

Paul Malignaggi: Doing It The Hard Way

Written by David A. Avila
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Hardcore boxing fans say Paul Malignaggi doesn't hit hard, moves around too much and isn't an exciting fighter to watch.

"I don't know," said Malignaggi. "I guess it's because I don't knock out a lot of people."

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But if you stand a few feet away, as if examining a classic painting, a different viewpoint comes to play and an appreciation of what the Brooklyn fighter can do in the ring becomes clear.

Malignaggi can flat out fight.

The IBF junior welterweight titleholder of Italian descent defends against South Africa's Lovemore N'Dou (46-9-1, 31 KOs) at Manchester Stadium on Saturday, May 24. It will be shown early Saturday on Versus network at 3:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

Don't miss it.

Whenever a prizefighter gains a world title without a ton of knockouts on his record, you can bet that fighter harbors tons of talent. Especially facing jawbreakers who can end a fight with one punch much like N'Dou.

It's N'Dou's second time at bat against Malignaggi and he could hit a home run. It only takes one swing.

"My most satisfying win came against Lovemore N'Dou because I dominated a guy nobody expected to be dominated," said Malignaggi (24-1, 5 KOs) who beat N'Dou on June 16, 2007, by unanimous decision. Two judges awarded every round to the fighter known as "Magic Man" Malignaggi.

But that was last year. The winner has a lot to gain from a victory.

N'Dou returned to the near top of the junior welterweight rankings with a seventh round knockout over Rafael Ortiz last January and aims to disrupt a future mega fight between the Brooklyn fighter and England's Ricky "The Hitman" Hatton.

A lot of money and prestige will be at stake, says Hatton.

"Absolutely, that's the idea of having him (Malignaggi) as part of the under card," said Hatton when asked if Malignaggi would be his next foe following their respective fights on Saturday. "It's important that we concentrate on our fights. It's key for him to win this fight and for me to win this fight."

Malignaggi's not thinking about the Hitman.

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"I'm not looking past N'Dou," Malignaggi says.

The Brooklyn fighter can't afford to look flat or unimpressive to the boxing public when millions of dollars are at stake and with the television networks looking for an excuse to avoid him. He's got to look as bright as the sequin jacket he wears while entering the ring.

"For some reason the television networks don't like me," Malignaggi said by telephone. "I don't get a lot of credit because I don't knock people out. But the last five guys I've fought, nobody is knocking those guys out."

That's not an exaggeration.

The IBF titleholder has faced a virtual murderers row of rugged individuals not accustomed to going down. Along with N'Dou, the Brooklyn boxer has faced Herman Ngoudjo, Edner Cherry, and Donald Camarena. These guys laugh at power punchers, but they didn't laugh at Malignaggi whose speed made them dizzy.

Even the superb Miguel Cotto wasn't able to add Malignaggi's name to his list of junior welterweight knockout victims. Though in the beginning it really looked like Cotto was going to drown him in punches after busting his cheekbone early in the fight.

After a slow start, Malignaggi, amazingly, began to figure out how to win rounds against the Puerto Rican wrecking ball. But it wasn't enough to offset the early lead Cotto piled on. Malignaggi was tabbed with his first and only defeat. It was depressing for the flashy fighter to endure a loss.

"Mentally, it was tough to get over," said the 27-year-old fighter of his first and only loss. "Miguel Cotto is a world champion and one of the best fighters in the world in my opinion. But I would want to do it again someday."

But first, he must prove he can beat N'Dou once again.

Beating the South African fighter can lead to a super fight against England's Hatton and perhaps open up the boxing world to Malignaggi, who remains an East Coast sensation, but is relatively unknown in the West including Las Vegas, the new boxing Mecca.

Anything can happen in a fight.

Fellow American Timothy "Desert Storm" Bradley recently upset a fighter many considered the top junior welterweight, Junior Witter, and took the WBC title. Malignaggi foresaw a possible upset that came into fruition.

Bradley foresees Malignaggi being able to run the table that can lead to a collision between the two American fighters.

"A Malignaggi fight could be done," said Bradley. "If he can take care of his business we can do

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this.”

Few professional boxers can jump in the ring against some of the most dangerous fighters in the world and win a fight by decision time after time. You have to be a Willie Pep or a Pernell Whitaker to pull out that kind of act.

It’s textbook boxing at its best.

Recently, Malignaggi was considered as an opponent for Oscar De La Hoya for his fight that took place a few weeks back. Golden Boy Promotions chose Steve Forbes instead.

“I think De La Hoya didn’t want to be abused,” said the fast-talking Malignaggi. “Too much stress. Especially because I would have been talking a lot about him.”

That’s another thing he does well; he can talk. He might be world ranked in that category as well.

“I like to cause controversy,” he says. “I like to keep it on the edge.”

Malignaggi is also one of the best boxers in the world.

Chris Byrd loses

The former two-time heavyweight champion Chris Byrd was stopped by technical knockout against light heavyweight Shaun George last Friday. The legs just couldn’t carry him any longer.

Byrd was knocked down several times beginning in the first round. He also dislocated his shoulder due to the knockdown but refused to quit until the ninth round.

According to ESPN.com Byrd was given painkillers after the fight when his shoulder was attempted to put back in place. He fainted and was sent to the hospital by ambulance. He was revived there.

It probably means the end of Byrd’s career.

Mijares unifies world titles

Mexico’s Cristian Mijares (35-3-2, 14 KOs) added the WBA junior bantamweight title to his WBC title when he won a split-decision victory over Venezuela’s Alexander Munoz (32-3, 27 KOs) last Saturday in Durango, Mexico.

Mijares has now defended his WBC title five times. Munoz was a two-time WBA junior bantamweight titleholder.

Arce and Chavez win too

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Popular Mexican boxer Jorge Arce (49-4-1, 37 KOs) beat Thailand's Devid Lookmahanak (18-2, 9 KOs) by a narrow majority decision in Aguascaliente, Mexico last Saturday. Arce knocked down the Thai boxer midway through the fight and that proved to be the difference on the scorecards. Judge Lou Filippo had it 115-113 for Arce and judge Dej Sri-Ampai 115-114 for the Mexican fighter. Judge Benjamin Rendon scored it 114-114 a draw.

Former Riverside resident Omar "Terremoto" Chavez, 18, the son of the great Mexican fighter Julio Cesar Chavez, knocked out Juan De Dios Castillo in the first round. Chavez remains undefeated with 10 wins and eight knockouts.

Angulo and Kirkland still undefeated

Coachella's Alfredo "Perro" Angulo (13-0, 10 KOs) kept his record spotless with a technical knockout win over Colombia's super tough Richard Gutierrez (24-2, 14 KOs) in the fifth round of their junior middleweight meeting.

Texas junior middleweight James Kirkland (22-0, 19 KOs) easily stopped Africa's Eromosele Albert (21-2, 12 KOs) in the first round.

Cuba's Yuri Gamboa (10-0, 8 KOs) survived a fourth round knockdown to beat New York's Darling Jimenez (23-3-2, 14 KOs) by unanimous decision in a junior lightweight fight.

Fights on television

Fri. ESPN2, 6 p.m., Aaron Williams (17-0-1) vs. Jose Herrera (15-4).

Fri. Telefutera, 8 p.m., Eric Morel (37-2) vs. Evaristo Primero (14-11).

Sat. Versus, 12 p.m., Ricky Hatton (43-1) vs. Juan Lazcano (37-4-1); Paul Malignaggi (24-1, 5 KOs) vs. Lovemore N'Dou (46-9-1, 36 KOs).