

## Malignaggi About To Snag First Belt

Written by Michael Woods  
Thursday, 14 June 2007 19:00

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Who wants to bet me? I bet Paulie Malignaggi will make it out of the ring in Connecticut on Saturday night without getting his hair gel touched. Any takers?

I see the flashy mover with the refashioned hands boxing rings around Lovemore N'dou, and bringing the orphaned IBF junior welterweight title back to New York.

It will be a joyful evening for Malignaggi, and kudos to the kid—he's 26, and still a kid in my eyes, as I've seen the entirety of his professional career arc—for showing 'A game' perseverance, and not chucking the whole quest when his hands splintered for the dozenth time.

The occasion will be televised by HBO, on their Boxing After Dark program (the show kicks off at 9:30 PM with a re-airing of the Cotto/Judah foul fest---prick your ears for Arthur Mercante assuring Judah that New Yorkers stick together in between rounds) from the Mohegan Sun Casino in Uncasville, CT.

The ultra slick Malignaggi (22-1, 5 KOs) last laced up on Feb. 17, doing what needed to be done to get to this place, earning a UD10 win over capable Edner Cherry in NYC.

Paulie made Cherry look like a B- fighter, and did so in typical Malignaggi fashion. He can't rely on his knuckles to stay in one piece, so any possibility of him morphing into a more powerfully punching version of himself isn't viable, and thus, Malignaggi sticks, moves, sticks, moves etc.

That style, if you're from the Merchant School of Preferences, and like some Wall St. level trading, can be humdrum to watch. Miguel Cotto forced Paulie to stand and deliver trades when the Brooklynier got a title crack on June 10, 2006 at MSG, and the result was pleasing from a viewers perspective, if not for Malignaggi's face. There is almost zero danger, though, that Paulie's puss will suffer another assault of that ilk tomorrow.

No, there will be no facial rearrangement on Saturday, as N'Dou (45-8-1, 30 KOs), while a forward mover, will be unable to land effectively. He's 35, and has been fed soft touches in Australia for the past two years, as his management has maneuvered for one final title shot opp. He did take an eliminator win over Naoufel Ben Rabah on Feb. 4, and that feat can't be diminished. Neither can his sturdy beard, which has never been deciphered. All of his losses come via the points route.

This title had been held by Ricky Hatton, who spurned it rather than fight N'Dou, the South African born vet who began a pro career in 1993. Hatton took the honorific from Juan Urango, who had bested Rabah to earn the strap last summer.

On occasions like this, when a fighter is set to be rewarded with a belt after soldiering on in the face of ample reasons to find a new job, I don't have much of a problem with the "excess" of

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titles floating about.

SPEEDBAG Jim Borzell is back as the matchmaker for John Duddy. The Derry Destroyer was in a snoozer going away party, against survivor Dupre Strickland on May 18, a foe that Borzell would never have okayed.

Did he get a raise? He wouldn't tell me, but one could guess yes. Borzell is now overseeing Pete Quillin's growth, so that bodes well for Kid Chocolate's prospects.

--Had an interesting back and forth with Bob Arum I forgot to relay. Arum had just told Cotto and Judah to represent boxing in a professional fashion. We started talking about the Briggs/Ibragimov fiasco and I stood up for the fans, who always get soaked buying PPVs. Arum replied, hey, buyer beware, you should've known it would be a stinker. Not fair, I told Bob, not when a fighter (Briggs) promises to tear a foe's head off, and then sleepwalks his way through the fight. Bob saw my point, and conceded to me. True enough, he said, boxers should be responsible for providing their best effort, so fans don't get stiffed as often.