

Coach Roach Says He Knows ODLH's Weakness

Written by Ron Borges

Tuesday, 11 November 2008 19:00

Freddie Roach is confident and he's making sure Oscar De La Hoya knows it.

It is a month now before Roach will stand in the corner of Manny Pacquiao at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, trying to figure out a way for his fighter to undress De La Hoya in public but the process of disrobing him has begun.

It is something that is done slowly, word by haunting word. Thought by confusing thought. It's done one statement at a time until, Roach hopes, De La Hoya suddenly sees himself daunted and confused. Hesitant to throw his hands for fear of what missile or mystery might be coming back at him.

Not so long ago Roach was standing with De La Hoya rather than across from him. He had prepared him to beat Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and halfway through the fight he believed he'd done it and then, inexplicably, De La Hoya abandoned their high-volume jabbing plan and the fight slipped away from them.

Roach has not been in his corner since, either literally or figuratively. Since Pacquiao agreed to come up to 147 pounds to face the six-time world champion, Roach has verbally assaulted boxing's Golden Boy at every turn, calling into question his readiness to stand up to the challenge the younger, faster Pacquiao poses.

He's said De La Hoya can't pull the trigger any more and at one point in San Francisco, during the six-city tour the fighters went on to hype the fight, he presented him with a plastic gun he said he found. Roach said he was sure it belonged to De La Hoya because "you can't pull the trigger."

He's hinted that he's too old, too slow and his face hit too many times to stand up to a 12-round assault from the younger, smaller, more agile Pacquiao. De La Hoya has admitted to being surprised, angered and baffled by Roach's words, which maybe is Roach's intention. Whatever the motivation, Roach seldom misses an opportunity to remind the world, and subliminally De La Hoya, that he is not what he once was.

Asked if he'd been studying the tapes of De La Hoya's difficult night with Pernell Whitaker 11 years ago Roach could have simply replied he was. He did. Then he elaborated.

"We've been watching that fight a lot on tape to be honest with you," Roach said this week. "That's one of the key fights and I really don't think he's improved since then. I think he's gone the other way.

"I think with age we all get old and our reflexes get slower. It's just part of life. I think he's not the fighter that fought Whitaker at the time and that's why I'm so confident in this fight."

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Confident not simply because De La Hoya struggled to solve Whitaker's style but confident because the man he's going to put Pacquiao in with is a diminished fighter, a spent shell.

Roach has been beating this drum since before the fight was made, insisting De La Hoya's superior reach (six inches) and size (naturally far bigger than Pacquiao, who has never fought at welterweight and only once has fought even as a 135-pound lightweight) are negated by the ravages of time and, frankly, something more mysterious.

When you talk to Roach about the Mayweather fight, his disgust at having come out on the short end of that decision is clear. It is not, as is sometimes the case, because he feels his fighter didn't get a fair shake from the judges. It's because the one time he worked with De La Hoya he believed a plan was in place that was a winning formula but was abandoned by his fighter.

Roach insists he understands why and will use it against De La Hoya on Dec. 6. Although he refuses to elaborate, what he does say is surely disturbing to De La Hoya, which is of course its intention.

"It's a mistake Oscar made in the fight and we're going to take advantage of it in our fight," Roach said when asked if De La Hoya's decision to abandon his jab had been psychological or physical weariness.

"I'm not going to tell you what it was but it was something that he started doing. It wasn't something Mayweather did (to negate that jab).

"It was a mistake Oscar made and I know the mistake and I know it well and we will take advantage of it. It's how I'm going to take the jab away from him.

"He's got a good left hand and doesn't have a lot of confidence in his right hand. So we know we have to get past that jabbing and that's going to be our toughest opponent, I believe. We're working on that."

Roach willingly sings the praises of De La Hoya's work ethic. He claims he is diligent in training and easy to work for and with. Yet there is an edge even to those words, a sense that beneath the surface of that praise lies a basic contempt for what De La Hoya has become as his financial empire has grown and he's drifted off into part-time status as a boxer.

Things could not be more different for Roach. To him, boxing is more than a job. It's a calling. Almost like missionary work. He has taken the raw clay Pacquiao was when he first began to train him and shaped him into a fighter considered to be the best pound-for-pound boxer in the world.

That is not a part-time job and neither is the effort to defeat De La Hoya with the physical disadvantages Pacquiao faces. To do it, Roach is willing to work endless hours and to say most anything he can think of to make De La Hoya feel the pressure of what is coming.

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He will insult him, cajole him, ignore him and, most of all, try every day to create doubt in his opponent's mind.

"He's not the fastest learner in the world," Roach said of De La Hoya, who has a new trainer for the third fight in a row, Mexican legend Nacho Beristain. "When you show him something new you have to keep working on him where Pacquiao picks it up a lot quicker.

"You show Manny something once he picks it up quickly. Oscar's not that type guy. Not that there's anything wrong with it but the thing is it takes a little more time for him."

NOT THAT THERE'S ANYTHING WRONG WITH IT. Of course not.

"The game plan we had for the fight (with Mayweather) was working well in the early rounds and I thought we were winning the fight and then he abandoned the game plan and we end up losing the decision," Roach continued. "Then, I guess about a month ago, he started blaming me for the loss. He's always blaming somebody so he can blame me for this one, too."

There it was again. The stiletto slipped in amidst a discussion on another topic. "He can blame me for this one, too."

This what? Oh, yes. This loss.

In other words, Freddie Roach is teaching Manny Pacquiao, not just training him. He's teaching him how to beat Oscar De La Hoya because he knows something. Something he saw in the short time he trained him for Mayweather.

Something he wants De La Hoya to think about every day for the next month. He knows something. He knows something? He does? What?

"I know Oscar tends to get tired in the late rounds in slow-paced fights," Roach said, "We're going to put pressure on this guy. We're going to fight the whole time and just burn him out.

"As I thought about this fight and I watched Oscar with smaller guys and with southpaws – he has trouble with both – I started thinking about it and it made sense to me when the fight was finally offered so I pushed for this fight hard because I knew it was a great fight for Manny. This is going to be the icing on the cake."

For that to be true, Freddie Roach has to know something, it would seem. Doesn't he? That's what Oscar De La Hoya has to worry about, which is just what Roach is trying to create.

In a word, doubt.

"I don't think the size is that big a deal," Roach said. "Speed will win this fight, not size. If a guy has a height advantage or a reach advantage how easy is that to take away?

"It's very easy. Manny has the style to take that advantage away. He's aggressive. He comes

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forward. When you get close to a guy with long arms it crowds their punches. So I'm not worried about the size."

Not worried about size or much of anything else, it seems. Not worried about Oscar De La Hoya. Not even a little bit.

In Freddie Roach's mind, this fight is simple - let Oscar De La Hoya do the worrying.