They don't celebrate Thanksgiving in Great Britain but if they did Ricky Hatton would have much to be thankful for this week. He would be thankful his career has been resurrected from the ashes of self-doubt.

After pounding around poor Paulie Malignaggi for 10 rounds Saturday night at the MGM Grand Garden Arena until Malignaggi's face began to take on a swollen look and a purplish hue, Hatton's assault was stopped 28 seconds into Round 11 at the instruction of both Malignaggi's trainer, Buddy McGirt, and his promoter, Lou DiBella. Both had seen enough by then to know this was not the Hatton they had expected.

While he will never be mistaken for Willie Pep, the Hatton that won nine of those first 10 rounds and the first 28 seconds of the 11th before referee Kenny Bayless stepped in to end something that had actually been over for nearly a half an hour was far more skilled than the wild boar who defeated Jose Luis Castillo, Luis Collazo and Juan Lazcano and was stopped by Floyd Mayweather, Jr. while sacrificing his face in the process each time.

This was the best Hatton anyone had seen since he stopped Kostya Tszyu in 2005 in what remains the best fight of his life. But while that victory was his finest hour, the win over Malignaggi may have been his most important because it came in such a one-sided manner that it again opened up the possibility of facing the winner of the Dec. 6 showdown between Oscar De La Hoya and Manny Pacquiao.

Even in this dismal economy, that fight figures to be one of the biggest pay-per-view events in history and a match next year between Hatton and the winner would be the biggest payday of Hatton's life, far in excess of the estimated $2.5 million he earned for pummeling Malignaggi, and surely one of the biggest shows of 2009.

Now trained by Floyd Mayweather, Sr., there would be a natural storyline if De La Hoya emerges as the victor in two weeks because Mayweather left him to train Hatton and has since been replaced by the highly respected Mexican trainer Nacho Beristain. Mayweather's goal in taking over Hatton was to convince him that there are other ways to block punches than with your face and that the jab is a formidable weapon of both offense and defense if used properly. Or at all.

Although Hatton prove to be master of neither against the light-hitting Malignaggi, he did show enough improvement after his first seven weeks training with Mayweather to believe there is yet a chance he might become all that Britain hoped for him in the wee hours of the morning after he broke down the noble Tszyu in a packed arena in Manchester, England.

That night all things seemed possible for Hatton but with each passing fight his defense lapsed more and more and his weight ballooned up more and more between each fight. In combination that left him in wars he won and in one, the knockout loss to Mayweather's son, Floyd Jr., a

defeat that was utterly and completely final. When put together it was the body of work of a fading fighter it seemed, a young man old before his time.

“Doubts started to creep into me mind,’’ Hatton (45-1, 31 KO) admitted after stopping Malignaggi. “Have I had too many fights? Have I been in too many wars?’’

The answer to that is not yet fully known but he was impressive enough against the slick moving, light-hitting Malignaggi (25-2, 5 KO) that it erased the memories of his battered face and wobbly legs against Collazo and the trouble he had subduing Castillo and Lazcano. Such problems may still exist but there is now at least all that is needed in boxing to spark another big fight for him – hope. Hope that his improvement will continue under the baleful stare of Mayweather, Sr. until he is actually slipping punches and catching an opponent’s jab with his gloves rather than his nose.

“He got hit way too much,’’ Mayweather said of the Hatton he inherited. “He was like a target. He didn’t have any defense. If he sticks with me and does what I tell him, you’re not going to believe he’s the same guy you saw against my son. He’s a real smart guy who wants to learn.’’

Some might argue that it is easier to stay with new things like head movement and a sharper jab when little armaments are coming back at you and they would have a point. While Malignaggi outboxed Hatton in the opening round he didn’t really win another minute of the fight in part because Hatton concluded very early that even if he did get hit it would not be fatal to his chances at victory.

Conversely, after Malignaggi was hurt by a right hand that buckled his knees early in the fight, he began to grab and hold and by the midpoint of the match his face was beginning to morph into a gargoyle’s misshapen image.

Freed of any concerns over being hurt, Hatton was free to move inside and work Malignaggi over, which he did. Still his jab, though more evident than in the past, would remind no one of Larry Holmes’ and to say he had head movement and improved defense, while true, would raise the question “In comparison to what? The statue of Michelangelo up the boulevard at Caesars Palace?’’

Still, there clearly was a positive change in his style. Many in boxing felt Hatton might never be able to catch up with Malignaggi’s speed and movement or have an answer to his hand speed but as things turned out neither was a problem and Mayweather was quite willing to take full credit for that.

Whatever the reason, the impression that was left was that the gulf between the No. 1 junior welterweight in the world and the No. 2 man at 140 pounds was as wide as the Grand Canyon that sits a short helicopter flight outside Las Vegas.

“Nobody will beat me at junior welterweight,’’ Hatton said after his hand was raised. “Nobody.’’

Perhaps not, but to face either Pacquiao or De La Hoya would be a different proposition

because both would bring with them the kind of power that not only can make an opponent take notice but can also render him unconscious, especially if he's forced to move back up to the welterweight division. That is where Mayweather's son overwhelmed him and where even Collazo appeared too strong for him, even though Hatton ultimately won that fight.

He is willing to do it again despite earlier promises that he had fought his last at 147 pounds because the money is there and, especially if De La Hoya awaits him, the most promotable fight in boxing would be there as well. Although that is not the same as the biggest fight, this is a business after all, and it would be big business with a capital B.

But if Ricky Hatton intends to win such a fight he will have to do more than learn how to manage those extra pounds and the power other men carry at that weight. He'll also have to master further the lessons of Floyd Mayweather, Sr.

"In the Castillo fight, the Collazo fight, the Mayweather fight, there wasn't a lot of method to what I was doing,'' Hatton conceded. "I was just tearing in there. I needed someone who would work on my technical side.

"I looked around and realized the best man in the world for me was Floyd Mayweather.''

Now he has him and the fruits of that union were on display in a one-sided victory over Paulie Malignaggi that has cemented that relationship, at least for the moment. If Hatton invests the time in training and is able to control his emotions and tendencies toward blind aggression when frustrated or after being hit, he may yet be all that Great Britain hoped for him the night he retired the great Kostya Tszyu in dramatic fashion over three years ago.

If he's not, he still got something big out of looking good Saturday night. He got a chance to earn big in six months or so, which, in the end, is really what prize fighting is all about.