I don't like to go there, as I always try to maintain a clear delineation between them and us.

I refuse, on general principle, to question a boxer's will—unless someone has tanked a fight pretty clearly, or has shown up in abominable condition-- or a ref's decision to stop a fight perhaps "too early." After all, anyone who gets in the ring, and gives his or her all, deserves tremendous respect, and should not have to defend themselves from some keyboard tapper who suggests they shoulda done this, or that.

So with that preamble, it is with great hesitance that I put forth a query. Should Miguel Cotto have at least attempted to fight to the finish in his battle with Antonio "The Real Life Terminator" Margarito on Saturday evening in Las Vegas? I ask, because I can't bring myself, in good conscience, to say that he should have. It's simply not for me to say. But it is a topic for discussion, among our most passionate and informed readership, some of whom have called Cotto out for "quitting." That term is way too harsh for me, and should be used on most rare occasions when in the context of boxing. But since that ball is in play, let's have at it..

On my card, Cotto was outboxing Margarito on Saturday, slipping masterfully, landing accurate, clean shots, and was ahead 6-3-1. I fully realize others, maybe most, had it much closer. Perhaps on another viewing I'd score it differently, as I did when I rewatched Cotto/Mosley (at MSG I had Cotto winning handily, at home I saw a MUCH closer fight.)

Then came the eleventh round, the unraveling round, the round where Margarito proved himself to be the most resolute fighter in the sport today, a machine unable on this evening of doing anything other than coming forward, and pressing the action. That smile we saw in days leading up to the fight, the same grin we saw him wear during his entrance into the arena meant exactly what it looked like it meant. The smile meant that Margarito, deep within his immense heart, was so certain he would prevail on Saturday, that he was able to enjoy the buildup to the crescendo.

But Cotto…

I was on board with labeling him Co-Pound for Pound best, with Pacquiao, and would've found it easy to elevate him to the top tier with a scintillating performance against Margarito, who I deemed a better boxer than the man Manny Pacquiao just dominated, David Diaz. He looked so confident, so slick, so good for so much of this bout. And then that eleventh round. He ate uppercuts, as Ron Borges told us he might, a left hooker-cut and then a right uppercut, and he took a knee at 1:38. No harm in that. Zero shame in that. It just surprised me, because I didn't peg him as being that sort of fighter, someone who would take the smart, safer route, collect his senses. Again, I reiterate, maybe he was seeing double, or triple, or the effects of a concussion.

I thought he was the sort who would dig down, trade, get mad, get even. So easy for me to say,

mind you, from the safe zone that is my sofa.

Blood trickled down his left eye, and was smeared on his face. There was more dripping from his nose, and his mouth.

Then, Cotto retreated again, as he had the bulk of the fight, but this was different. Fatigue was about to make him, not a coward, but a less resolute warrior than his foe. He ate left hands, two, three, slipped some shots, held on for dear life. He backed up, with the look of a man facing a firing squad, as Margarito skipped towards him, almost merrily, to plunge in the final dagger. The Mexican, who now has to be seen as a new millennium Roberto Duran with the feral intensity of his attack, tossed a one-two. Neither punch landed, but Cotto could not stand another second of even the promise of punishment. He took to his right knee, glanced at his corner, and stood up immediately, as his trainer hopped onto the apron to finish the act of surrender. No mas, the trainer, his Uncle Evangelista said, by stepping in to the ring.

I hate to use those two words, No Mas, with the bitter connotation they convey. But since a couple people I discussed this issue with brought it up, it's not inappropriate to fold those loaded words into this discussion.

To me, Cotto won the bulk of the fight. And when the going got truly treacherous, when the tide turned against him, he succumbed, to a knee, one, then twice. Again, I hate writing this, because there is not an ounce of coward in Cotto. But the record will show, in the eleventh round of his July 26 fight with Antonio Margarito, Cotto decided to go the safer route, and went to his knee, twice, rather than “go out on his shield.” Going out on your shield is an overrated way to go out, if you are keen on saving some brain cells for later in life.

But I’d figured Cotto for that sort of fighter when and if he did meet his match. I have no way of knowing how his body is internally. I just know it appeared to me he left something in that ring after that second kneeldown. On this night, his will to win was not equal to Margarito’s, it looked like. There’s no shame in that, but there is a perverse honor in fighting until one does not have an ounce left to give.

One former fighter I talked to, who didn’t want to give his name, because he didn’t want to be seen questioning Cotto or his effort, noticed that Miguel took to his knee twice, on his own volition, and the second time without being hit. He noticed that he glanced at his corner, perhaps hoping they would do what they did, so the onus of the choice not to continue wouldn’t be upon him.

This former fighter told me about the one round that he is probably most proud of in an illustrious career. The round came against a legend, who had inflicted some harsh punishment on him. The ref came over in between rounds and asked him if he wanted to continued. He hesitated, for a millisecond. His corner could have interceded, and threw in the towel. They didn’t, and he went out for the next round, and battled furiously. And was TKOd. He faced down the firing squad. And he looks back on that moment, and that round, and that effort, as maybe his proudest moment in his ring life. Because he found out then the depth of courage that he had, the size of his heart, his ability to face down fear and failure. Again, this former fighter

didn't want to cast an aspersion on Cotto, and neither do I; I want to see where we all stand on this issue, see if the standards in judging a fighter's heart have changed over the years, and make it clear that only Cotto knows if he could've given an ounce more of himself, or should have "gone out on his shield."

I ask you, readers, in your opinion, did Cotto have an ounce left to give?

Did he still have a chance, even a tiny chance, of winning that fight, of marshaling every ounce of strength, of landing one home-run toss, and dropping Margarito?

Did he do the right thing, the smart thing? Because in 10 years, the fans will have moved on, and he will be the one left to deal with the consequences of being excessively brave, to the point of maybe being foolhardy.

Have we made strides as fight fans in recent years, with all the medical knowledge we have in our possession, and are we less inclined to demand a fighter "go out on his shield?" And if yes, isn't that a good thing?

Will Miguel Cotto lie awake at night and wonder, tonight, tomorrow, ten years from now, if he had anything left to give in that ring on Saturday night?