Written by Frank Lotierzo
Tuesday, 28 April 2009 19:00

This weekend’s Ring magazine/IBO junior welterweight title bout between Manny Pacquiao (48-3-2, 36 KOs) and Ricky Hatton (45-1, 32 KOs) will be broken down and analyzed from a multitude of angles. We'll hear it said numerous times that "styles make fights." Which of course will be a major factor in determining who comes out on top. Having said that, I believe it's even a little more simple than that regarding this fight.

Is it really a secret to any sophisticated boxing observer that Hatton is going to be in there trying to overwhelm Pacquiao and take his head off from the onset? On the other hand, Manny will be looking to nail Ricky with big left hands on the way in, with the hope of impeding his aggression and eventually stopping him.

In looking at this fight we have a few things that are pretty much a given. We know Pacquiao has the faster hands and can put his punches together in combination better than Hatton. He also has more ways and weapons at his disposal to win the fight. It's not hard to envision Manny out-boxing Ricky for the better part of 12 rounds and securing a decision victory. Especially since he is the fighter the boxing establishment will be pulling for, being that Pacquiao's star quotient explodes with a victory more so than Hatton's will. Pacquiao vs. Mayweather or any other big name is a bigger fight than Hatton vs. Mayweather II or Hatton versus any other big name opponent. I'm sure that's something that will escape the mind of those who end up scoring the fight.

Sure it will.

It's also conceivable that Pacquiao can beat Hatton via stoppage, as opposed to Hatton, whose only real shot to beat Pacquiao is by stopping him.

In the run-up to this fight we've heard Hatton's trainer, Floyd Mayweather Sr., say that under his tutelage, Hatton is a more complete boxer and has improved his defense and will be difficult for Pacquiao to find and hit. He's also stressed with certainty that Hatton is physically stronger than Pacquiao, something that many boxing observers believe, but it isn't necessarily a given.

The bottom line on Pacquiao-Hatton is, if Hatton can't impose himself physically on Pacaquiao, how does he win the fight? The last thing Hatton can do is sit back and wait on Pacquiao. Ricky has to force the fight and make Manny fight under duress. He has to cut the ring off and get inside. In doing so, Hatton needs to give Pacquiao a lot of head movement and angles. Coming forward in a straight line with little movement will leave him a sitting duck for Pacquiao's straight jabs and crosses. Once inside, if he can get there, Hatton will be able to somewhat smother Pacquiao's punches and work his body at the same time. Hatton will be best served by forcing Manny to fight and trade hooks with him while cornered or against the ropes, as opposed to trying to neutralize him from the outside or center ring. If Hatton can't force Pacquiao to hold and break off the exchanges, he's in for a long night.

This is a fight that needs to resemble Ali-Frazier moreso than Hagler-Leonard if you are Ricky Hatton. The reason I make that point in contrast is because during the Hagler-Leonard bout, there were plenty of times during the fight where Leonard actually won the exchanges when he was against the ropes or in the corner (not that Hagler fans freely admit that). Lookout if Pacquiao can get away with that tactic. Ali, on the other hand, either had to hold Frazier to neutralize his big left hook, or use up his stamina and energy by being forced to get away. Leonard was much more comfortable when forced to fight Hagler off the ropes than Ali was versus Frazier, due to Marvin lacking the big hook or finishing punch during his fight with Leonard. Hatton needs to be able to move Pacquiao around and make him go where he needs him to. To accomplish this, Ricky needs to have a big enough gun that when he lands cleanly, Pacquiao realizes he can't stay there for long and take a steady diet of shots.

The last thing Hatton can have in this fight is for Pacquiao to fight at his pace and pick his spots. If Pacquiao is able to step back and pot-shot Hatton, it's tough seeing a scenario where Hatton can pull the fight out. Another problem for Hatton is the fact that his Sunday punch is his left hook. With Pacquiao being a southpaw, his natural stance almost forces him to keep his right hand up and cuff Hatton's hook, especially if he gets lazy and widens the arc on it. In this fight, if somehow Floyd Mayweather Sr. managed to incorporate a nice straight right hand into Hatton's arsenal under the radar, it would be a big asset for his fighter on top of surprising Pacquiao and his trainer Freddie Roach. No, Hatton will never have Aaron Pryor's right hand, but if Mayweather Sr. can help him shorten it and get more of his body into it opposed to lunging with it, it would be another tool for him to work with.

Having detailed Hatton's strategy above on paper makes his fight plan seem pretty direct and plausible, but it's not enough. What Ricky needs to assure himself victory against Manny Pacquiao is the hope that he has a big enough punch that not only gets Pacquiao's attention, but forces him to rush his shots and defer. If Ricky can't keep Manny backing up and on the run, and allows him to get set, that's a bad sign.

A quick recap of Hatton's fight versus Floyd Mayweather Jr. back in December of 2007 is very revealing. In that bout, Hatton wasn't peppered or tattooed by Mayweather's boxing ability and jab. Ricky was able to get inside without having his face rearranged. He even managed to get through to Floyd's body and surprise him with a few clean shots to his chin. The problem was when he did connect and get through, he wasn't able to hurt Mayweather or make him get away from what he wanted to do. Without being able to slow Floyd and keep him from getting pot-shotted, Mayweather was able to set him up for one of the best left-hooks he's ever landed in his career and stopped Hatton.

I know it's been said that warring with Pacquiao is suicide, but waiting on him because of his quick hands and reflexes is like putting a gun in your mouth and hoping to survive after pulling the trigger. Pacquiao being forced to punch with a sense of urgency is better than letting him use his speed and free lance with it. In the end, everything goes out the window if Hatton's punch isn't big enough to panic or cause Paquiao some discomfort.

On May 2nd 2009, Ricky Hatton can execute the perfect fight plan, but if he doesn't have a big enough punch to make Pacquiao do what he doesn't want to do, or to stop him, it's doubtful he'll

win.