

Body Attack Key For Marquez-Juarez

Written by David A. Avila

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In the 1960s whenever a native Mexican like Juan Manuel Marquez fought a Mexican-American like Rocky Juarez, it was a civil war in the ring. But now it happens far too often and is not special anymore.

But Marquez can't buy his youth back and Juarez has bottle full of it. Can youth beat wisdom?

Marquez, the stylish fighter from Mexico City, defends his WBC junior lightweight title against Houston's Juarez on Saturday Nov. 3, at the Desert Diamond Casino in Tucson. The fight promoted by Golden Boy Promotions will be televised on Showtime.

For 14 years the fighter known as "Dinamita" has flourished under the tutelage of Mexico City's master trainer Nacho Beristain to become one of the more polished prizefighters to ever come out of that country.

With his precise counter-punching style Beristain has guided the careers of Juan Manuel and Rafael Marquez. And before that he led Ricardo "Finito" Lopez to a Hall of Fame career that ended with that fighter never suffering a defeat in his amateur and pro career.

Marquez (47-3-1, 35 KOs) is one of the best fighters on the planet and has been for a number of years. But the ticks of time are catching up.

It's Texas-born Juarez's turn to see if its quitting time for Marquez.

Juarez is a product of the U.S. amateur system for who he participated in the 2000 Olympics in Australia. He captured a silver medal with his plowing style of mowing down opponents with body punches and more body punches.

Many experts say that's a chink in Marquez's armor that has never been tested thoroughly.

One highly recognized trainer says that fighters begin to lose a bit of their resistance to body punches at the age of 30 due to the countless rounds of sparring as an amateur and pro. The ribs, liver and stomach area can only take so many blows before the mind reacts.

"You can do all the sit-ups you want but the body weakens," said Roger Mayweather, a former world champion who now trains his nephew Floyd Mayweather. "Some guys can take a shot to the head their entire lives, but not to the body."

For a murderous body puncher like Juarez, it's what he's counting on.

"Well I choose not to say how I'm going to fight him," said Juarez during a telephone press conference. "But that is something we look into."

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Spar thousands of rounds

Throughout boxing history it's evident that the great boxers possess the ability to take a shot to the chin and keep fighting. Guys like Sam Langford in the early 1900s to Sugar Ray Robinson in the 1950s could absorb punches from the best during their heydays. Despite fighting more than 200 fights Robinson was never knocked out.

But it was the blows to the body that caused many of their losses later in their careers.

"What a lot of people don't realize is that boxers spar thousands of rounds with boxers constantly hitting them to the body," said Rudy Hernandez, a former fighter who now trains lightweight contenders Jose Armando Santa Cruz and Urbano Antillon. "People only see the fighters during a fight but forget about all of the sparring."

Ageing fighters always face a risk of losing despite an iron chin. Jesse James Leija couldn't sustain the body shots Arturo Gatti fired on him and Gatti couldn't withstand the blows to the body from Alfonso Gomez. The body can only absorb so many punches before the brain says no more.

Oscar De La Hoya's only knockout loss was to Bernard Hopkins. And though Hopkins was a true middleweight, his blows to the head didn't faze De La Hoya, but the left hook to the body sure did.

Ricky Hatton whipped Jose Luis Castillo but not with shots to the head. It was a single punch to the liver that dropped the Mexican warrior to a helpless heap.

The constant battering to the body makes 30-year-olds more protective of their stomach area.

Earlier in the year Rafael Marquez and Israel Vazquez collided in a explosion of punches that ended in a win for Marquez in their first fight. But if you examine that first contest, it was evident that Vazquez realized his body punches were opening up the Marquez's defense. In their second encounter Vazquez exploited Marquez's vulnerability to body shots then lowered the boom when Marquez lowered his guard.

Juarez has a puncher's chance if it's to the body. He experienced that against the great Marco Antonio Barrera in two fights.

"I feel that those two fights with Barrera gave me a lot of confidence to allow myself to know that I can compete against the best out there," said Juarez, who had been scheduled to fight for the IBF featherweight title against Robert Guerrero but was offered this fight and took it. "Every fight whether it's Barrera or Marquez I go in thinking I'm going to win."

Marquez, 34, likes to fight from the outside and punishes opponents who cross an invisible line on front of him. But even Marquez can be hit in the body as Barrera proved when they fought last March. Several perfectly placed lefts and rights to the body forced Marquez to cover those areas and leave his chin exposed. Barrera feinted to the body and caught Marquez on the point

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of the chin for the only knockdown of the fight. But he managed to evade Barrera's body attack for the rest of the fight.

"I know that Rocky Juarez is a tough and dangerous opponent," said Marquez. "I don't just prepare for one style. If he can move, he can run, he can throw punches or stop throwing punches. I know that everything can happen in the ring."

Age and experience vs. youth

Could this be the fight where that accumulated punishment catches up to him?

"You can't always go by age because I've seen some fighters past 40 that have beaten much younger guys," said Hernandez who is preparing Jose Armando Santa Cruz to meet veteran Joel Casamayor on Nov. 10. "But Marquez now is more aggressive. He has to be careful not to get caught coming in."

Juarez, at 27, has probably sparred several hundred rounds less than Marquez. That means he's endured thousands of punches less to the body than the Mexico City world champion. If the battle is fought in close quarters, it could be the difference between winning and losing.

"If you get hit with a good body shot you can go into shock," said Hernandez.

It won't be a shock if one of the fighters is stopped due to a blow to the body that's for certain.