Written by David A. Avila
Wednesday, 01 November 2006 19:00

Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s lightning fast reflexes combined with his superior defensive technique have left few doubting his claim as the best boxer on the planet. But now comes the real challenge: fighting a real welterweight in Argentina's Carlos Baldomir.

"There's no doubt he's a very good fighter," says Mayweather, 29, who's not shy about demeaning an opponent before the fight, but who has not insulted Baldomir.

Mayweather seeks Boxing's Holy Grail, to claim the mantle of the late great Sugar Ray Robinson, who many consider the greatest prizefighter of all-time. To achieve equal recognition he must beat WBC welterweight titleholder Baldomir (43-9-6, 13 KOs) on Nov. 4, at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino.

"I think I'm the greatest fighter in the world today," Mayweather (36-0, 24 KOs) said. "Who's better than me?"

The epic fight will be shown on HBO pay-per-view and is co-promoted by Goossen Tutor Promotions and Sycuan Ringside Promotions.

It's not an easy to task for Mayweather. Baldomir has not lost a fight to a welterweight in more than nine years and has fought against every type of opponent from the super fast to the super strong. And he's beaten them all.

As great as Sugar Ray Robinson was, even he met his match when he moved from the welterweight division to the middleweight division and began to lose. You might say Mayweather is Robinson and Baldomir is Jake LaMotta or Carmen Basilio. A victory is not assured.

"He's a great fighter and a very good and talented fighter, but he's fighting in my weight category and he's like a child coming forward to me," said Baldomir, 35, on a telephone press conference. "I'm strong and the true world champion. I demonstrated against Zab Judah and Arturo Gatti that I can go chest to chest with anyone and beat them."

Baldomir feels that if a lightweight like Jose Luis Castillo could give Mayweather trouble then he's in for a more intense version of how strength can beat speed.

"His speed is not going to bother me at all," said Baldomir in a low-key manner. "He's fighting at 147 pounds. He's not going to be as fast."

Baldomir proved his theory against Brooklyn's southpaw Judah who held the WBA, WBC and IBF welterweight titles at the time, but was humiliated by the Argentine last January. Judah was knocked down and refused to engage in exchanges with the heavy-handed Baldomir and was defeated.

Mayweather accepted a match with Judah in April and soundly defeated the former champion, but tasted the canvass once during an exchange, though it wasn't counted as a knockdown by the referee. The speedy Mayweather then increased the tempo and convincingly outboxed Judah the rest of the 12-round fight. Though Judah was the welterweight champion, he had never fought a true welterweight contender and was actually a blown-up junior welterweight. So when Mayweather met Judah, it was seen as a junior welterweight fighting a junior welterweight.

Before meeting Judah, the Las Vegas-based fighter clashed with Gatti more than a year ago in New Jersey and used his speed to overwhelm the gutsy Canadian/Italian-American. It was a complete blowout and had people insisting that Mayweather was unbeatable.

Baldomir accepted a Gatti fight and proceeded to batter him for a ninth round technical knockout. Most people were in shock.

During his career Baldomir has accepted every challenge and fought in Germany, Mexico, Denmark, England and South Africa. He fought anywhere as long as it meant getting closer to a world title fight.

"I thought many times about quitting, but I knew that if I eliminated everyone then I would have my opportunity," said Baldomir. "The hardest thing was waiting. But I knew it was a matter of time."

Just two years ago Sycuan Ringside Promotions signed Baldomir after Top Rank let him go. Few noticed or cared about Baldomir and now he stands at the precipice of becoming a legend.

"Nobody was really interested in him," said Scott Woodward, a representative of Sycuan Ringside. "They viewed Carlos as a journeyman fighter."

However, Mayweather does not.

"Baldomir beat Zab Judah and he beat Gatti. I have to take him seriously. He's a good fighter," said Mayweather. "He's not fast and he's not big but he knows how to fight."

Considered unbeatable by many boxing experts, Mayweather realizes that nobody is unbeatable. But he plans to rely on more than speed and power.

"I've gotten this far not because I'm the fastest, because speed alone doesn't win fights. Show me a fast fighter and I can show you how to beat him," Mayweather said. "It comes from outthinking another fighter. That's how I win."

Asked how he plans to beat Baldomir, Mayweather pauses.

"I can't say what I'm going to do," Mayweather says. "But I'm the best there is. I'll come up with something."

Undercard

Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero defends his IBF featherweight title against Orlando Salido of Mexico in the semi-main event. Also, welterweight contender Paul Williams tangles with Mexico's hardheaded Mauro Lucero in a 10-round bout. In an 8-round heavyweight bout, Riverside's Chris Arreola meets Hollywood's Damian Wills. According to sources, the fight is now going to be televised. That's great news for Southern California fight fans.

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Giovanni Segura (15-0-1) vs. Carlos Tamara (12-1).

Fri. Showtime, 11 p.m., Kendall Holt (20-1) vs. Isaac Hlatshwayo (25-0).

Sat. HBO pay-per-view, 6 p.m., Floyd Mayweather Jr. (36-0) vs. Carlos Baldomir (43-9-6); Robert Guerrero (19-1-1) vs. Orlando Salido (27-9-2); Paul Williams (31-0) vs. Mauro Lucero (42-11-1).

Sat. Showtime, 9 p.m., Sergei Liakhovich (23-1) vs. Shannon Briggs (47-4-1); Juan Diaz (30-0) vs. Fernando Angulo (18-3).