

## If This Was His Final Act, Oscar Deserves a Curtain Call

Written by Michael Katz  
Sunday, 07 May 2006 19:00

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LAS VEGAS, May 7 – Oscar de la Hoya got on a plane for Puerto Rico today, but where he is going is still up in the air.

As far as Oscar the Boxer is concerned, he could be flying west, into a beautiful sunset.

After one of the most satisfying nights of his Golden career, beating up a bully and thus delighting anyone who's ever been browbeaten or threatened in a schoolyard, de la Hoya again established himself as the richest prize in sports, especially if he opts for a grand finale Sept. 16 to coincide with Mexican Independence Day celebrations.

Following some cryptic remarks about who he will choose as his partner for the last dance – the hopefuls begin with Floyd Mayweather Jr., Winky Wright, possibly Felix Trinidad Jr., Ricky Hatton and Antonio Margarito – in which he told the post-fight press conference “I think people will be surprised,” de la Hoya coyly dropped the possibility that we had just seen his last fight.

“There's a big chance I'm going to retire,” he said.

The Dow-Jones dropped 150 points. Never mind what a de la Hoya retirement would cost potential opponents; the loss to Time-Warner might rock the stock market.

There's no reason to go on boxing, of course. He's 33, revealed that he's had a torn rotator cuff for three years (even his trainer, Floyd Mayweather Sr. had never heard about it), and what's another \$25-30 million to a guy who's rich enough to start his own bank and has real estate in Hollywood and Manhattan. His wife, the Puerto Rican singing star Millie Corretjer, would obviously prefer he not go away to long training camps and instead stay home with her and their infant son, Oscar Gabriel.

He was “semi-retired” as Richard Schaefer, his friend, and chief executive officer of de la Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions, said for 20 months before coming back to shut the big mouth of Ricardo Mayorga, dispatching the Nicaraguan novice at 1:25 of the sixth round with a delightfully brutal beating.

De la Hoya said he had to “erase” the picture he had in his head of his last performance in the ring, crawling on the canvas, slamming the floor, after being dropped by a Bernard Hopkins left hook to the liver, as if anyone remembers who beat Sugar Ray Robinson in his last fight (you don't have to look it up, it was Joey Archer).

That picture was obliterated last night at the MGM Grand Arena. De la Hoya need not risk going out on a loss again, though that same great pride might tempt him to try and beat the best out there right now as a fond farewell.

De la Hoya already has a long leg up on Matchmaker of the Year for choosing Mayorga as his

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foil. The next choice won't be so easy. It is especially complicated because Mayweather Jr., whom he acknowledged as THE best pound-for-pound, is the son of his own trainer. And Floyd Sr. has made it very clear that he can not be a "bad daddy."

"What kind of daddy would I be helping to knock out my own son?" he says.

Young Floyd, making the obligatory nice remarks about de la Hoya's performance ("I thought he looked great, great hand speed, that long layoff really rejuvenated him"), said the matchup would be "an incredible fight."

"I think it'll get done," he said.

Schaefer said "I think it's very makeable."

De la Hoya said "I always want the best, but there is nothing on the table."

Then, cryptically in light of his later comment about retiring, said "that fight is not a guarantee, in fact, no fight is a guarantee."

Kevin Iole of the Las Vegas Review Journal here has suggested that Floyd Jr. take \$2-3 million of his purse and give it to his father to sit out the fight. That could leave no Mayweathers in the corner – Roger Mayweather, the younger brother with whom Floyd Sr. has been feuding for years, has had his license revoked by Nevada for entering the ring during Junior's victory last month against Zab Judah.

De la Hoya, in any case, said "if I fight again, I have to have Floyd Sr. in the corner, he's the person who brings me confidence."

De la Hoya had a long string of trainers before hiring Floyd Sr. in 2000 after losing the first time to Sugar Shane Mosley. The evidence last night against Mayorga is that de la Hoya has finally incorporated much of the Grand Rapids master's teaching into his game. He now has a right hand; it may not make anyone recall Earnie Shavers, but it stings well enough to set up the Golden left hook, which no less an expert than Mosley said again last night "was the best in boxing – it is so fast, you never see it."

It was a right hand that set up the hook that Mayorga didn't see less than a minute into the match that dropped him the first time. Mayorga never recovered, said one of his assistant trainers, Stacy McKinley.

De la Hoya had left his corner with no intention of "feeling out" anything. He went right after Mayorga, who had dropped his hands and allowed Vernon Forrest and Felix Trinidad Jr. to hit him.

