

## Who Now Will Avoid Margarito?

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

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LAS VEGAS – With each punch that he walked through to get at Miguel Cotto Saturday night, Antonio Margarito took a step further away from ever meeting Oscar De La Hoya for the biggest payday of his life.

Each time the soon to be newly crowned WBA welterweight champion drove Cotto to his knees in the 11th round at the MGM Grand Garden Arena, Margarito lessened the chances that he would one day face Floyd Mayweather, Jr. anywhere but in a nightclub.

As a resume builder Margarito's 11th round stoppage of the previously undefeated Cotto was a moment of triumph. As an ad for future fistic employment it was not because by the end of the evening De La Hoya, who is in search of a final opponent with whom he can end his career, understood one thing – Antonio Margarito may be a little too interested in ending people's careers.

As for Mayweather, he turned down an \$8 million offer to fight Margarito two years ago, according to his former promoter Bob Arum. The wisdom of that decision was on full display Saturday night, as Margarito, a freakishly big man for a welterweight, dominated Cotto so completely that by the 11th round the brave Puerto Rican had voluntarily gone to one knee without being hit.

Some will question Cotto's bravery because of that act but he had done nothing more than follow the code of the fast-rising mixed martial arts fad. He had tapped out, and with damned good reasons.

By the time Cotto genuflected at the altar of Antonio Margarito he had been physically battered and spiritually broken. For half the fight he had fought brilliantly, countering Margarito again and again with his superior hand speed and snapping his head back repeatedly with stinging uppercuts and a rapier jab.

None of that had dissuaded Margarito for a moment from continuing to walk toward him, closing the gap more and more and pressuring Cotto until it must have felt as if he was trapped inside a diving cage with a Great White Shark.

"Margarito was like a freight train going downhill until it finally ran (Cotto) over," said Arum, who promotes both fighters.

Indeed he was, but what Margarito's performance likely accomplished was only to convince fighters with other options like De La Hoya and Mayweather to seek them out. Perhaps the biggest beneficiary will prove to be not Margarito but rather lightweight champion Manny Pacquiao. Although the public pronouncements were that Arum had begun preliminary negotiations with De La Hoya's promotional company to stage a Cotto-De La Hoya fight Dec. 6 in the Golden Boy's farewell to boxing, discussions had also begun about a De La

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Hoya-Pacquiao showdown at 147 to 150 pounds.

With Cotto beaten down and busted up so badly he is out and with Margarito having inflicted all that damage he seems unlikely to be a candidate for De La Hoya's swan song. That leaves De La Hoya with the kind of under-sized opponent he's grown to cherish in his dotage. Where it leaves Margarito is wildly appreciated this morning by fight fans but warily being eyed by future opponents.

"I offered Mayweather \$8 million to fight this beast and he turned it down," Arum crowed. "Floyd showed he was pretty smart."

Arum and Margarito have claimed for years that no one would fight him even though he was a two-time welterweight champion (WBO and IBF) before snatching the WBA title from Cotto before a crowd of 10,447. How one gets all those title shots and still claims to have been ignored is not the issue. What Arum and Margarito were claiming was that the biggest earners in boxing, the ones who had other options, took them instead of taking a fight with someone rightly called "the Tijuana Tornado."

Saturday night Margarito showed the world why that was the wise course by not only beating Miguel Cotto but destroying him first physically and finally psychologically. At nearly 6-2, Margarito is freakishly big in the way Thomas Hearn used to be as a welterweight. He has long arms that generate power and leverage but more importantly he has a chin that was molded in a foundry.

Cotto landed shots on him, especially uppercuts, that would have staggered and stopped most welterweights. In the first six rounds he often snapped the challenger's head back with his hard and accurate jab and by the time the fight ended CompuBox punch stats claimed Cotto had landed 43 per cent of the 655 punches he'd thrown and an amazing 45 per cent of his non-jabs (179 of 395).

It would be unfair to say they did no damage because about two hours after the fight Margarito passed through the hotel lobby at the MGM Grand surrounded and supported by his entourage. Pressed against his nearly closed right eye was a large plastic bag filled with ice. His left arm was resting on the shoulder of one of his compatriots as he leaned forward and shuffled more than walked toward the door.

This was a man who had taken quite a beating himself but it didn't show until the post-fight press conference when he arrived wearing dark glasses to hide some of the damage Cotto had inflicted. But damage, like all things in boxing, is relative. While Margarito had an ice bag on his face, Cotto was in the hospital being stitched up, rehydrated and given enough pain killers to anesthetize a thoroughbred.

Perhaps the latter was oddly fitting since Cotto is a thoroughbred. He was just a badly beaten one on the night by a guy who may find that his victory was perhaps too complete for his own good.

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Arum insisted that pay-per-view sales were tracking well ahead of projections and that DirecTV sales were about 50 per cent better than Cotto's November victory over Shane Mosley, which did somewhere around 350,000 buys.

Arum postulated those numbers would not only greatly fatten the paychecks of both fighters (Cotto was guaranteed \$3 million but may earn \$7 million while Margarito had a \$1.5 million guarantee which could more than double after all the money is counted) but also increase the marketability of Margarito because fighting him will now earn his victims larger purses.

"Something changed tonight," Arum said. "This fight did tremendous numbers on pay-per-view. A great number of those who bought it were Mexicans, Mexican-Americans. Because of that, people who wouldn't fight him before would be inclined to fight him because now the money rewards can be so great.

"It changes the whole parameter of who won't or who will. Something happened tonight that changed everything, to (Margarito's) benefit."

Perhaps so, but don't count on it. Perhaps those numbers that might entice one of Margarito's most recent conquerors, WBO champion Paul Williams, to offer him a rematch but there is no comparison between a payday for a unification fight and one with Mayweather or De La Hoya.

What one wonders even more is will Cotto seek a rematch after his swollen face begins to subside? Sitting in an anteroom off his locker room that was reserved for family only, Cotto sat looking dejected and spent. He spoke softly, his words leaking out more slowly from his mouth than his own blood had during the second half of the fight, when he kept spitting out every large gobs of plasma as Margarito punched his face into a barely recognizable contusion.

He said he would be back. He said Margarito had done his job better than he had. He said this was not "the end." He did not say he wanted another shot at Antonio Margarito however.

Oscar De La Hoya and Floyd Mayweather, Jr. seem likely to feel the same way. So on the night of his greatest victory Antonio Margarito had done it again. He made himself into a guy anyone with another option will refuse to fight.