

Arturo Gatti: Tough, Courageous, Popular – But Not Great

Written by Robert Cassidy Jr.
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In boxing, it seems that an attempt to measure toughness is a redundancy. Aren't all boxers tough? Of course they are. But Arturo Gatti's toughness resides at another level.

Gatti is tough, courageous, powerful and determined. Outside of the ring, he is a gentleman, a class act. But the one adjective I am reluctant to use in describing him is great. There is this sentiment in some boxing circles that Gatti is a hall-of-famer. If he beats Floyd Mayweather Jr., I may agree.

Gatti has given the sport more excitement than one could imagine the human body capable of providing. He has given boxing classic fights, but not that classic win over a premiere fighter in his prime.

When I examine Gatti's record, it is his days at junior lightweight that impress me more. His two wins over Tracy Harris Patterson may not have been better fights than those against Micky Ward, but from a boxing standpoint they were better performances.

The Gatti-Ward fights were special because of the immense courage they displayed and violent ebb and flow to the 30 rounds. The fighting was great, but were the fighters great? In terms of action, they were comparable to the Ali-Frazier trilogy. But were they comparable in terms of talent?

No.

The movement to immediately enshrine Gatti in Canastota began after his fights against Ward. That's fine if we are talking about a hall of fame for the most popular fighter or the most courageous.

With all due respect to what Gatti and Ward did inside a boxing ring, had those fights taken place 50 years ago they would have taken place inside of St. Nicholas Arena and they would have been special to the 1,500 people who witnessed the event. Thanks to HBO, the Gatti-Ward fights are special to the 15 million people who witnessed them.

Trainer Buddy McGirt has made Arturo Gatti a better fighter. A more complete fighter. A fighter capable of greatness. I would love to see him upset Floyd Mayweather Jr.

Gatti and Evander Holyfield are the two most exciting fighters of this generation. Holyfield is a first-ballot hall-of-famer because in 48 professional fights, 26 were against world champions. [That includes counting one each for his multiple-fight series with John Ruiz, Mike Tyson, Lennox Lewis, Riddick Bowe and Dwight Muhammad Qawi].

In 45 fights, Gatti has faced nine world champions.

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Of Holyfield's 38 career wins, 16 have come against champions.

Of the nine champions Gatti has faced, he has defeated all of them except Oscar De La Hoya. But who is going to compare Tracy Harris Patterson with Riddick Bowe? Or Leonard Dorin with Lennox Lewis? Or Calvin Grove with Mike Tyson?

Gatti has six career losses. Only one came against a world champion [De La Hoya]. Holyfield has eight career losses. With the exception of Larry Donald, the rest were against world champions.

The only way for Arturo Gatti to end the speculation and the debate is to defeat Floyd Mayweather Jr.