Mayorga, of course, began the wild swinging that made him such an attractive opponent to anyone with de la Hoya's knowledge of boxing. But there probably was as much attention in the de la Hoya camp to audio tapes as there were to Mayorga videos.

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Mayorga, whose insults of everyone he fought rankled many, was chosen, it is clear, because in the long months of training, de la Hoya wanted to have his “blood boiling.”

“The way he was talking about my wife and my son made me work harder,” said de la Hoya. “The plan always was that he was going to talk dirty.”

After a few weeks of wondering if the rust of 20 months’ inactivity would ever leave, de la Hoya said, “finally it clicked in.”

Mayorga was talking right up to the first bell. He had looked rather reluctant, walking slowly to the ring, and one wondered if Don King, the promoter he was unhappy with, had a cattle prod to get him moving. Before the bell, he kept telling de la Hoya, “I’m going to knock you out, I’m going to knock you out.”

De la Hoya said he thought, “Okay, this is the moment of truth.”

Mayorga fought as if he were missing a cattle prod for the first couple of rounds before he started to at least make a concerted effort. It was not much; he just was never in the same league with the 1992 Olympic gold medallist who probably has almost as many title belts from more divisions than Marian Muhammad has stripped in a month.

Okay, given the opposition, it is hard to go overboard on how well de la Hoya fought. But it is just as hard to ignore his speed, his willingness to risk punches – he did get caught with a wild right uppercut with about 20 seconds remaining in the third round, but just smiled and jumped back at Mayorga with a dazzling three-punch combination just before the bell.

“I had to show the bully I wasn’t going to back down,” he said.

The corner, especially his brother, Joel Jr., kept telling de la Hoya to “stay on your toes and box.” But he said “I could tell I was reaching him with my punches by the way he winced.”

In the sixth round, almost as if he had had enough fun tearing the wings from the butterfly – or maybe it was a flying cockroach, Doug Fischer of maxboxing.com suggested – de la Hoya put the attack into drive. He unleashed punches so quickly that ringside scribes quickly ran out of fingers and toes on which to count. It was maybe eight blistering punches in a row that sent Mayorga stumbling along the ropes to Oscar’s corner. Another series dropped him. He got up at eight, but de la Hoya jumped all over him and Referee Jay Nady had no choice but to stop the torture. In fact, he had to virtually throw de la Hoya to the canvas, but this time, he did not pound the floor.

Maybe it was good that he finished the job so efficiently. He said the left shoulder, about three weeks ago, started to bother him again. Floyd Sr. said all he knew was that “they were giving him pills.” (The state of Nevada, of course, will check to make sure there was no hanky-panky – though de la Hoya would be the last guy one would think about cheating.)

De la Hoya said he has had this problem for years, but he was worried because in training,

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“when I sparred, after nine rounds it starts burning and I have to my hand down.”

Maybe he knew he could get rid of Mayorga before the shoulder started burning. Mayweather or Winky Wright would be a bit more dangerous. De la Hoya almost eliminated Trinidad from consideration, saying he would never fight at 160, which was where the again-retired rival has been toiling for years. Wright has also moved up to 160 and will challenge Jermain Taylor next month for the middleweight title. If successful, he said he would be glad to starve himself down to 154 for de la Hoya. Wright makes some kind of poetic sense – he handily beat Trinidad, who beat Hopkins, and Trinidad and Hopkins both have victories over de la Hoya. The logic may be convoluted, but it’s still a huge fight.

And though Wright has his supporters for No. 1 in the pound-for-pound “ratings” (he’s my No. 2, behind Little Floyd), there is no question de la Hoya-Mayweather is by far the bigger fight. The patricide element has been a big deal from Euripides through Eugene O’Neill to the Mayweathers.

Floyd Sr., who used to train his son before the kid kicked him out of the house he bought for father, said there must be “a burden on my kid, a vendetta,” but Junior seems always to be challenging fighters trained by Senior.

Big Floyd, diplomatically, said both his son and Oscar could win. Floyd Jr. had the speed advantage, but Oscar was bigger and stronger. “Chop Chop (Corely) hurt him, but he didn’t jump on him,” said Senior, noting that de la Hoya certainly would not make that mistake.

Bottom line, he said he couldn’t allow the fight, even if he did recuse himself from de la Hoya’s corner. So what if Junior misses out on making millions – he has alternatives in Ricky Hatton, Miguel Cotto, Antonio Margarito et al. But Junior wants Oscar.

