

THE BLUEPRINT: How To Beat Floyd Mayweather, Pt. I

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 30 March 2009 19:00

Floyd Mayweather Jr. is returning to the ring. It is divinely ordained. Many boxing aficionados are already scrambling for seats in the choir and clearing their throats to sing again of the glory of "Money". If the stained glass windows shatter, blame Floyd, for he shall surely be singing loudest.

It is likely that he will choose a beatable but not a bum to bedazzle in his comeback bout. And he will again blaspheme the closest thing to a boxing god in Sugar Ray Robinson. "I respect what Robinson did for the sport," Floyd has said, "but I am the greatest." Let the rational among us politely remind the man and his fans that Floyd Mayweather Jr. isn't nearly ready to carry Robinson's spit bucket or say his name without bowing his head. If Floyd is serious about achieving an elite legacy, he should step off the stage and into lions' dens; stop jabbering and start jabbing, in the direction of Mosley, Cotto, Paul Williams, and Pacquiao.

Indeed, the glare of perspective has a way of separating delusion from dogma when it comes to comparing Floyd to more proven quantities and surveying what he has and has not accomplished. It does not, however, detract from the glittering skill and talent that this five-division champion undeniably possesses. Floyd has both style and substance. His personality may be that of a classic narcissist, reflective of the bad taste and boorishness in vogue today, but his training is old school. It is rooted in a solid foundation of skill that only appears after years of practice –and it's a family tradition among Mayweathers. The demon speed, reflexes, timing, distance negotiation, and cat-like coordination rounds out the technician in him.

And that is not all he brings: Floyd is also a conditioning fanatic in the Holyfield-Hopkins mold. Working out is part of his lifestyle. He'll do roadwork at odd times, often simply because he knows that his opponent won't. He has reason to feel confident; notwithstanding a mere 39 fights that include one gift decision (Castillo I). That confidence, that fanfaronade, hasn't hurt him yet.

Yet.

Like any other artist and tradesman, fighters settle into their individual systems. Human systems contain patterns and habits. They have weaknesses. Great boxers, analysts, and trainers identify an opponent's system and intend to find those weaknesses. Eddie Futch solved the conundrum of Ali and beat him twice through the instruments of Frazier and Norton. Two decades later he was still at it, devising the strategy for Bowe to defeat Holyfield and for Montell Griffin to defeat Roy Jones. Futch, a bespectacled old man who served his apprenticeship among boxing's greatest generation in the 1940s thus defeated three undefeated champions –without breaking a sweat.

Archie Moore was a master strategist for almost as long as Futch. Sports columnist Jim Murray watched the early rounds of many Moore fights and was reminded of a skilled mechanic

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“...opening the hood of an engine and exploring around inside for the weaker spots. Only, when he finds these, he doesn't repair them. He makes them worse. It's a trick a lot of mechanics have, but with Mr. Moore it's a high art form. A loose bolt here, a slick valve there, and by the time Arch has got through tinkering, the transmission falls out.”

Granted, the Mayweather machine is a Maserati –known for speed and performance. He is not easy to undermine; and the mechanic who tries is going to have to deal with high voltage shocks while he's working. However, if he has commitment, experience, conditioning, and athleticism of his own, then his tool box is sufficient, though not enough. What he needs is a strategy to defeat the system that is Floyd Mayweather Jr. What he needs is a blue print.

Understanding Floyd

Floyd's natural talent and proficiency has been acknowledged. Let's pop the hood and see what's underneath:

Floyd seeks easy glory and the ring is both stage and showcase. He does not relish violence or crave the kind of blood-spattered glory of rougher men. He sees himself as a performer first and the sound of money is his applause. How else do you explain his forays into the WWE and “Dancing with the Stars”? Here is a man desperately trying to fill a starved ego. This is perhaps the major reason why he is a great competitor who will not lie down under pressure. He has finished fights with painful injuries to his left shoulder (during the first Castillo fight), his left hand (which he shattered on the head of Carlos Hernandez), and his right hand (against Baldomir). “My body's tearing down,” he admitted on HBO's 24/7. Brittle hands are the explanation for the patty cake drills he does on the mitts, as well as his reluctance to fight inside or work the body. Past injuries also explain his diminishing punch output. He has evolved, or devolved, away from the more aggressive boxer-puncher we last saw against Sharmba Mitchell and into a hit and run spoiler.

Look closely. His psychology is peculiar. He comes across as supremely confident to the saucer-eyed and the young at heart. Those more seasoned witness the constant bragging and posturing and see a man who is not at peace with himself. Few “gangsta” types are, with a notable exception in Frank Lucas who reminded us that “the loudest one in the room is usually the weakest.” Floyd is not as strong as he pretends and if you know what to look for, you'll see fragility. Sometimes he'll even show you. He's cried at press conferences and his public angst over his undeniably strong father turn my worrisome head towards Dr. Phil –or Freud. Some may argue that it's partly an act. I would retort that even if he is inflating it, lies don't float without the helium of truth.

Floyd Joy Mayweather Sr., the alpha male of the clan, is kept at a safe distance. The fighter prefers the more amenable personality of his father's younger brother (and former “Black Mamba”) Roger Mayweather. Uncle Roger is the trainer and chief second, but his role is more intimate. He is like a eunuch from the late Roman Empire, who acted as a shield between the emperor and the rest of the world. Loyal and trustworthy, Roger soothes the child-king who secretly fears failure, who fears exposure.

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These fears may be why Floyd exercises caution when choosing whom he will fight. Pitch a tent in his head and you'll see how it is very possible that the limelight Floyd craves fills the voids left by a hard, disapproving, and often absent father. So the son pursues big names like Oscar and Ricky, yet must protect himself from failure, and so avoids lions ...like he avoids his father. Those competing goals of glory and low risk clashed as public criticism increased after the Hatton win. And what did Floyd do? He took his ball and went off to safer playgrounds.

And now the child-king is back, resplendent in a robe that is too large for his legacy and too small for his ego.

Check back on TSS for technical specifics in Part II...