Written by Ron Borges Friday, 25 July 2008 19:00

LAS VEGAS – Antonio Margarito knows what he's looking for at the Grand Garden Arena tonight. He's looking for Miguel Cotto to do what he's always done. He's looking for him to go to work on the inside.

Not many fighters would be especially fond of that idea since Cotto is a guy whom no less an expert than Sugar Ray Leonard has said "goes to the body with conviction." To do it though Cotto has to first get inside, an especially difficult task against an opponent who holds a six-inch reach advantage on the WBA champion.

Yet that advantage is mitigated somewhat by the fact Margarito doesn't have the greatest jab in the world and is often disinclined to use it in favor of his more powerful hook, a punch Cotto will be looking to counter all night.

What may prove perhaps more important though will be Margarito's plan to invite Cotto to fight on the inside with him because it is there, he and his allies believe, that the champion is actually most vulnerable despite the success of his body punching on past opponents.

Every fighter has flaws, of course. This is true even for fighters like Cotto, undefeated ones (32-0, 26 KO) who are considered among the greatest in the world. Fighters can survive such flaws in many ways, either by overwhelming an opponent to the point that his own flaws don't come into play or by surviving them by virtue of a solid chin or an ability to mask those weaknesses in some fashion.

It is when your flaws dovetail with an opponent's strengths that a state of danger is created for the one and opportunity knocks for the other. Such a situation is what Margarito and his handlers see in the prospect of Cotto attacking on the inside because when he comes in he does so with a forward lean that can, at times, put his head ahead of his hands while momentarily exposing him to one of the most dangerous punches in boxing when properly executed.

How can that be when body punching is one of the welterweight champion's best assets, as Leonard rightly points out? It is because once Cotto gets inside, loaded for bear and looking to land painfully powerful body shots, he can forget he is also in a dangerous and vulnerable place, a place where if he leans forward a tad too much he opens up his less than sturdy chin to Margarito's powerful uppercut.

In the end a fight that is widely expected to be well worth the \$49.95 HBO pay-per-view is charging its customers to view it may come down to something as simple as that - the lean of a head and the sizzle behind an uppercut.

Cotto's chin has been much debated this week because he was once in grave danger of being knocked out by former WBO junior welterweight champion Ricardo Torres after being dropped

The Punch That Could Change It All

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for the only time in his career.

Were that the only time we had seen Cotto rocked one could call it a fluke occurrence but Demarcus "Chop Chop" Corley also had Cotto's legs resembling limp spaghetti when they met.

In both cases, it should be pointed out, Cotto came back to stop his opponent and both fights were at 140 pounds, a weight the champion now insists had been taking too much out of him to make. Since moving up to 147, Cotto has been in with some fairly heavy handed guys in Zab Judah and Shane Mosley and neither seemed to hurt him. What both did do was allow him to learn new things about the craft of boxing. That is something he and his trainer/uncle Evangelista Cotto believe will help the WBA champion greatly tonight against Margarito.

Still there is the specter of that uppercut snapping Cotto's head back with a hook coming behind it after his chin has been teed up. If Margarito lands such a shot once Cotto may well survive it. If it happens more than that however those 7-2 odds on a Margarito (36-5, 26 KO) win by knockout could prove to be the best bet on the board.

Before the two warriors arrived in Las Vegas, Margarito promised a fourth round knockout, a prediction he has fled from since, claiming he was only joking. Perhaps he was, perhaps he was not, but he has come to the Nevada desert cocksure he will leave a winner and probably knowing for that to happen he would have to stop Cotto, who is the superior technical boxer.

Cotto realizes Margarito's power is something to be concerned with and he well understands that his uppercut could do him great damage if it lands sight unseen. But what he also believes is that when he is on the inside clubbing Margarito to the body, the lanky Mexican with the long body will not like it.

The great Joe Louis once said, when told by a newspaperman that his opponent didn't like it to the body, "Who do?" That is as perfect an analysis of the effectiveness of sound body punching as has ever been uttered and Cotto does it as well these days as most anyone in boxing.

He's not Micky Ward, who stopped so many opponents with one shot to the body, but he relentlessly beats people down there until they implode and is committed to doing so.

Antonio Margarito knows and expects this. What he also expects is that some time tonight he will rip an uppercut into the face of Miguel Cotto. If he does, many chin questions will be answered about the champion. The question of who is going to become the best welterweight in the world may also be answered at that very moment as well.