Channeling Harry Greb

To beat Floyd, you have to fight him with intelligent disdain and exploit his vulnerabilities –physically and psychologically.

Sure, almost every one of Floyd's high profile opponents has proclaimed the intention to "pressure" him. That simply isn't enough. Floyd is a matador. Hatton-sized, one-dimensional bulls can't get by his talent, while aging or inadequately conditioned bulls like De La Hoya and Judah can't maintain the attack. Almost every one of Floyd's opponents fought him for extended periods at precisely the wrong range. Matadors like ring center and no one is going to out-matador a speed demon like Floyd. Those who tried should have worn a blindfold because at least they'd have had an excuse for embarrassing connect percentages.

Jose Luis Castillo, an average athlete at best, found remarkable success in the first fight because he understood how not to fight Mayweather. He got into tight formation, held his hands high, tucked in his elbows and weaved his way in until he pinned Mayweather on the ropes. Once he got there, he punched with him. By round 7, he was snorting like a righteous bull.

Trying to slip Floyd's shots and then counter is an exercise in futility. He's too quick. Get inside and rip shots. This can draw him out. When Floyd punches, he leaves windows open like everyone else. Don't look for openings because you're probably not quick enough to catch him –so punch with him.

Vernon Forrest's revelation about how he dealt with Shane Mosley's speed was no secret to anyone who knows their way around the ring. Jabs can neutralize speed. Many trainers will tell you that Floyd would not be an exception to that. I think they may be wrong. Floyd is a master at timing and countering jabs. There is a qualifier: if you are a stronger man with an educated jab, aim for his chest to try to get him off balance. Think about throwing what used to be called "straight lefts" at the cusp of his left shoulder where he was injured. Vary it, shoot rising jabs, and double it to foil the counters. Use it to ram your way inside.

Floyd is increasingly unlikely to concentrate any kind of attack to the body. I don't think he wants to risk punching an elbow and breaking a hand. He'll jab to the body to probe and set things up, but he is almost a headhunter like Ali. The head, after all, is on a spring and is therefore less likely to hurt your hand unless you land one on top of the head. Floyd learned that the hard way. You, however, should go to his body. Sam Langford already told you why ("the head got eyes"). It is baffling to me why so many of Floyd's opponents concentrate their attacks on his head. Baffling! They only miss; and thereby offend judges, increase his morale, lower their own morale, get countered, and tire out. Go downstairs! "When the belly is hurt," mused A.J. Liebling, "the legs sympathize." Body punching is an investment that eventually pays dividends against a man who relies so much on mobility. President Obama says it's time to invest in the future or face tougher times. He's right.

The “L formation” or “Kronk Defense” is part of Floyd’s system. The right hand is held high to parry jabs and block hooks while the left hand is held across the belt line. The chin is tucked in behind a shrugged left shoulder. Floyd uses this stance to invite your right so that he can roll back and counter with his own right. Set a trap: feint the right and then whip a left hook so you can catch him throwing his counter right. He also has a habit of bending at his waist and to his right. The cure is simple: Shoot a left cross at his heart or at the cusp of his left deltoid. Get close, feint the right, and as he bends to your left, shift your weight on to your front leg and leverage short left hooks and hybrids, mixing in short rights and right hooks to the body.

Remember that Floyd is exceptional with angles, particularly when he sets up left hooks. Angle with him and throw your own left hooks to prevent his escape and to set up your rights. Floyd also has a habit of sliding outside and away from punches. You can see this on the tapes. If a right is thrown, he slides outside and to their right. If a left hook is thrown, he slides outside and left. He is able to do this because the opponent is often at mid-range when he’s throwing his shots. Close the distance, shorten up the shots, and bar the exits. You do this by cutting off the ring, controlling him with hooks, and by putting your non-punching arm around his waist just long enough for you to pivot at him or step over. If he gets away, cut the ring off again or chase him down.

In real terms, Floyd’s experience is beyond 39 fights. While most fighters have been plying their trade since adolescence, Floyd has been doing the same since before kindergarten. Part of the secret to his reaction-time is that he understands probability. Although there have been high profile innovators like Ali, Roy Jones, and Hamed, most boxers are blue-collar conservatives. It’s how they learn their craft. Trainers use a form of classical conditioning where “this” causes “that”. In other words, boxers are trained according to certain rules and expectations –for example, right crosses often follow left hooks, and the counter for each is often the other. Preparing for probable responses is part of fundamentals.

An experiment can illustrate what I’m getting at: The next time that you step into a crowded elevator, don’t face the door like everyone else. Face the wall opposite the door. Take note of the reactions of the people around you. Some will stare, distracted. Others will move away, disturbed. This is why Aaron Pryor beat Alexis Arguello and could have beaten him all week long and twice on Wednesday. Alexis was a stand-up technician who could not adjust because Aaron’s frenetic and unfamiliar style defied expectations. Aaron was as disruptive as a rebel on an elevator and he short-circuited Alexis’s system.

What Floyd does is similar to Alexis, only he takes it to another level. Floyd bases his reactions on two things: fast twitch fibers and good odds. He gets downright Pavlovian –he offers a stimulus and anticipates what your response will be. Then he exploits your predictability. Lead and respond unexpectedly and you will not only disrupt his game, you will find him. Floyd is conditioned to expect 1 or 2 or maybe 3 shots thrown in succession. So throw 5. Mix in rare punches like overhand rights and right hooks. Feint often. Feinting is a foil for speed. Vary not only your attack, but the speed of your punches, and your feints as well. The only constant is that you have to get inside and pin him to the ropes and the corners.

A few of Floyd’s opponents demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of how to best fight

Floyd. Gatti tried to use his strength and get him off balance. Oscar periodically pinned him on the ropes and landed shots up and down. The athletically gifted Judah was able to impose his southpaw style for four rounds. They all eventually failed because of faulty strategy. Castillo got inside, brawled intelligently, concentrated on the body, and closed off exits –but was robbed in the first bout. In the rematch he forgot how to fight Floyd and became a somnambulist –repeating what have become the typical mistakes of following Floyd, headhunting, and fighting conservatively from the wrong range. They all got bedazzled.

If Floyd returns to the ring and fights stylistic straight men with inadequate tool boxes, then he will continue to mesmerize, but will never convince. If Floyd is serious about improving his legacy, he and his system will be tested. Watch for the challenger who enters the ring with a blueprint structured around 'intelligent disdain' –and based on the principles of infighting, body work, and unorthodoxy described above.

I'll be there as a witness –with two empty seats reserved for master strategist Eddie Futch and ring mechanic Archie Moore. And after the fight is done and the din has died, I'll find a church on a dimly lit street …and listen to the sound of a silent choir.