

What's Next For Cotto And Pavlik?

Written by Ron Borges

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Kelly Pavlik and Miguel Cotto both won easily Saturday night but what did it prove? Beyond the importance of match making, not much.

Both were coming off stunningly one-sided defeats so these were fights designed to get their feet wet without getting their faces bloodied and on that level they were stirring successes. Cotto looked spectacular against the offensively-challenged Michael Jennings, a brave Brit but one with no definable credential that warranted a world title shot. Pavlik was brutally effective against Marco Antonio Rubio, who wisely retired in his corner after nine rounds in which he had no answers for what Pavlik brought to the Chevrolet Centre in Youngstown, Ohio.

Pavlik retained his middleweight title and Cotto recaptured a portion of the welterweight championship that Antonio Margarito beat out of him last summer but what is more significant will be where they go from here. Unlike Cotto, Pavlik has a logical immediate challenger with which to test himself at the highest levels if he chooses to accept it in undefeated IBF champion Arthur Abraham (28-0, 23 KO). It is a challenge his promoter, Bob Arum, has no intention of accepting any time soon, however.

Cotto, on the other hand, is not so lucky. It was originally thought Cotto would face Margarito in a June 13 rematch until the latter was found to have tampered with his handwraps prior to his loss to Shane Mosley January 24. Suspended for a year and under suspicion for a lot longer, Margarito is now out of the picture and Mosley has no interest in a rematch with Cotto, at least not in New York.

Cotto does have one option that, though not a big money fight, would help greatly in re-establishing his credentials in the division and that's a unification bout with IBF champion Joshua Clottey (35-2, 20 KO). What's more likely, if Arum can get away with it, is pitting Cotto against former two-time champion Kermit Cintron, who is coming off a bad beating from Margarito and then a questionable draw against Sergio Martinez when he moved up to 154 pounds to challenge for the junior middleweight title.

Eventually, Cotto hopes to land the Manny Pacquiao-Ricky Hatton winner, which would be a mega-fight, especially if Pacquiao defeats Hatton on May 2. In theory it would be relatively easy to make as well since both are promoted by Arum. So the good news is that both Cotto and Pavlik have opponents out there who would allow them the opportunity to rebuild their careers after their first losses. The only question is whether they can do it, a question not answered by anything that happened Saturday night because of the understandably inferior opposition in front of them on their first night back at work.

What seems most likely is that Arum will put Pavlik in with popular Irishman John Duddy in Cleveland in early summer, a fight that figures to be bloody target practice for Pavlik despite Duddy's improved defensive performance on the Pavlik undercard against journeyman Matt Vanda. Duddy (25-0, 17 KO) was not only dominant but also showed an improved willingness to

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move his head and avoid unnecessary toe-to-toe confrontations – for nine rounds. But Duddy can't seem to avoid a firefight if one breaks out and when Vanda opened up a bit in the final round Duddy took unnecessary punishment because he couldn't help himself. If a brawl breaks out he's a brawler at heart.

That's a bad tendency if you're facing someone like Pavlik, who comes forward relentlessly throwing the jab and the straight right hand behind it. Unless you happen to be Pavlik's promoter.

Duddy would make for some interesting moments but in the end is not likely to survive the kind of pressure Pavlik will put on him nor have the kind of power that could threaten him. He is, then, the perfect opponent from Arum's point of view – a very popular and saleable guy who appears to be much more of a potential threat than he actually is.

The other suggestions of junior middleweight champion Vernon Forrest or "Contender" alum Sergio Mora are shameful but not beyond the realm of possibility in this day and age. Mora's lack of firepower would leave him helpless against Pavlik. Forrest, a skilled two-time world champion, would probably give Pavlik more problems but he's no middleweight and at his age seems unlikely to be able to stand up to Pavlik's pace.

What Pavlik should focus on then is unifying the title by facing the two German champions, Abraham and WBA belt holder Felix Sturm. Arum has already begun to argue that Abraham is not well enough known in the US yet and so more time is needed. This is the first thing promoters and managers say when they're trying to give an opponent the Heisman stiff arm.

First off, a fight or two on a Pavlik card would do little to change the public perception of Arthur in the U.S., where he is relatively unknown outside boxing circles. Abraham is not likely to agree to that because he can make more money fighting in Germany, although he's anxious to face Pavlik. In fact, he claims the only reason he has remained at 160 pounds was to face him in a unification bout.

But more importantly isn't it a promoter's job to promote the idea of what such a fight would mean rather than downgrade it? Isn't his job to promote a worthy opponent rather than launch into claims that Abraham wants too much money (which is a falsehood) and that he's not well known enough to justify a fight with Pavlik when everyone believes they are the two best middleweights in the world at the moment?

Pavlik-Abraham would be a fight for fight fans. Why's that a bad idea?

As for Cotto, if he chooses to try and unify the title against Clottey it would be a rugged test but if he is still near what he was before the Margarito beating it seems likely he would find a way to win. Such a test, if successful, should renew his confidence even more and send him hopefully into battle with the Hatton-Pacquiao winner in what would be a mega-fight and set up a rematch a year or so from now against Margarito. Considering the history between them, and the shadow that will linger over Margarito because of the allegations of loaded handwraps, a Cotto-Margarito rematch if Cotto can defeat Clottey and the Pacquiao-Hatton winner would

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become a second mega-fight for Puerto Rico's most popular fighter today.

So in the end what really came out of Saturday night's one-sided victories for Kelly Pavlik and Miguel Cotto? Future opportunity to be sure but no sure sense yet that when those opportunities come that either will be fully ready and able to handle them.

Only time and more testing will tell if Miguel Cotto and Kelly Pavlik are still what they were once thought to be but one thing was obvious on Saturday night – they can still dominate the lesser lights in their division's constellation of stars.