

More Merchant: Larry On Pacquiao-Hatton I

Written by Michael Woods

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Props must be given to Larry Merchant, that professor of pugilism. He after all hatched the concept of Pacquiao vs. De La Hoya, and suggested that the match could be a thriller. Most everyone and their brother, if their brother wasn't Filipino or Teddy Atlas, or a few TSS keyboard tappers, though the event was a cynical exercise of exploitation for ego and moolah, and foresaw a De La Hoya wipeout win. Merchant's wisdom and judgment was bolstered that much more, as Pacquiao showed naysayers that his heart, and skill were more abundant than many presumed, when he forced Oscar to utter a No Mas. It is with that prescient call that TSS again dials up the prof, and gets his take on Pacquiao-Hatton I.

"Pacquiao-Hatton is probably the biggest junior welterweight fight that I can recall," Merchant told TSS. "It is a great contrast in styles, in and out of the ring. Who woulda thunk two small guys from outside America would meet in America for a big prizefight? I don't recall that happening."

"They both have rabid supporters, so it figures to be a big event."

The bout, co-promoted by Bob Arum and Golden Boy Promotions, will land in Las Vegas on May 2, with the venue and mode of television delivery still up the air.

"If Pacquiao wins, that could lead to another super event, and end of the year fight with Floyd Mayweather. Or, the winner fighting the Juan Manuel Marquez-Juan Diaz (Feb. 28 in Texas) winner is also a big event."

"I don't recall Pacquiao having to deal with someone quite like Hatton," Merchant continued. "The thinking in some corners is, sooner or later PacMan will land shots, as Hatton is moving in. He's got that lefty power Hatton won't be prepared for. But Hatton is a bright guy. We saw in his last fight he was willing to modify his style to be effective, under Floyd Mayweather Sr. Also, Pacquiao showed his willingness to make modifications under Freddie Roach. That was a big surprise for many, how skilled Pacquiao was, how complete he was, against Oscar. He now throws rights more, and we hadn't seen that so much when he arrived and was blowing through people. Also, his poise and discipline versus Oscar, his ability to avoid being careless or overzealous, was impressive. That's unusual for a fighter to be able to make changes like that, after being so successful and making so much money. Hatton also made modifications, though that was against Malignaggi, who was not as strong as Oscar, but was certainly given a chance to win. He showed with one training period with Floyd Sr. more head movement, and that he was not just a one-speed, marching forward type fighter. We can expect he try to continue to evolve. Given his physical and mental and emotional makeup and grit, there's a chance he can make it a serious fight as the underdog."

I told Merchant I am predicting a Pacquiao win, a narrow victory by a margin of one or two points.

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“If it goes the distance,” he replied. “It should be a hell of a fight.”

I do expect it will. We tend to play down Pacquiao’s ability to actually get buzzed by a shot, since he’s been on such a hotstreak. But you will recall, Rustico Torrecampo knocked him silly in 1996, and Medgoen Singsurat kayoed him, with a body blow, in 1999. But he was struggling mightily to make weight then, and his chin since then hasn’t betrayed him. Sure, he was buzzed against Marquez in 2004, momentarily against faded Morales in 2006, was in danger in the third against Larios, and Marquez wobbled him in the second round of their rematch. Much as we might think, right after his steamrolling of Oscar and off his three-year win streak, that Manny’s chin is impenetrable, history says the Filipino is actually a mortal in that department. But does Hatton have the pop to stop Pacquiao? No. And can the Hitman revamp his game in such radical fashion that he will be the slicker boxer come May 2nd? Doubtful. Will we be in for a good show on May 2nd? Yes.