

BORGES: Margarito Trapped By Own Style

Written by Ron Borges

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Sometimes in life your strength can become your weakness. In the boxing ring - a place where the truths of life are often violently played out on a 20-foot stage – this can become fatal to your hopes and concussive to your synapses. Saturday may be such a night for Antonio Margarito.

Margarito has sacrificed many years as well as the IBF welterweight title he recently won from Kermit Cintron for the opportunity to challenge the world's best welterweight, WBA champion Miguel Cotto, at the MGM Grand Garden Arena. It figures to be a clash filled with contusions and ultimately a concussion. Their styles will demand nothing less.

Both the undefeated Cotto and the battle-tested Margarito come to the arena having signed the same psychic contract. They are in the pain business, two men well willing to accept some of it to inflict more of it upon the other.

Margarito has promised as much, predicting a fourth round knockout while insisting, "I am not sure what strategy Cotto will have for this fight but I know I'm the type of fighter who throws a lot of punches and puts a lot of pressure on my opponent. We'll see how he comes out and reacts to it.

"My strength is my power and my stamina and to be on top of him all the time. I feel that I will be pressuring him a lot more (than Shane Mosley or Zab Judah did). I have a lot more power and I can do a lot more things as far as power is concerned (than they could) and I know I have a bigger heart than both of those guys combined.

"I've waited a long time for this fight. I know I'm hungrier than he is and I want it more than he does...and I'm going to go get it."

None of those things Margarito boasts of are in themselves bad traits. In fact, as they apply to Margarito they are the only way he can win. He learned this at his own expense when he lost the WBO title to Paul Williams by taking a cautious, or perhaps disinterested, approach at the outset that was the opposite of his normally aggressive style. By the time he began to press Williams he had fallen so far behind on the judges' cards he was unable to catch him and lost his title and a bit of his reputation in the process.

Margarito swore this would not happen again after watching tapes of the fight and concluding he had let Williams out work him and he has stuck to that philosophy since in stoppages of Golden Johnson and Cintron that were overwhelming examples of forward motion and an attacking mindset.

Traditionally, Cotto has been a slow starter who measures his man, at times getting himself in trouble in so doing, but then grinds his opponent down round after brutalizing round. As the night drags on and he turns up the heat his opponents tend to wilt, suffocating from the damage he has done to their bodies and the relentless pressure he keeps them under.

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The difference between Cotto and Margarito is that while the former is perhaps not quite as powerful as the latter he is technically superior, more sound on defense and a better body puncher and counter puncher. So while Margarito's plan may be to engage Cotto on the inside that may not be as wise a course of action as he seems to believe.

His advantage is to keep Cotto at bay with his long jab and then look for spots where he can bomb him with his power shots but his history has been one of more of relentless engagement, often taking whatever fire he feels he must endure to do it. Because he is blessed with a solid chin and tremendous stamina that approach has often worked well for him but he has never been in with a fighting machine like Cotto, a champion who has proven not only his skill but also his mettle under fire against better opponents like Mosley and Judah.

What normally happens when Cotto is faced with someone who believes as Margarito does that his job is to throw punches in bunches until the issue is settled? Well, what has happened 32 straight times thus far is that the man in front of Cotto ends up taking more punishment than he can stand up to. That is a pattern Cotto intends for both of them to follow once again.

"If he prepared for just four rounds it's going to be very painful for him," Cotto (32-0, 26 KO) said. "I'm prepared to fight for 12 rounds.

"I try to bring the best Miguel Cotto into the ring that I possibly can, you know? The Miguel Cotto that can box and can move. When there is someone that can do that – you are a complete boxer. I will use whatever I need to use to win this fight.

"I can't tell you what style I will have to use. Until I get in the ring I don't know what style will win this fight – move or box - but I will try to use everything. I always feel better when I do that."

He also feels better now that he's safely fighting at 147 pounds rather than battling his own body to make 140 as well as his opponents. Since moving up in weight five fights ago, Cotto has not shown the occasional vulnerability he exhibited as a junior welterweight. He stopped Carlos Quintana, Oktay Urkal, Judah and Alfonso Gomez and won a clear decision from Mosley in which he appeared to rock the former three-time world champion repeatedly.

Truth be told, even when he did go down as a welterweight he always got up and inflicted harsh penalties for having been sent tumbling so even that small flaw seems to be less significant than some have tried to make it seem. But now, Cotto insists, Margarito cannot even rely on the ideal of that physical superiority despite his claims of being the harder puncher.

"When you destroy yourself to make a lower weight you suffer the consequences in the ring," Cotto said of the fights when he was briefly in trouble against DeMarcus Corley and Ricardo Torres. "Now I feel more comfortable at 147 pounds and the people that see my fights at 147 can see that."

Saturday night one of those people may well turn out to be Antonio Margarito, a fighter trapped by his own style and naturally aggressive inclinations into a battle plan that, in the end, may render him hors de combat when the issue is finally settled.