exist. However, whilst I'm reluctant to disregard Leija on the over-used and over-stated issues of natural weight, age, etc., I'm going to. Gatti has demonstrated an ability to add cunning to his usual face-first march, too, and I think that flexibility will help him establish a points advantage before beginning to apply the physical pressure his larger frame should provide. Leija will be typically brave and well prepared, but I just feel Gatti has more of everything to secure the win, possibly on a stoppage between 8-10, but more likely by comfortable points decision.

### **David Payne**

Without Buddy McGirt in his corner, Arturo Gatti should have too much for the 38-year-old Jesse James Leija. With McGirt, the vastly improved Gatti should be a lock. I favor Gatti by decision.

### **Pat Putnam**

I sense a minor upset here. Leija did not get enough credit for beating Nelson and Gatti got too much for beating Ward. Leija on points.

### **Jonathan Rendall**

Both fighters not only have a lot of mileage on their odometers, but they also have a lot of scar tissue as well. Cuts could very well become a deciding factor in this fight, and I hope this doesn't end on an accidental butt. Even though Leija is in his late 30s and an obvious underdog, his vast experience and excellent physical conditioning might prove to be problematic for Gatti. Jesse James will do best to frustrate Gatti and make him come to him. If Leija is successful at baiting Gatti into that game, he has a good chance of winning a decision. To be sure, with Buddy McGirt in the corner, I'm inclined to believe that won't happen. I think Gatti will mix his attack up. I think he'll work both inside and outside, and will concentrate on Leija's body to build a foundation for the late rounds. Additionally, when Gatti works on the inside, I believe he'll concentrate on putting a lot of leverage on his shots with bad intentions. Despite Leija's excellent resume, I think he'll be surprised by Gatti's power. Overall, I see Leija putting up a spirited effort for a while, and will probably give Gatti some nervous moments. In the end, I think Gatti will prevail in a fairly close unanimous decision or late round stoppage on cuts.

### **Greg Smith**

Jesse James Leija is giving up three inches in height, around three inches in reach, six years in age and least fifty sutures in the mug against Arturo Gatti. It should be entertaining and competitive for the first three sessions. Then look for a poised and confident Gatti to open Jesse up and win via a bloody stoppage sometime after the fifth.

### **Scott Yaniga**