

Can't Beat Paulie, The Brit Will Quit

Written by Ron Borges

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A lot of people in boxing believe Ring Magazine junior welterweight champion Ricky Hatton's career will be shortened, if it hasn't already been, by an outside-the-ring lifestyle that involves a lot more late-night hydrating than it does early morning running.

Paulie Malignaggi disagrees. The man who will be challenging Hatton for supremacy in the 140-pound division Saturday night thinks what will shorten his career is far more simplistic than that.

"(Hatton's lifestyle) is not something that's going to help him at the end of the day but I don't look into that stuff," Malignaggi said. "I just know on fight night he's ready to fight.

"I think the way he gets punched in the face is what will shorten his career. The amount of punches he takes is more of a concern than what he does outside the ring. Ricky Hatton is what he is. He'll fight like he fights.

"I don't care what his plan is. Everyone has a plan until he gets punched in the mouth. Saturday night he'll get punched in the mouth. Then we'll see."

Malignaggi (25-1, 5 KO) knows as much about defense as any fighter in the world today. He became a junior welterweight champion because of his mastery of it and he gave up that hard-earned world title for the opportunity to face a man who, to be kind, believes defense is something that goes around de-yard.

Ricky Hatton is many things. He is a powerful puncher, a hyper-aggressive proponent of pleasing the crowd by displeasing his opponents and is one of the most popular fighters in the world because of it. What he will never be, however, is confused with Willie Pep.

In an attempt to shore up the defensive part of his game after being stopped by Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and then looking less than overwhelming in a fight in which he took far more punishment than seemed necessary to subdue Juan Lezcano in his last outing, Hatton hired Floyd Mayweather, Sr. to replace his long-time trainer, Billy Graham, in an effort to shore up his long vulnerable defense.

Mayweather claims to be the world's greatest trainer and a professor of the manly art of self-defense. That may well be, Malignaggi countered Tuesday, but just because you can teach defense doesn't mean your student is capable of mastering it.

"You can teach someone anything but you have to be born with natural radar (to be an effective defensive fighter)," Malignaggi said. "Ricky Hatton has absolutely no sense of anticipation. You can teach him all of the defense you want but Ricky Hatton is awful defensively.

"He doesn't deal with speed well. Speed bothers him. If there's one thing you think of when you

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think of Paulie Malignaggi it's speed. I always had natural speed."

Hatton insists he has speed as well. Or at least more defensive abilities than he's shown in his last few outings, or even on the night he was nearly beaten by lightly-regarded Luis Collazo in Boston when Hatton made his first, brief foray into the welterweight division.

Collazo, who is not considered especially heavy handed, got off the floor to rock Hatton several times and leave his face marked up and swollen by the end of what proved to be a tight victory for the then undefeated Brit.

Since then it has more and more seemed that the result of a Ricky Hatton fight was that his hand was raised and his face was braised. Global warming may be threatening the environment but the night after a Hatton fight his face is so covered with ice bags he'd never know it.

"I do have this boxing ability nobody seems to see," Hatton (44-1, 31 KO) insisted. "Floyd has brought it to the fore.

"I admit my last few fights there hasn't been a lot of method to the madness but sometimes Ricky Hatton doesn't show all the boxing ability he has. I've got this (defensive) ability but at times I haven't used it."

Malignaggi doesn't believe Saturday night will be one of those times. He is convinced that although he lacks any significant punching power (as witnessed by his five knockouts in 26 fights) he will still be able to pummel Hatton until his features are barely recognizable.

His punches may only carry the sting of a bee but put your head inside a beehive for long enough and eyes begin to swell, noses begin to run and pain begins to mount.

Inflicting such pain is now Malignaggi's goal. Originally he was talking the more standard "I just want to win the fight" but after hearing that the champion had said he would retire if he couldn't beat the likes of Malignaggi, well, the bee began to buzz.

Hatton tried to clarify that statement Tuesday when he said he was not questioning his challenger's ability, only pointing out that "I just look at what he's got in his arsenal and what I've got in my arsenal and I should beat him.

"A fighter has to be honest with himself. If I don't perform I gotta look at things a little closer."

If Paulie Malignaggi is right about what he sees in Ricky Hatton, the champion may have to wait a few days for the swelling to go down to be able to do that.

"My basic game plan is to beat his butt," Malignaggi said. "It doesn't matter. Inside, Outside. I do it with speed. I'm going to beat his butt.

"He can have whoever he wants in his corner. Saturday night he's not going to win the fight. Look at his resume. He's been in with a lot of names. The problem is other than Mayweather

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and Collazo they were all 100 years old when he fought them. Paulie Malignaggi is only the third guy in his whole career he fought who was in his prime and still had all his tools.”

It is Malignaggi's opinion that when he begins to use those tools, all of them will be running at high speed. A speed Ricky Hatton will once again find out he cannot match.

When he does, Malignaggi says, he will forget all about whatever Floyd Mayweather, Sr. has been trying to teach him and return to a familiar, face-first style and when he does, his challenger will be waiting for him.

Waiting to make his face as unrecognizable as possible.