“I don’t give a damn who he wants,” said Senior. “I’m the daddy and I’m calling the shots.”

De la Hoya is calling the shots and he left the impression that he might have fired his last one in a ring. If so, he had a brilliant career and he’ll be missed as a fighter. As a promoter, though, he’ll still be in the thick of things.

PENTHOUSE: How could it be anyone else but the Chicken de Jour, the Chicken Delight, the Chicken who beat up the bully? It was a magnificent performance, even considering the opposition. But let’s put Oscar in here for an entirely different reason – he took a political stance. Okay, it’s one I happen to agree with, but it was nice of him to enter the ring with a head band saying “No to HR4437,” the House of Representatives bill that would block immigration.

De la Hoya, who is proud of both his Mexican blood and his American heritage, is also proud that he comes from a family of illegal immigrants, people, as he says, who want “only to work to make things better for their families.” He acknowledged that it was difficult for them to get proper papers and the green card, but that doesn’t mean they can’t pay taxes and be good citizens. “People who come across the border,” he said, “want to work.” Hear, hear.

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OUTHOUSE: Afterwards, Mayorga finally shut up. De la Hoya went over to the Nicaraguan's corner and was told by the bully, "You're a great champion and a great fighter – I apologize for everything I said to you."

"I forgive you," said de la Hoya.

But then Mayorga – and his beaten promoter, Don King – brushed off the post-fight press appearance. Mayorga, we were told, went up to his room at the MGM. King was seen lurking in a hallway leading to the post-fight press conference, but there was nothing he could say. "I never thought I'd see Don King pass up an open microphone," said Norm Frauenheim of the Arizona Republic.

OUTHOUSE II: Marc Ratner is retiring this week as executive director of the Nevada State Athletic Commission. It is hereby requested, again, that he take Darby Shirley with him. Shirley has long been one of the worst fight judges in Nevada, and that covers an awful lot of ground. Last night, he somehow saw Marco Rubio of Mexico a point ahead of Kassim Ouma, the former junior middleweight champion, after 12 rounds. Rubio knocked down Ouma with a right hand in the opening round, staggered him with another a few seconds later, and did land a few more before the Ugandan began to keep his left hand a bit higher than his ankles. But all in all, I gave Rubio two rounds after the first. So did Jerry Roth, who astutely scored it 116-111 for Ouma; I say astutely because we had identical cards. The third Vegas judge, Bill Graham, gave Rubio only one other round on a 117-110 card. But 114-113 for Rubio? Shirley, you joke.

There's more. As if there weren't enough bad judges locally, the WBClowns imported some Shirley-score-alike named Guido Cavalleri from Italy to work the de la Hoya-Mayorga affair. Cavalleri gave the third round to Mayorga – okay, he landed that right uppercut, but the left uppercut by de la Hoya earlier in the round was just as good – and somehow scored the fourth round even. "Even?" He must have had World War II a draw....Of course, Paul Smith of Nevada also gave the third round to Mayorga. That is just incompetent. At least Duane Ford, who with Roth and Dave Moretti are the best locals, scored it a shutout for Oscar.

MORE DIS AND THAT: Okay, let's say something nice about King. He gave the Boxing Writers Association a \$10,000 check to give to the Gerald McClellan Fund....Yoel Judah was the main cornerman for Mayorga. It may be his last work for a while. Tomorrow, he faces the Nevada commission in a hearing on his part, and son Zab's, in the Mayweather-Judah mini-riot. Leonard Ellerbe, one of Mayweather's assistants and close friend, will probably get a stiff fine when he too is judged tomorrow....There was an unusually large police presence at the MGM Grand before the fight. Someone said Zab Judah must be in town....Paid crowd was announced as only 13,076. Yes, boxing was on TV four straight days last week (and when was the last time that happened? Before my 1952 Bar Mitzvah, I guess), but when de la Hoya doesn't sell out the house on the Cinco de Mayo weekend, maybe the game is slipping. Actually, I think the economy may be slipping; maybe it's the price of gasoline, but when things are tough, fight tickets are not easy sells....MGM Grand crowd was so sedate during prelims I thought I was at a political debate. Even when de la Hoya's arrival was flashed on the big screens, there was no reaction....Biggest cheer of intros was for Sylvester Stallone. Chant of "Rocky, Rocky" followed....I'm glad I looked it up. I almost wrote "Jimmy" Archer instead of Joey Archer as Ray

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Robinson's last fight.