

Say a Little Prayer for Ricky Hatton

Written by Rick Folstad
Tuesday, 31 May 2005 19:00

Shake his hand, pat him on the back and give him a friendly nod. Then quietly slip away and say a little prayer for Ricky Hatton.

The British junior welterweight contender has this crazy idea on how to beat world champion Kostya Tszyu in their IBF title fight on June 5 (Showtime) in Manchester, England (June 4 back home).

Hatton - giggle, giggle - says he'll be right in the middle of this thing if he can just avoid getting stunned by the scary right hand of Kostya Tszyu.

Right. And I'm going swimming, but I'm somehow going to avoid getting wet.

The best way to avoid Kostya Tszyu's right hand is to spend June 4 in Topeka.

"I believe I have the style to beat him," Hatton was recently quoted as saying in the Sydney Morning Herald. "But obviously, I have to be more cute and careful to avoid his main strength, which is his right hand."

If Hatton was listening to me, I'd suggest to him that he not completely rule out avoiding Tszyu's left hand as well. I'd also tell him to avoid being cute. That never sails well in title fights.

So how does a guy avoid a devastating right hand? Is it like ignoring an old girlfriend? Do you turn your back on it and hope it just goes away? Do you avoid direct eye contact and return all mail unopened? Or do you just pretend it's not there, give it the cold shoulder, hope it gets the hint and chases someone else?

Maybe you just circle to your right.

"My style is about work rate," Hatton said. "My style is pressure and pace while Tszyu is more of a patient fighter."

It just keeps looking worse.

Hatton has never lost in 38 fights, and he's got 28 knockouts. But he's never shared a small, intimate setting with a guy as dangerous as Tszyu, either.

He says he's beaten guys like Vince Phillips and Ben Tackie, but this is a different class. Phillips did hand Kostya Tszyu (31-1, 25 KOs) his only loss, but we've all had our bad days. Besides, that was back in 1997 when dinosaurs still roamed the earth. Ring magazine called it the "upset of the year."

"Kostya is a step up, but I have breezed through against the opponents I have fought," Hatton

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said. "I say don't look at who I've fought, look at how I've beaten them."

Unfortunately, Tszyu still isn't on the list.

If Hatton can't get Tszyu's respect with a little snap, crackle and pop in his own punches, he's going to have a long night trying to duck the right.

Of course, Kostya Tszyu knows Hatton will be looking for anything coming at him from the left side.

"He is open for the right hand," Tszyu said. "But he knows that as well. That's why he will probably try to cover the right side especially."

Tszyu's game plan? Probably doesn't need one. And that's what Hatton should really be worried about.