Written by Michael Woods
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Miguel Cotto's rumble with his uncle Evangelista sounded a heckuva lot more interesting than just about any heavyweight title fight we've seen in the last few years, didn't it? Such passion, such fury…why couldn't most of Wladimir Klitschko's recent foes have summoned half that energy and zest for combat?

Family squabbles can go from 0 to 60 on the lunacy scale when a rift ruptures. When a livable gulf explodes into a canyonesque vacuum that can't be filled by any amount of mediation or heart-to-heart fence mending sessions, sometimes folks throw hard objects through their loved ones' Jaguar windshields. Better that, I say, than a piece of lead aimed at a noggin, instead of a rock at an automobile. That's my lengthy way of saying...Hopefully with some time elapsed, Miguel Cotto and his father's brother will be able to be in the same room without trying to take each others' head off, and perhaps even look back on their April brouhaha, and chuckle at their ineffectiveness at conflict resolution.

But the Miguel Cotto I saw on Wednesday at a press conference at Madison Square Garden to hype his June 13 showdown with one of boxing's most underrated hitters, Joshua Clottey, that Cotto hasn't been able to move past the family fracture. He looked spent, like he needed an IV of espresso to snap out of a mental funk, as he took questions from the NYC fightwriter mafia. If Cotto and Clottey were to throw down this weekend, I'd not be afraid to throw a few bucks down on the underdog Clottey, who looked to be locked into a mindset of joyful anticipation at the prospect of getting his chance of a lifetime.

But there will be plenty of time for the 28-year-old Cotto (33-1, 27 KOs; sole loss to Antonio Margarito July 2008) to get the recent bloodline battle out of his head. For eight weeks, the Puerto Rican hitter will train in Tampa, Florida, and one presumes he may well emerge from that camp in a better frame of mind and body than he has in some other camps, when he sparred with his trainer as heatedly as he did with his paid sparring partners. For that reason, I see Cotto as a 60-40 favorite to take down Clottey. I see a distance fight, with conditioning and will being the most important factors in deciding a victor.

Since 2006, five of Clottey's seven outings went the distance. Since 2006, five of Cotto's nine outings went the distance, or ended in the second to last round. Clottey will be in Cotto's face, and will try and grind him down. The Ghanian does not have the power to stop Cotto. And in 38 pro tiffs, Clottey (35-2, 20 KOs; last bout was a win against Zab Judah last August) hasn't been stopped; I don't see the pugilist Cotto doing the deed in June. Cotto will take a UD, with a margin of two or three points, at the end of the night.

Then again, that aura that Clottey dispensed at MSG…the 32-year-old New York appears to be in a zone of confidence that should worry Cotto fans.

As a matter of fact, when asked what a win over Cotto would mean, Clottey didn't deliver the expected response, and say that he was thinking only of the present, of what he had to do to

hand Cotto his second loss. He said that a win over Cotto would get him another marquee tussle, with Shane Mosley.

"I know Cotto's gonna hit me," said Clottey, the IBF 147 pound champion. "I can take his punches, but I don't know about him taking mine." He also said he lusted after a rematch with Antonio Margarito (he lost a UD12 to Margarito in Dec. 2006, a fight he was winning until he hurt his hand). "I want a rematch very badly," he said. If Clottey's hand gets raised on June 13, we can look at his forward-thinking, and concede that his foresight was the product of a prepared mind. If he loses, we are likely to decide that he may have gotten ahead of himself…

As TSS told you earlier, Cotto will be trained for the time being by the unknown Joe Santiago, a trainer of Puerto Rican amateurs, who has been with Cotto for three fights as a conditioning coach and nutritional consultant. They will work together in Tampa, away from the tug of family ties in PR, though Cotto said he might still hire on another, presumably more well-known tutor. Would he ever reunite with Evangelista? "I don't know, I don't think so," he said.

Cotto made it clear that he didn't want to belabor the matter concerning he and his uncle's violent clash. He also said he never considered putting off the bout. Both he and Clottey chose not to re-enter the Margarito/MargaCheato fray. "I prefer to keep in my mind he had a good night against me in Las Vegas," Cotto said of the tainted boxer.

Promoter Bob Arum told TSS that he thinks the split with the uncle could really help Cotto, removing an element of distraction. Cotto is on the same page. "I feel less pressure" with Evangelista's exit, he said. "I hope the less pressure gives me the opportunity to train better."
Early on, I referenced Cotto's seeming funk, so I was curious how much he is still digging the whole not-so-merry-go round of the fight game, the political beefs with his promoter and his familial squabbling. How much longer, I asked Cotto, will you keep fighting?

