

## Shame On MargaCheato!

Written by Ron Borges  
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The hand wraps were dirty. So now what does boxing do?

That is the dilemma facing both boxing and the promoter of Antonio Margarito, who accused others of preaching when they agreed with the California State Athletic Commission decision to suspend former welterweight champion Antonio Margarito and his trainer, Javier Capetillo, for life for what now appears to be an effort to load Margarito's gloves with plaster of paris.

According to the Los Angeles Times, the confiscated handwraps taken from Margarito in the locker room shortly before his losing title defense against "Sugar" Shane Mosley in January contained two primary elements of plaster of paris: sulfur and calcium. The Times report cited documents obtained from California's top law enforcement agency.

A California Department of Justice senior criminalist who inspected the wrappings under a stereomicroscope and with an X-ray fluorescence spectrometer, determined the wraps contained two elements which, when mixed with oxygen and water, make plaster of paris. What that combination would make on the hands of a professional boxer is lethal weapons.

The hand wraps were removed from Margarito's fists shortly before his Jan. 24 title fight against Mosley when Mosley's trainer, Nazim Richardson, objected to the amount of tape covering one of the handwraps. After a heated debate the wraps were removed and hardened gauze pads, which had been inserted inside the hand wraps near Margarito's knuckles, were seized by the California State Athletic Commission. The fight was allowed to go on because, after all, you couldn't stop the money from flowing from an HBO broadcast even if one of the guys involved was slipping a brick in his glove now could you?.

With the pads removed, Margarito seemed a shadow of the fighter who had destroyed Miguel Cotto and Kermit Cintron, two fighters who had not lost to another opponent let alone ever been given the kind of beatings Margarito handed them before knocking them out.

With his hand now wrapped in tape and gauze only, Margaito was like a lamb, beaten to the punch all night by the 37-year-old Mosley and never able to hurt him in the slightest. He was finally stopped in the ninth round, surrendering the WBA welterweight title to Mosley.

This is all particularly alarming because Margarito seemed to come to power punching late in his career. After performing little better than a journeyman for years, he suddenly blossomed in his early 30s, consistently not only beating but knocking out top level opposition. Now that career has an even longer, darker shadow cast on it by this latest confirmation than occurred in January but so too does boxing.

Once again its regulators proved inadequate and its enforcement arm weak. A one year suspension for an offense as egregious as this one now appears to be now seems like a slap on the knuckles at best.

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Arum argued at the time of the suspension that this was all a toxic blend of hysteria, suspicion, innuendo and misunderstanding. Worse, he claimed it was a travesty of justice and that it was Margarito who was the victim of a rush to judgment not Mosley.

Now the tests have come back positive. On handwraps that are supposed to have nothing on them but gauze and tape there were traces of two of the three elements necessary to turn a boxer's hands into hardened blocks.

Arum has thus far been mum on the matter, saying he hasn't seen the report. Margarito is back in Mexico hoping to fight outside the United States before his suspension is up while not yet having even appealed the suspension. With the evidence on those wraps, one can understand why he didn't.

If Margarito does try to fight before the ban is lifted, he should be banned from boxing for life. If he doesn't try to, he should still be banned from boxing for life unless someone can come up with a plausible reason why those tests found a lot more on Antonio Margarito's handwraps than the rules allow.

The burden of explanation is now on his shoulders and no amount of saying, "I didn't know what they were doing" will change the situation he's in. As Cotto himself said, "A fighter knows what's on his hands."

Indeed so, and what now appears clear, maybe even to the man who promotes Margarito and who once was a lawyer, is as Desi Arnaz used to say to Lucille Ball on their hit situation comedy in television's early days: "Lucy, you got some 'splainen to do."