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Since being stopped by Manny Pacquiao in his last fight on December 6th, 2008, Oscar De La Hoya's advancing age, rapid weight cut and lack of hand speed have been highlighted as the reasons why he looked so bad. And though I agree with that, there's a bigger reason as to why De La Hoya looked so inept against Manny Pacquiao. Before touching on that, I can't overlook how much Oscar resembled an empty package at the weigh in. Physically, his eroded skills stymied any chance he had to get off. Add to that his severely declining reflexes, along with his being confronted by a quick-handed fighter who puts his punches together in flurries---it made him look as though he was aging by the minute. I can't help but think Oscar made the right decision when he announced his retirement from boxing on April 14, 2009. It's nice to see a fighter get out with his health, wealth and respect.

Early in De La Hoya's career he battered smaller fighters like Jimmi Bredahl, Jorge Paez and Genaro Hernandez because they engaged him and he wasn't forced to fight as the attacker every minute of every round. Even Jesse James Leija and Julio Cesar Chavez knew if they fought as the counter-puncher and moved away, they'd never beat him. So De La Hoya did to them what Bernard Hopkins would do to him eight years later, and drew them into him. However, once De La Hoya moved to welterweight he was a fish out of water when the winning ring strategy required him to impose himself physically on an upper-tier opponent.

Starting with his disputed decision win over WBC welterweight champ Pernell Whitaker, De La Hoya showed he had no clue how to force the fight. Forget about who deserved the decision. With Whitaker forcing Oscar to push the fight, Pernell was actually in control. Against Whitaker, De La Hoya lunged and reached with his left jab, and because he was missing with his jab, his slightly more than adequate right hand was a non-factor. De La Hoya was known for having a good left-hook, but no fighter with the exception of Sugar Ray Robinson could effectively lead with their left-hook. Against Whitaker, it was imperative for De La Hoya to go to the body, the reason being Pernell could move and hide his head, but not his body. The only trouble with that was, Oscar came at Whitaker with a high attack, which left him wide open for Whitaker counters when he lowered his left hand trying to go to the body.

Further proof of De La Hoya being ineffective when he had to impose himself physically are found in the contrast between his two fights with Shane Mosley. In their first fight back in June of 2000, Oscar was facing a Mosley who fought as a lightweight his entire career with the exception of Shane's two fights prior to challenging Oscar for the WBC welterweight title. Oscar assumed that Mosley was just a pumped up lightweight, therefore he figured he could push the fight and over-power Mosley a la George Foreman. Once again, De La Hoya not knowing how to cut the ring off and force Mosley to fight him off left him a sitting duck on the way in to the counter punching Mosley. In truth, Mosley's at his best fighting as the counter-puncher. Add to that a guy who's not forcing him to punch out of urgency and he's home free. Thus Mosley won the title via a split decision which should've been unanimous.

When they fought a second time at junior middleweight in 2003, De La Hoya was a completely

different fighter. Luckily for Oscar, Mosley was a confident guy and loves to fight. Sure, he likes to counter-punch, but he's more than willing to press the action if his opponent is moving away. In the rematch De La Hoya moved away and circled Mosley behind his left jab. So much so, Oscar didn't even to try to put any real hurt on Shane, and was more than content trying to win the fight from outside. Mosley had no reservation about assuming the role of Joe Frazier against Oscar, and fought the entire fight as the aggressor. The problem for Mosley, like Oscar, is he's not at his best if he has to push the fight from bell-to-bell. The second time around De La Hoya moved and boxed against Mosley. Once again the decision went against him, but the fight was much closer and some had De La Hoya winning a fight that I scored a draw.

Before touching a little more on how ineffective De La Hoya was when forced to impose himself physically on his opponent, let’s look at two of his better showings against dangerous opponents who pressed him. In February of 1999, De La Hoya fought the very strong and aggressive undefeated Ike Quartey. No doubt the fight was close, but during the bout De La Hoya did some of his best work, scoring two knockdowns to eke out the decision. Why? Because Ike pressed him during the fight, enabling Oscar to move and box against an opponent who was right there. Seven months later De La Hoya fought undefeated Felix Trinidad, a fighter who pressures his opponent even more than Quartey. Again, forget about the decision for a moment. For the first nine rounds De La Hoya boxed better than he did in any other fight. With Trinidad forcing the fight, Oscar was able to tag Felix on the way in with jabs, right hands and hooks to the body. This may have been Oscar's finest hour and he won no less than seven rounds of the twelve round fight. It must be noted that Quartey and Trinidad didn't offer much head movement or angles as they pressed in, something that can't be said about Mosley when he fought as the attacker. Interesting how the first Mosley fight was nine months after the Trinidad fight, and Oscar looked so ordinary against the counter-punching Mosley.

In another high profile bout for Oscar, he took on Fernando Vargas, another fighter who'd set De La Hoya up to fight as the counter-puncher. After losing some early rounds Oscar took apart Vargas on the way in and scored one of his most impressive wins, stopping Fernando in the 11th round. A year later he fought a rematch with Mosley that I already touched on. The pattern should be very clear by now. Bring the fight to Oscar, and he was at his best. Force him to push the fight, and he was nowhere nearly as effective.

When De La Hoya announced he was fighting Floyd Mayweather Jr. after taking apart Ricardo Mayorga, I knew he was in trouble. This was easy to see. What you had was De La Hoya who was seven years removed from the first Mosley fight, taking on a fighter who'd force him to fight as the aggressor from bell-to-bell. In a way this was even a worse match up for De La Hoya, being that he wasn't as good in 2007 as he was in 2000, and Mayweather was much less inclined to force the action compared to Shane Mosley.

In the early rounds against Mayweather, De La Hoya fought smart and kept Floyd off balance by using his jab. However, once Mayweather countered him a few times Oscar abandoned his jab. From about the fifth round on, De La Hoya charged Mosley almost like a linebacker. Despite holding a substantive strength advantage he didn't know how to apply it. Oscar never cut Mayweather off or went to his body in order to try and force Floyd to trade with him. Once again, Oscar not being effective when forced to fight as the aggressor cost him a fight. Luckily

for him Mayweather wasn't as good as advertised or the Golden Boy would've taken a beating, as opposed to just being outboxed for the better part of 12 rounds. Obviously, the fight with Manny Pacquiao came at the end of De La Hoy's career. Add to that the style contrast and Oscar looking weak at the weight, the way it ended wasn't a surprise.

Oscar had a great career and fought the best of his era when they were at their peak, with a few exceptions. He did a lot of things really good, but nothing great. He was a good boxer with a stiff left jab. When allowed to fight as the counter-puncher he was at his best. When forced to impose himself physically in order to win he was very ordinary and vulnerable. Don't take my word for it. Go back and watch the fights in which he fought as the aggressor at welterweight or above.