

Arturo Gatti: When the Risk Outweighs the Reward

Written by Aaron Tallent
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A quick look at Arturo Gatti on paper makes one question his motives for fighting again. With a record of 39-7 and his last fight being a lopsided 6th round TKO at the hands of Floyd Mayweather back in June, the casual boxing fan would say, "Retire."

Mayweather is not a good gauge for determining when a fighter is shot. Just ask Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo. "Pretty Boy" Floyd beat both of them decisively over 2001 and 2002, and they still managed to give us one of the biggest thrills of 2005 and are still the top fighters to beat in their respective divisions.

Like Castillo and Corrales, Gatti may very well have more great fights in him. We will find out tonight when he faces Thomas Damgaard in a welterweight bout at Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall. Very little is known about the Danish Damgaard, except that he is undefeated at 37-0 and this is his first bout outside of his native country.

One has to applaud Gatti for taking this gamble. It would be easy to pick an over-the-hill fighter to regain his confidence after a devastating loss, not give a hungry, unbeaten prospect a shot at the big-time. That will to risk it all in the ring is why Gatti is the most popular fighter in boxing today.

It is why he can pack Boardwalk Hall like Bruce Springsteen and why he could make seven figures for fighting the driver of the Coast City Bus. He has fought on HBO a total of 18 times and gives even the fairest-weather fight fans a reason to stay home on Saturday night.

My biggest question is where does Gatti go from here? Regardless of what happens tonight, he will not have a lot of options in the way of his legacy.

The welterweight division seems void of a championship opportunity for Gatti. With Mayweather's ascension there, it seems as if all roads for dominance will run through him. Even with Gatti's popularity, very few will pay to watch a rematch of their one-sided bout.

Gatti has made the argument that much of his problems in the Mayweather bout were trying to make weight. He feels that he will have much more ease at 147. But Mayweather does not seem to have lost a step as a welterweight. He is simply the most gifted fighter in boxing today and too fast for Gatti. Also, the welterweight division has seen Gatti before, in a 5th round TKO to Oscar De La Hoya.

However, Mayweather may not be able to unify the title and Gatti could still pick up a belt. Even if he is unable to win another championship, he can still pull in good paydays fighting in Atlantic City. Still, at some point or another, the risk will outweigh the reward.

Gatti has never left the ring without giving his all. More gifted, unexciting boxers often use the adage, "I'll put myself in danger when I have to, if I have to." The slugging but slow Gatti has

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often been forced to risk his health in the name of victory. Many of his ring wars could have ended on his stool had self preservation even been a passing thought.

Stories of his fights are already boxing folklore. Coming back to win fights with broken bones, blindly-swollen eyes, and other forms of punishment is a rarity and requires the heart only a handful of fighters possess. Mickey Ward is another one of those fighters, and as we all know, the two gave us one of the greatest trilogies of all time.

His penchant for risk is also his tragic flaw. Earlier in his career, Gatti often put himself in danger when he did not have to and that has attributed to a few of his seven losses. Fortunately, Buddy McGirt's arrival after the De La Hoya fight gave Gatti a new, defense-first approach. There have been times that he has had to leave pieces of himself in the ring, as he did with Ward, but most of his wins under McGirt's tutelage have avoided a brutal slugfest.

But at 33, how many more legalized assaults can Gatti sustain before his health suffers long-term effects? If the welterweight division proves to be a war zone and he has to abandon McGirt's approach, he should call it a day and avoid the unnecessary punishment. He has given us enough thrills already.