

Truly A Fighting Family

Written by Ron Borges
Sunday, 27 April 2008 19:00

It was supposed to be a discussion between two trainers about their fighters and the upcoming showdown between them and eventually they got around to that, but when members of the Mayweather clan are involved in the conversation it's always about them.

So it was Monday afternoon when Floyd Mayweather, Sr. set back family counseling about a century while discussing the family feuds that seem so much a part of the Mayweather modus operandi.

"Dysfunctional families are ones that go and kill their Momma, go kill their Daddy...or maybe want to go kill their cousins," Oscar De La Hoya's trainer said from Los Angeles, where he is preparing boxing's Golden Boy for a Saturday night showdown with Steve Forbes, a fighter now trained by Mayweather's brother, Jeff.

"It's not a family that's got differences in the family. If that's dysfunctional then the whole world is dysfunctional. It don't mean your family is dysfunctional because you don't agree. The Mayweather family is a warm family. It's not a dysfunctional family. I'll tell you what's dysfunctional. Floyd Mayweather, Jr. That's where the dysfunctional comes in."

Actually some might argue the dysfunctional came in, even by Floyd, Sr.'s high standards, the day then one-year-old Floyd, Jr. was wrapped in his father's arms when his uncle shot him in the leg during a highly dysfunctional family feud in Grand Rapids.

"Me and my Dad were playing in front of the house and my Dad picked me up," Floyd, Jr. recalled last year when relating the story one afternoon before his fight with Ricky Hatton. "My Dad said to (his maternal uncle), 'This is all I got in the world, my son, so if you're going to kill me, shoot.' My mother says he used me as a shield from getting shot."

Fortunately for Floyd, Jr. his defense is a lot better now than it was then. Never one to take a chance on shooting a child, Floyd, Sr.'s brother-in-law contented himself with shooting big Floyd in the leg. Now that takes the fun out of dysfunction right there.

This story came up within the outwardly innocuous context of discussing what it would be like for Floyd, Sr. and his brother Jeff to find themselves in opposite corners at the Home Depot Center in Carson, CA. Saturday night, one standing with arguably the most powerful financial force in boxing and the other next to a guy who understands his chances of winning are not much better than Floyd, Sr. being licensed by the state of California as a conflict resolution counselor.

"This is a first in boxing as far as I know, especially in a boxing match at this level, me matching wits with my brother," Jeff Mayweather said of he and his brother training Saturday night's main event combatants on HBO.

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“We’re climbing a very, very steep hill. Not just because it’s De La Hoya. Because it’s the boxing business. He (De La Hoya) had a big fight in place before and in my opinion he lost the (tune-up) fight (to Felix Sturm before facing Bernard Hopkins in a multi-million dollar middleweight title fight that had already been scheduled, just as his September rematch with Floyd, Jr. was scheduled before the Forbes tune-up was agreed to).

“We’re not just fighting Oscar. We’re fighting the business of boxing as well. If we don’t get it in the ring hopefully we’ll get it through the public. Steve has to look good enough for the public to want to see him again. He can fight at 140 (instead of just over the 147-pound welterweight limit for this fight) too and there are plenty of opponents out there. I’m not going to sugar coat anything. We know what the situation is.”

The situation is that the former junior lightweight champion was not given this fight because De La Hoya felt it likely he would upset him. Floyd, Jr. wanted to be sure of that though, so when he learned his trainer and uncle, Roger, had agreed to prepare Forbes he threw a tantrum and told him if he did he was out of the Money. At least out of the “Money” Mayweather business.

Little Floyd said he’d fire his uncle for putting his big payday at risk and hire someone else to get him ready for De La Hoya if he insisted on training Forbes, who has had the unique experience of having been trained by all three of the Mayweather brothers while also often sparring with Floyd’s son, who just happens to be considered the best pound-for-pound fighter on the planet.

