

No One, But Him, Thinks Gomez Can Beat Cotto

Written by Robert Mladinich
Sunday, 24 February 2008 19:00

Few people are giving Alfonso Gomez much of a chance against WBA welterweight champion Miguel Cotto when the two square off in the main event of an HBO doubleheader on Saturday, April 12, from Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City.

In the co-feature, IBF welterweight champion Kermit Cintron, 29-1 (27 KOS), of Reading, Pennsylvania, via Carolina, Puerto Rico, will defend his title against the only man to beat him, former WBO titlist Antonio Margarito, 35-1 (25 KOS), of Mexico.

It seems likely that the winners of both bouts will fight each other later in the year.

The February 25th press conference was held at the ultra-chic Hotel Gansevoort in New York's Meatpacking District.

The immensely talented 27-year-old Cotto, 31-0 (25 KOS), of Caguas, Puerto Rico, displayed a great sense of humor and, as usual, was extremely respectful of his opponent.

Gomez, who is also 27 and hails from Guadalajara, Mexico, showed why he was such a fan favorite on season one of "The Contender."

He was besieged with questions about the perceived inability for him to win this fight, or to be even reasonably competitive against the rampaging Cotto.

The extremely charming Gomez made it clear that he has winning on his mind, and that nothing or no one is going to dissuade him from that mindset.

"It's my karma for people to doubt me," said Gomez, who in his very first bout on "The Contender" opted to fight the much more experienced and heavily-favored Peter Manfredo Jr. To nearly everyone's surprise but his own, Gomez beat him by decision.

(He later lost a 7 round decision to Manfredo in a rematch).

"I don't have the (great) physique or thuggishness, but I have a lot of desire to win," he continued. "I will just keep punching and punching Cotto until my arms are going to fall off. I have a good jab and uppercut, and Cotto has a questionable chin which I'd like to expose even more than it's been exposed."

When it became apparent that as earnest as Gomez sounded, he wasn't convincing anyone that he was going to emerge victorious, he threw up his hands in a comical surrender.

"I don't know what to say," he said laughingly. "I'm just going to beat him."

Those words, coupled with Gomez's innate charm and million dollar smile, immediately

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ingratiated him to the scores of cynical media.

Later on Gomez continued to plead his case, but didn't seem all that concerned about turning the negativists into believers.

"Cotto is a great fighter, but there is no way he is hungrier than me," said Gomez. "He has a title and he has millions of dollars. How can he be hungrier than me?"

Asked if he felt the need to uphold and enhance his reputation as a member of "The Contender" franchise, Gomez said he fights first and foremost for himself and his family.

"If I come out victorious, everyone benefits," said Gomez. "And that is a positive reflection on the TV show."

Jeff Wald, the co-executive producer for "The Contender," said Cotto would be foolish to underestimate the tenacity of Gomez.

"Cotto is as good as it gets," said Wald. "But Alfonso is very strong-minded. You won't hear any trash-talking bull from him. Cotto is a tough bastard, but so is Alfonso."

To accentuate his point, Wald cited the fact that Gomez broke his hand early in a fight against the always tough Ben Tackie in October 2007, but went on to win a 10 round decision.

Regarding Gomez's other notable victory, a seventh round TKO of Arturo Gatti in July 2007, at the very same venue where he will challenge Cotto, Wald explained, "People said Gatti was washed-up, but he was still a tough bastard and Alfonso walked through him. This kid isn't intimidated, and he knows that to be the best you have to beat the best."

As Cotto becomes more proficient in English, he is showing a much lighter side of his warm and engaging personality.

When Tim Smith of the New York Daily News congratulated him on his acquisition of gas stations in his native country, Cotto signified with a hand gesture that the high price of petroleum was bad for business.

He then laughed heartily when Smith suggested that he would go out of business if scientists ever figured out how to use water for fuel.

Although continually asked if he believed Gomez was overmatched, Cotto defended his future rival by saying he had beaten Gatti and Tackie, both of whom were formidable opponents.

"No matter what, he comes to fight," said Cotto. "He is looking at this as his moment. I am always ready for whoever I fight. I look at all my opponents as dangerous. Anyone who doesn't is making a mistake."

Asked if he was looking ahead to the winner of Cintron and Margarito or even a fight against

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Floyd Mayweather Jr., Cotto determinedly said he was not. He did say, however, that as quick as Mayweather is, he believes he would successfully utilize his relentless pressure to beat him.

Cotto-Gomez is one of those matchups where it is hard to root against either fighter. Both are consummate gentlemen who have given their all to such a brutal vocation.

While Cotto has a hard-earned and well-deserved reputation as a fighter who would have been successful in any era, thus making him a heavy favorite to win, you can't turn your back on Gomez who has overcome many obstacles to find himself within punching distance of bringing all of his lofty dreams to fruition.

"I have always fought with things against me," said Gomez, who started boxing as a 10-year-old after his family moved to Oakland, California, from Mexico and he was regularly bullied by other youngsters over his inability to speak English.

He cited his failed 2000 Olympic aspirations and the fights he had lost early in his career, but stated, "I'm still standing here. Cotto has a lot of strengths, but I'm going to take advantage of his weaknesses and I'm going to leave the ring as the world champion."

Gomez's web site is: www.alfonsogomez.com