

BORGES: Diaz/Katsidis Lowdown

Written by Ron Borges

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The stunningly instantaneous ravages of a great storm will battle the corrosive effects of constant erosion tonight when Australia's version of Arturo Gatti faces Houston's version of a windmill. The winner in such a match is debatable but one thing is not – if styles make fights they better have a double-wide ambulance at the Toyota Center in Houston.

When former lightweight champions Michael Katsidis and Juan Diaz are finished with each other there would seem to be no way that either won't have suffered the kind of damage that makes for good TV and high medical costs. Katsidis comes to fight face first. Diaz does the same. Both seem to feel slipping a punch is a felony while assault and battery is not. For a fight fan, could there be a better confrontation of will vs. grit?

"If there's ever been a fight almost guaranteed to produce all out action from bell to bell it's this one," promoter Oscar De La Hoya said of a fight that should have asked Clash to sing the national anthem.

"Diaz and Katsidis only know one direction – forward. When they meet in the center of the ring tonight there is going to be fireworks."

There is also going to be blood, contusions and probably confusion because though light hitting, Diaz is like the pounding of a wild surf. He hits and hits and hits again. Though stinging, no one blow causes much of anything to happen and then, seemingly all of a sudden, your front porch sags and falls down the cliff.

Katsidis, on the other hand, is a more concussive puncher, a big wind who had 13 straight knockouts at one point in his career and whose record (23-1, 20 KO) makes clear how he goes about his work.

So did his first loss, a bloody stoppage against Joel Casamayor in which his inexperience on that level showed in the first round, when he went down twice, but whose tenacity did as well when he fought back and dropped Casamayor in the sixth round, knocking him through the ropes in the process.

By the 10th Katsidis was spent however, badly cut, victimized by a nasty low blow, a storm that had blown itself out. It was then that Casamayor finished him, stopping him in a way Katsidis never thought possible.

Diaz suffered a similar fate against Nate Campbell in his last outing. Campbell simply beat him down in the same way Diaz had 33 previous opponents. Skilled and slick in the ring, Campbell did a great deal of damage to Diaz (33-1, 17 KO), much of it coming after he grew convinced the light-hitting but unyielding Diaz could not hurt him.

What happens this time if the far heavier handed Katsidis comes to the same conclusion? Diaz

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thinks it won't happen because he is a more skilled boxer than the raw Katsidis, which frankly isn't saying much, but the Aussie remains bold even after the first loss – but far from the first beating - of his life.

“It's one of those fights where one of us could get seriously hurt,” Katsidis said frankly, accepting that possibility in the way the gladiators he so admires did in the past.

“I've given my heart and soul into preparing for this fight. I've done the work to prepare. We are two fighters who like to come forward. I'm a fan of Juan Diaz. I know he's got no quit in him.

“He's just like me in a lot of ways. It's going to be an explosive night but I'm bringing the dynamite.”

He's also bringing the rawer skills and the more penetrable defense. This is not to mistake Diaz for Willie Pep. He has always been willing to pay a high price for the right to get inside and tear at an opponent like a cotton field full of boll weevils. The difference this time is he'll be doing it against a guy with power in his fists, the kind of power that has dropped the overwhelming majority of his opponents, including even the highly skilled and elusive Casamayor.

Though the fight is for a lightweight of a lightweight title, the IBO version, championship belts are not what are really at stake here. Health insurance premiums will be and so will the future of both because the one who loses will find it a bit more difficult to make his way through what has become a crowded field of lightweight champions and contenders.

Most of them will be working over the next two Saturdays; Juan Manuel Marquez taking on Casamayor for the RING magazine belt on the same night Campbell defends his title against undefeated two-time world champion Joan Guzman, who is moving up in weight for the third time to face him.

Those fights come one week after Katsidis-Diaz and once all are done the division will be sorted out and either Diaz or Katsidis should be back in the true world title picture. For television purposes, Katsidis is the choice of men who wear suits and draw up contracts because he has a style not unlike Arturo Gatti's, although with considerably less polish and defensive skills. To such people, those deficiencies are a plus.

Since defense was seldom associated with the oft-bloodied Gatti that gives you some idea how open to assault Katsidis is. Of course, that's part of the attraction.

Both Diaz and Katsidis claimed this week they'd learned many things from their first loss and surely they have. Whether any of that changes them once the leather starts flying is highly questionable however.

“There are a lot of things I learned not to do,” Katsidis said this week. If slipping a punch were one of them it might change the way this fight is likely to go but Katsidis quickly added most of what he'd learned were “mental things.”

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In other words, it's still face first fisticuffs on a Saturday night in Houston, which is what should make Katsidis vs. Diaz must-see TV for any fan of boxing or crime shows because someone's sure to get assaulted.