"A year and a half, two years," he said. Cotto's contract with Arum is up in 2010, and two months ago, it looked like a done deal that he and Arum would go the way of Miguel and Evangelista, though perhaps without the Jaguar modification. But on Tuesday, it sounded like Arum had done some skilled PR work to heal wounds. "(Me and Top Rank) are good, like always," he said. "We've always had a good relationship." 'Cept that time two months ago when you were furious that Arum seemingly took Margarito's side..but I digress… "When the contract is finished, I will sit with Top Rank and negotiate," the current WBO welterweight titlist said.

I am not afraid to gush a little bit, and tell you all that I have been quite impressed with the newest head of the NY athletic commission, Melvina Lathan. Partly because she wasn't afraid to publicly gush about Barack Obama's improbable, wondrous win in November, but also because she isn't afraid to depart from the script, and just speak her mind on boxing matters. She said she would've been harder on Margarito than California was if his hand warp shenanigans occurred in her jurisdiction two months back, and on Tuesday, she again showed that she is capable of displaying a knack for not simply mouthing platitudes and fill in the blanks banalities. "I thank HBO for making this a straightup HBO fight, and not a pay per view," she said. "It's a good thing." Halle-frickin-lujah! Rather than appearing to be a mouthpiece for the cable behemoth, she actually spoke up for the long term good of the sport and the shrunken

wallet of the average fan who has been forced, if he or she wanted to watch premium fights, to pay hand over hand over fist for it in the last five years. “These guys are fit and ready and they can bang,” she said of Cotto and Clottey.

Arum noted then that 60% of tickets for the event are scaled at $50 or $100, which is reasonably reasonable in this day and age.

Clottey, during his turn at the mike, showed a load of class, as he stated, “I am sorry about what happened between Miguel and his uncle, everything will be fine.” That said, he wasn’t just in warm and fuzzy mode. “It’s going to be a war in the ring,” he promised.

Cotto then took to the mike, and he articulated what his wan demeanor suggested. “This is not one of the great moments of my career,” he said, “but I will work on climbing out.”

SPEEDBAG Martin “Bazooka” Kovzelove is one of those dudes I see at almost every big press conference and I have never taken the time to figure out who he is and what he does. Turns out he’s a cut man who is owed some money by the folks at Dum Dum lollipops. About ten years ago, Bazooka was in Gleasons Gym, and there happened to be a commercial shooting there. Larry Holmes and Gerry Cooney were starring in the spot for Dum Dum lollipops, and a production guy tapped Bazooka to be in the spot. Not a speaking role, but after a couple of hours of production, he had a few bucks coming to him. He’s still waiting for his check. To make matters worse, that Dum Dum spot never ran, Bazooka thinks, so he didn’t even get a chance to see his mug on the tube. Bazooka said he asked Larry about the spot a few years later, and Holmes didn’t really recall the shoot. One presumes that Larry got his check, because that man would remember the shoot if the Dum Dummies still owed him dough….

---Had a nice chat with former lightweight and junior lightweight champion Joey Gamache. The Maine-iac has been apprenticing under Manny Steward the last couple of years, soaking up Manny’s ways in camps for Jermain Taylor, Kermit Cintron, Andy Lee and Jonathan Banks. Now, trainer Gamache is ready to make his own mark. He’s looking for a few good men to mold and help reach the promised land. “I’m looking for guys with desire, and dedication and discipline,” he said. Fit that bill? Call him at 646-245-8084.

---I gushed earlier about Lathan. Here’s a bit more gushing. I truly believe this woman is looking to make the most of her position, and will look for ways to help some of those boxers who aren’t able to yank themselves up by their bootstraps; who may have fallen on hard times; who may be feeling the effects of blows absorbed in decades past, and are having a hard time making their way in the United States’ health care system which is stacked in favor of the wealthier folks who are afforded employer-provided health insurance coverage. Lathan is putting together a financial planning seminar which will run on May 18 at Pac U in NYC. Fighters past and present can attend, free, and get some advice on how to make the most of their earnings. Check back with TSS; we will have more specifics on the seminar, and more details on Lathan’s plans to encourage some of those who have benefitted the most financially from the sport of boxing to establish funds and programs for those who have served the sport, without enjoying a financial windfall.