

Miguel Cotto Has No Worries

Written by Bill Knight

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Oh how some people love to talk the talk. Others are just content to walk the walk.

One thing, though, is a given in the fight world. Those who talk the talk can help sell the show. Those who walk the walk will take the show.

Paulie Malignaggi has his moment in the sun and he seems intent on not wasting a breath of it. He is talking some serious — albeit comically serious — talk.

Witness:

“June 11 may be the Puerto Rican Day parade, but on June 10, when I expose him, Miguel Cotto will be known as the Puerto Rican Charade.” Or, how about: “On June 10, Cotto will fall harder at Madison Square Garden than King Kong did from the Empire State building.”

OK. He gets style points. He talks of knocking Cotto out, of walking right through the WBO Light Welterweight champ.

At first glance, this is a nice little matchup. Cotto, of course, lives in the spotlight. He basks in the bright sun of fame with his 26-0 record and those 22 knockouts. He has been hurt a time or two or three. He has been hit. But he has always hit harder. He is the darling of Puerto Rico these days — and of many other fight fans as well.

The last time anyone went the distance against those two bombs Cotto calls fists was May 8, 2004 when Lovemore N'Dou lost a unanimous decision. Before that, it was Sept. 2002 when John Brown lasted 10 against Cotto's blasts. The only other Cotto survivors were in the beginning, in the four round days.

And Malignaggi?

Well, he is a spotless 21-0. But the 25-year-old has just five knockouts. Five blackouts in 21 wars will put even the fastest and slickest of fighters smack into harm's way sooner or later. Last time the fast moving, fast talking Malignaggi stopped anyone? He got Kevin Watts by TKO in the sixth round — in August, 2003.

Of course, the world of boxing is full of triumphant tales, the tortoise taking the hare, speed nullifying power. Will the brash Malignaggi be Leonard to Cotto's Hearn's? Remember, though, that Cotto is hardly a statue, hardly a stiff, hardly without some mobility.

He has his own theories on the whole Saturday night bangfest at Madison Square Garden.

“I'm not even worried,” he said. “You know, he's been trying to sell himself; he's been talking a lot of trash. We'll find out in the ring. If you think about Randy Johnson or Pedro Martinez, you

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know the speed is there in the beginning of the game. It's not always there at the end. And any pitcher will tell you that speed doesn't last the whole night through."

OK. Cotto gets style points for analogies.

And he was only a little appreciative of his opponent's bleating: "I think he doesn't have the power or the courage to really go try to knock me out. I think it is one of the many lies he's been saying."

Still, talking a little smack has never hurt a fight gate. And even Cotto can appreciate that ... a little.

"I do have to commend him for selling himself as a viable opponent for me. He's been saying a lot of stuff. He's making up all this stuff that he's going to do to me. I think a lot of people are expecting ... they want to see if he can really do that to me and I think that's good for the fight. I think a lot of people are going to turn on the fight and buy the fight to see if he has really any possibilities of doing anything like that to me. I think that's good for the fight."

No question it is good for the fight.

And this fight needs a little oomph, going against Tarver-Hopkins. In fairness, Bob Arum and Top Rank scheduled this fight long ago, in conjunction with the Puerto Rican Day parade. Arum said they want to make it an annual event. And, in fairness, the undercard on Cotto-Malignaggi is far superior to that of Tarver-Hopkins.

Most of all, though, if speed can steal this show, this will be a far better fight. And, most of all, if speed does not swipe this show, if Cotto clanks Malignaggi like he has clonked most of his opponents, that, too, will be worth the price.

Cotto knows. He knows there are much bigger fights out there for him, that there are far bigger paydays down the road if he keeps his string of sending his opponents to bed without supper. He swears he does not let those thoughts enter his noggin.

"I always get ready to fight. It's not my job to pick the opponent. I have a great company in Top Rank and a great matchmaker in Bruce Trampler, who's always putting up the guys out there that they think I need to be facing. And I love that. I love the way they bring guys in to me, the guys that they know they're going to ask more of me and it's a great challenge. And if you are a professional boxer and you want to get to the levels that you want to get to, you know you have to face this type of fighters."

Arum added, "Miguel is a hard, hard worker and he's faced very many guys with different styles and Malignaggi is probably the quickest guy that he's faced and he needs to deal with that speed before we can say that he's complete. I believe that he will and once he does then he's ready for anybody out there — whether it's Jose Luis Castillo or Diego Corrales or Ricky Hatton or Arturo Gatti or anybody. So I think this is an important test for Miguel. If he passes this test, then I don't think Bruce will hesitate recommending anybody as an opponent and I think you'll

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see a string of very, very big fights that Miguel will be fighting.”

So there you are.

This, indeed, is a test.

Of course, Malignaggi views it as a test for him, too. He has visions dancing in his head of bigger and better stages, stages where his tongue can wag to a very, very large audience.

Will Malignaggi have the answer to Cotto? Will he bring surprises?

Cotto says he does not look at videos of fighters, that he does not study opponents. He says he remains without worry, having absolutely no concern that Malignaggi might play Ali to his Foreman. He is coming to fight. Most likely, Malignaggi — after coming to talk — will come to use that speed.

Is Cotto worried there might be something he has not prepared for, a big box with a big bow with a big surprise inside?

“I’m not even worried about that,” he said. “He’s been trying to sell himself. He’s been talking a lot of trash. We’ll find out in the ring.”

And then, in parting, Cotto added, “I’m not concerned at all. As long as I do my job, my uncle gives me the perfect plan. We’re sending him wherever he came from.”

Will it be a knockout?

I really don’t know. All I know is I’m going to win. How? I don’t know. All I know is that you can hit a home run any time and if Paulie slows down he’s going to go to sleep quick.”

There is talking. And there is walking. Sometimes they are one in the same. Sometimes they are two different animals.

Saturday night, center ring in Madison Square Garden, we will all find out who will walk the walk. In essence, that is what boxing is always all about ... what makes it so tantalizingly interesting and forever fun.