

The first superfight of 2009 comes tomorrow, as the new king of the welterweights, Antonio Margarito, takes on three-division champion and all-time great "Sugar" Shane Mosley before a packed house at Staples Center in Los Angeles. Forget all the meaningless sanctioning bodies and the belts they so haphazardly distribute; this fight is for the true welterweight championship.

Beyond that, the fight carries even more meaning for each of the fighters. For Margarito, this fight will show whether murmurs of greatness from boxing's insiders are warranted. As for Mosley, whose legacy is already cemented, this bout will reveal if his Hall of Fame career has one more legendary performance in store.

A classic storyline. The highest of stakes. The promise of violent confrontation.

It doesn't get much better than this.

Margarito's Gameplan:

There is no mystery as to what Margarito, (37-5, 27 KO), will bring to the table on Saturday night. Honestly, can he really fight any other way than what we've seen? In the sage words of Larry Merchant, "You have to dance with what brung'ya," and that is exactly what he'll have to do against Shane Mosley.

What makes The Tijuana Tornado so formidable is not immaculate skill, nor awesome physical gifts, but rather his unbendable, wrought-iron will. As he demonstrated on the biggest stage of his career against Miguel Cotto, Margarito simply will not take no for an answer. Even if it means walking through a hailstorm of punches, Margarito will make his intentions felt, with the frequent outcome being an opponent left in ruins (see again: Cotto).

Margarito will have to exhibit nothing less against Mosley. The brutal simplicity of Margarito's style befits the uncomplicated nature of his fight plan: hit Mosley hard, and hit him often. He must start fast and maintain a frenetic pace the older man cannot hope to keep. Margarito is a fighter who thrives on momentum, so he cannot afford to stumble out the gate with Mosley. If he can build an early lead, the Margarito tide might end up being more than Mosley can turn. The belief of many is that, if Margarito can average in the neighborhood of 100 punches per round, he will gradually tenderize Mosley in the same manner he did Cotto.

Mosley's Gameplan:

Simply put, Mosley, (45-5, 38 KO), needs to implement the gameplan Cotto failed to. It is common knowledge that Margarito's game is riddled with holes. The difficult part isn't in finding the openings; it's making Margarito feel the effects of the incoming. In almost all his fights, Margarito just rolls forward like a heavily armored tank, scoffing at his opponent's vain attempts to thwart the inevitable. It is up to Mosley to instill doubt in Margarito's mind, to make him hesitate in his usually relentless pursuit of the kill.

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Mosley will have to assume the role of sniper against Margarito. At 37, it is unlikely that Mosley will be able to hang with the hyperactive Margarito punch-for-punch. Instead, he'll have to counter effectively and keep his opponent off balance with good footwork, something that has never been a strong suit for Margarito. As well as sharpshooting, Mosley will have to find opportunities to work the body, something Cotto neglected to do. An underrated body puncher, Mosley might just find a way to pierce Margarito's armor if he can dig into his midsection.

This is a tricky proposition for Mosley, who will essentially be walking a tightrope all night long. If he uses his legs too much, Margarito could walk him down in the same manner he did Cotto. If he stands too flat-footed, too eager to trade, he could go the way of Kermit Cintron and get chopped up like firewood. In order to win, Mosley will have to blend skill and will as he sits on the razor's edge against his vicious adversary.

### What Will Happen:

From any perspective of analysis, this fight figures to be an uphill battle for Mosley. Although he still has some game left at 37 years of age, he is still several years removed from his prime. It wouldn't be difficult envisioning a younger version of Mosley, say circa 2000, pounding out a convincing decision against Margarito. The problem is, it's nine years later, which is an eternity in the life of a prizefighter.

Mosley's recent fights have shown him to be increasingly vulnerable. In his fight with Miguel Cotto, a slow start forced Mosley into a late-round rally which ultimately proved to be too little, too late. Against Ricardo Mayorga, the stylistically crude Nicaraguan managed to out hustle Mosley during extended stretches of the fight. Though most fans just remember the savage Mosley left hook which ended the fight with one second left, the fact is that he struggled significantly against a limited foe in Mayorga, indicating that some of the magic may have left Sugar Shane.

Though it remains to be seen if Margarito, already a fifteen-year pro at thirty years of age, can make his mark on history in the same way Mosley has, what seems evident is that he is entering the peak of his career as a fighter. His punishing performances against Cintron and Cotto in 2008 were the kind of breakthrough performances that had eluded Margarito for his entire career. The Tijuana native is likely riding a wave of confidence unlike any he's ever experienced, a ride he's not interested in ending any time soon.

Even with his physically taxing style and many years in the ring, Margarito still seems relatively fresh compared to Mosley. Along with the advantage of youth, the styles also appear to favor Margarito. In recent years, the times that Mosley has been most dominant has been when he's faced foes who have allowed him to set the tempo of the fight, such as Luis Collazo and Jose Luis Cruz. Against foes who have been willing to press the issue a bit more (see Cotto and Mayorga), Mosley has had more trouble. Even against the limited likes of David Estrada in 2005, Mosley had some uncomfortable moments with his hard-charging opponent. Margarito brings greater size, strength, and aggression than any of the aforementioned opponents, which might mean trouble for Mosley.

## TSS Prediction Page-Margarito/Mosley

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When they square off on Saturday night, expect Mosley to be the same stylish, tenacious boxer he's always been, but expect Margarito to be the same unrelenting bruiser that has earned him his fearsome reputation. Exchanges will be plentiful in a crowd-pleasing fight, but eventually youth, hunger, and ferocity will win out as Margarito shows that he simply has more to give at this point in his career. Mosley will keep things close, and will make a valiant stand against his younger, stronger foe, exhibiting the spirit that has made him the legend he is. In the end, though, it just won't be enough. Though the temptation is there to predict a late stoppage for Margarito, the guess here is that the gritty veteran Mosley will finish on his feet, dropping a reasonably competitive decision.

The Pick:

Margarito by unanimous decision

Editor Note: Welcome back, John.