

Mayweather-Mitchell: Pretty Boy seeks to put his mastery on display

Written by JE Grant

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“Pretty Boy” Floyd Mayweather, 34-0 (23 KOs), widely seen as one of the best pound-for-pound figures in boxing, will engage the willing and able Sharmba Mitchell, 56-4 (30 KOs) Saturday night without his title on the line.

Their bout, in the way-off-the-strip location of Portland, Oregon, is a prelude either to Mayweather’s move to supplant Zab Judah as the undisputed welterweight champion, or upcoming defenses of his WBC super-lightweight belt. No one can know the real plans of the undefeated superstar.

Given Mitchell’s age, 35, and his recent ventures in title matches, it would seem that his fight with Mayweather puts him at the final crossroads that leads to either a major title shot or permanent relegation to the club circuit.

Mitchell is still smarting from his blowout loss to Kostya Tszyu in November 2004, despite coming off a win over Chris Smith as a welterweight in his last fight (tech. W5, June 11th).

In the long-awaited rematch with Tszyu – their first fight ended in a stoppage of Mitchell – Mitchell figured to have an edge on the then-super-lightweight champion due to Tszyu’s almost two-year layoff.

However, it was [a rejuvenated Tszyu](#) who showed up in Phoenix and he was not to be denied. Tszyu scored four knockdowns enroute to a third round stoppage. There was no doubt as to which fighter was dominant.

Nonetheless, Mitchell has been a winner in nine of his last ten fights. Decision victories over former titlist Vince Phillips (though he was past his best days) and contender Ben Tackie lend evidence that his considerable skills remain intact.

Until his latest venture into the welterweight division, Mitchell slowly moved from lightweight to super-lightweight, gaining the WBA title in 1998 with a unanimous 12 round decision over defending titlist Khalid Rahilou in France.

Until his loss to Tszyu in a title unification match in 2001, he lost only as a lightweight in back-to-back fights to the late Leavander Johnson and Stevie Johnston, both men who would go on to gain titles in their own right.

Mitchell has never been noted for his power. In his title winning effort and all four of his successful defenses he was unable to stop his opponents, though he won by a wide scoring margin in each case. Indeed, he has never stopped a major player.

He has long relied on super quick punches thrown from of his southpaw stance to pull opponents out of position.

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Mitchell is ranked as a welterweight by the major alphabet organizations: # 7 IBF; # 6 WBA; and # 3 WBC.

Super quickness and ranking in a higher weight class may prove of little advantage when facing the ever-improving Mayweather.

Since moving through – and cleaning out – the super-featherweight and lightweight divisions, Mayweather has captured solid victories in each of his three super-lightweight fights against the likes of DeMarcus “Chop Chop” Corley, Henry Bruseles, and longtime fan favorite Arturo Gatti.

Corley, another quick-fisted southpaw, found himself thoroughly out-speeded and outgunned by the well-schooled Mayweather.

Although blessed with top-level hand speed, Mayweather’s real strength lies in having refined skills that exceed simple natural talent. From blocking and countering, to finishing a hurt fighter, to adapting to almost any style confronting him, he understands the game is about more than mere athleticism.

The experienced Gatti, a battler and multi-weight division belt holder in his own right, hoped to give Mayweather problems by introducing Pretty Boy to his recently rediscovered boxing skills. His backup plan, as always, was to out-tough his opponent.

Mayweather, of course, pounded Gatti mercilessly throughout the six rounds of a fight that could not be called a contest. A virtually no point in the fight did Gatti pose the slightest sign of gaining the upper hand. [Mayweather's full collection](#) of every punch in boxing sprayed flush on Gatti’s face.

After six rounds, the supremely tough Gatti finished the fight on his stool. Even if he had been willing to go on, his cornerman Buddy McGirt exercised judgment in calling a halt to the slaughter. He saw what everyone witnessed, the master craftsman Mayweather at the height of his powers.

Of course limiting a review of Mayweather’s credentials to his recent layover at super-lightweight gives insufficient insight into his talent level.

As a super-featherweight and lightweight he met and defeated two fighters who would later engage each other in what will likely be the consensus fight of the year: Diego “Chico” Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo.

His domination of Corrales in defense of his WBC super-featherweight title was perhaps the first clear indication of his ability. Corrales entered the bout undefeated and with a reputation as a tremendous puncher – a fact later confirmed against Castillo.

Despite a significant height and reach advantage that complemented a solid counterpunching style, Corrales quickly learned that Mayweather could adapt and conquer with his own brand of counterpunching. Mayweather consistently beat Corrales to the punch and negated his physical

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advantages. Five knockdowns of Corrales led his corner to stop the contest in round ten of what had been a one-sided bout from round one.

Castillo proved himself Mayweather's toughest foe to date. In their first of two meetings for the WBC lightweight belt, Mayweather lost more rounds than he had in any of his previous fights, but still dominated on the scorecards. Such were the expectations of Mayweather, that even with a clear victory in hand, there was talk of controversy.

Such controversy led to an immediate rematch with a closer yet still clear win for Mayweather.

Both Castillo and Corrales would go on to gain title recognition in the lightweight division.

Mayweather has won 14 title matches in his 34 fights.

When Mayweather enters the ring in Oregon he will undoubtedly be favored to stop Mitchell.

Both fighters have nearly equal hand speed, but little else in common.

Mayweather has had his chin tested and remained solid. By most standards Mitchell has a good, though not great, chin, having been stopped in each of his four losses.

The fight will likely turn on Mitchell's lack of power. Mayweather has aggressively engaged his opponents of late and Mitchell will not have enough zip in his punches to keep him at bay.

There is also considerable evidence that even in a fight from the outside Mayweather has the greater variety of punches and has enough power to inflict considerable damage.

The real question will be where Mayweather goes from this bout. There is money in a bout with Judah, and a prestigious undisputed belt to go with it. There is also money in a fight with Englishman Ricky Hatton (who fights Carlos Maussa on Nov. 26th to unify the IBF and WBA belts), and the linear title that goes with a victory.

There is real power in being the best in the business.