Young Floyd’s reaction gave some credence to the belief held in some corners that Forbes, while not a heavy-handed opponent, could give De La Hoya problems with his speed and slickness. That, of course, is why De La Hoya chose him, believing that while he does not have to fear getting hurt he will gain experience and timing working against an opponent with some of the same skills as the man who last defeated him 12 months ago.

“I trained him for nine fights so I know about Stevie,” Floyd, Sr. said. “I’ll be honest with you, I’m not saying he’s the fighter Floyd is but he can give you the look. He can roll his shoulders and come back with the right hand. Stevie worked with all three of the brothers. He had a taste of it all.

“My brother, of course, thinks his fighter can win. I think mine will win. My man is bigger, stronger, punches harder and I think he’s faster.”

He would have been happy to add, as he later did, that he also once again has in his corner “the greatest trainer of this time, that time, part-time, full-time, any-time, all-time” after using Freddie Roach to prepare him for his first fight against Floyd, Jr. That change was made because of A) a dispute over money or B) De La Hoya’s concern over hiring a father to prepare him to beat up his son or C) none of the above or D) all of the above.

Whatever the cause, they’re passed it now and Mayweather, Sr. will be in his corner both Saturday night and on September 20 in Las Vegas. That assumes, of course, that together they get by a fighter and a trainer Floyd Mayweather, Sr. knows well.

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“To a degree by me having trained Stevie and now my brother training him of course it gives him some kind of edge,” Mayweather conceded. “We just hope it ain’t the edge he’s looking for.”

Considering that Forbes’ greatest moment was briefly holding the IBF 130 pound title eight years ago and the fact that he has only nine knockouts in 38 professional fights (33-5), the odds of him upsetting a six-time world champion who has been campaigning as a light middleweight and middleweight for the past seven years are longer than the Mayweather family moving in next door to the Waltons.

Steve Forbes was hand picked by Oscar De La Hoya for a reason. Beating him was not the reason. Jeff Mayweather understands what it is.

“Steve is one of the closest fighters out there to emulate Floyd,” he said. “That’s one reason why he got this fight. But he has fast hands. He can punch extremely strong to the body.”

He also has one other factor going for him. When it comes to mimicking the moves of Floyd Mayweather, Jr. he’s been prepared by the same trainers who helped create the best boxer in the world.

“I’m closer to Big Floyd than Roger,” Jeff Mayweather said of his training style. “He stresses defense. I stress defense. Roger was more of a puncher (when he fought) so he stresses more aggression and less boxing.”

What he’ll stress to Forbes on Saturday night is using speed, which confounded De La Hoya in the past against Mayweather and Shane Mosley, and the same kind of offense coming from his defense that the younger Mayweather fancies and used so well to outbox De La Hoya last May.

What will come of that no one can say for sure, although Monday it sounded like both trainers understood De La Hoya did not invite Steve Forbes to meet him at the Home Depot Center to make him upset. Or, more importantly, to upset him.

If anyone gets upset in fact it figures to be a Mayweather, although not with De La Hoya or Forbes. When they get upset they usually keep it in the family.

“With my nephew, him or myself has to make a decision to be the bigger person to squash something that happened in the past,” the more mild-mannered Jeff Mayweather said at one point.

“It goes back to when he started working with James Prince. I was doing all the things a manager do (for the young fighter). Working with Top Rank (Bob Arum’s company which promoted Mayweather at the time), those things.

“For some reason he got a manager. It came out of no where. To me it was a slap in the face. Once he brought in James Prince (who’s gone now) there was no need for me to be there. I wasn’t going to hang around and try to get a hand out and I knew my nephew wouldn’t be man

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enough to tell me he didn't want me around so I walked away."

It is believed Jeff Mayweather hasn't spoken to his nephew since. Floyd, Sr. speaks to him but when he speaks of him it is almost always with a harsh edge. Dysfunctional family or all in the family? Hard to know but unless Steve Forbes can do something about it, there will be a real boxing first on Sept. 20 involving the family Mayweather.

That's the night Floyd Mayweather, Sr. will send out from his corner a man he has been training for months to beat up his son. That's not a function many families would want to be part of.