

Steward: Margarito Too Dangerous For Oscar

Written by David A. Avila
Monday, 28 July 2008 19:00

Antonio Margarito can't box. The Tijuana Tornado has no defense. Those were some of the reasons many fans felt the Mexican welterweight would have no chance against Puerto Rico's Miguel Cotto.

Now everyone outside of California and the wild border town of Tijuana understand why many of the elite welterweights avoided Margarito like a tainted bushel of jalapeno chiles.

After years of boxing fans and experts decrying Margarito's boxing style and lack of defensive skill, finally the rest of the country along with the rest of the world now understand why Californians felt all along the Tijuana Tornado would beat Puerto Rico's talented Miguel Cotto.

Only those who ventured into the L.A. Boxing Club behind the Olympic Auditorium, or the Maywood Boxing Club in the middle of the industrial town, or the air-conditioned boxing gym in South El Monte, and finally the steamy one story Montebello PAL gym where Margarito prepared endless hours sparring against the likes of Sebastian Lujan, Alfredo Angulo, Jesus Soto-Karass and many others in preparation for his showdown with the respected Cotto.

The few boxing writers that ventured in those gyms over the years got a clear understanding of Margarito's ability and his almost abnormal stamina that allows him to climb the steep hills of Griffith Park and other locations.

Time to turn the page to chapter two.

Now, at the peak of his power, it would seem the next logical step would be a match with the ivory tower of boxing Oscar De La Hoya. Or not.

Most experts believe that Margarito's chances of meeting East L.A.'s De La Hoya are remote. More than a few say that Manny Pacquiao, not Margarito, will be the Golden Boy's last opponent.

Top Rank's Bob Arum, who promotes both Margarito and Cotto and formerly promoted De La Hoya, said he received a phone call a few weeks ago from Golden Boy Promotion's CEO Richard Schaefer about setting up a match with the winner of Cotto-Margarito. Both Arum and Schaefer were hoping for Cotto.

"If Margarito wins there is no chance because Oscar doesn't want to go out fighting another Mexican. Is that real or true? That's what he told me so I go to take it at face value," said Arum on Saturday before the Cotto-Margarito match.

Now with Cotto out of contention, the pendulum points to the diminutive Pacquiao.

Many boxing experts view that fight as a mismatch, despite Paquiao's recent success over

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junior lightweights like Marco Antonio Barrera and lightweights like David Diaz; experts see De La Hoya's size advantage as too much for even the speedy Filipino to overcome.

"I wouldn't pick Manny Pacquiao to win especially with the size disadvantage," said boxing columnist Robert Morales from the Long Beach Press-Telegram. "He'll (Pacquiao) have the same problem Cotto had last night against Margarito...I just don't think he can hurt Oscar."

Emanuel Steward, the famed trainer of Tommy Hearns, Wladimir Klitschko and Kermit Cintron, says he would rather De La Hoya face Margarito, but doesn't think it will happen.

"I don't think Oscar will ever take it, he (Margarito) is too tough," said Steward who also works as an analyst for HBO. "It would be the biggest fight that Oscar could make because Margarito is so hot right now."

Though Steward views a Pacquiao-De La Hoya match doing big numbers in the box office and on pay-per-views, he doesn't like the size disparity.

"The fight can be made because it involves someone who's considered the best fighter pound for pound," said Steward via telephone. "We just saw that size makes a difference when Margarito fought Cotto. Especially when you're talking about an elite welterweight, not just any fighter."

Tony Rivera, a cut man to many legendary boxers, said the best fight would be between Margarito and De La Hoya, but he also understands that money dictates matchups in prizefighting.

"It's a money fight for those guys but I hate to see such a little guy fight a big guy. Manny wants it because there's a lot of money for those guys, but all the work he's done will go out the window after a tremendous loss against Oscar," says Rivera who worked for Roberto Duran, Alexis Arguello and Marco Antonio Barrera. "Manny can only do so much. After that, you're asking for him to take a horrible beating. Everything will go right out the window for the sake of money."

Morales feels the same about the proposed match between De La Hoya and Pacquiao.

"Oscar could fight his sister and he'd get huge pay-per-view buys," said Morales, who has covered boxing for more than 15 years. "At different parts of his career he's been criticized for fighting guys smaller than him. How are they going to react when he's fighting someone who never fought at more than 135 pounds? Does he want to go out fighting a guy so much smaller than him? I'm not sure what that victory does for him."

After eventually breaking down Cotto, who gave a valiant effort, Mexico's Margarito has other avenues he can take.

Arum is proposing a welterweight tournament.

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Welterweight tournament

A welterweight tournament that pits the best 147-pounders of the world against each other is Arum's idea. He says it's reminiscent of the 1980s when fighters like Roberto Duran, Sugar Ray Leonard, Wilfredo Benitez, Hearn and others clashed.

"It's the hottest division in boxing," said Arum pointing to a Friday night match at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino where welterweights Jesus Soto-Karass and David Estrada engaged in a firefight for eight rounds. It was Soto-Karass who emerged the victor of the brutal affair with a left hook to the jaw.

"How many do you get as exciting as the fight between Soto-Karass and David Estrada?" Arum said. "What makes boxing interesting is you have these world class fighters and make them in different combinations. Sometimes they even fight each other again."

Arum proposed that the winner between Sugar Shane Mosley and Nicaragua's Ricardo Mayorga in late September fight the winner between Zab Judah and Joshua Clottey that is scheduled for Saturday Aug. 2. He also has a number of other welterweights waiting in the wings.

"All four guys are practically at the end of their careers. Not one guy outdoes the other. I like that," says Rivera about the proposed welterweight tournament.

"If you had this (tournament) in the heavyweight division it would be a bore, but doing it in the welterweight division I think makes it exciting," Arum said while at a Las Vegas casino and hoping to put Soto-Karass in the welterweight mix. "I would also love to see Judah against a guy like Margarito."

If Margarito finds it difficult to attract a marquee name opponent such as De La Hoya, there are plenty of other willing welterweights.

And let's not forget Cotto. Though he lost to Margarito, the Puerto Rican welterweight is still one of the best fighters in the world pound for pound. He fits right in the middle of any welterweight tourney that would also include Paul Williams, Andre Berto and Kermit Cintron.

Few welterweights in the world cared to enter the ring with the long-armed dynamo Margarito, who twice derailed Puerto Rico's other ex champion, Kermit "The Killer" Cintron.

People seem to dismiss Cintron, but the iron shouldered fighter packs knockout power in either hand, he hits harder than Cotto and was one of the few 147-pounders in the world willing to exchange blows with Margarito.

"Kermit (Cintron) banged Margarito with big shots and cleaner than Cotto did," Steward said of Margarito's ability to withstand a knockout blow. "Kermit was hitting him on the chin and he still kept coming."

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Steward is convinced that Margarito is the most dangerous welterweight in the world and has now attained superstardom.

Veteran cut man Rivera, who has witnessed first hand a number of the best boxers who ever lived, says that he understands if De La Hoya overlooks Margarito.

“He won’t take Margarito for his farewell appearance. I wouldn’t if I was Oscar. I would not take Margarito,” said Rivera who admires De La Hoya for keeping the sport on the front page. “De La Hoya needs an exciting fight too, to quiet all the Oscar haters. I like Oscar, he’s done a lot for boxing and Latinos, but everything comes to an end. I’d hate to see Oscar knocked out.”

Meanwhile, Margarito sits on top of the welterweight world and is surely close to the top of boxing’s best fighters pound for pound.

“He’s a superstar now,” said Steward.