

HATTON: Everybody Just Sees Me As A Little Fat Brawler

Written by Ron Borges

Wednesday, 29 April 2009 19:00

Nearly everywhere he looks around Las Vegas this week, Ricky Hatton sees that he is not the story. Yet everything he has is on the line. Everything he has bled for and sweated for and labored for in the dark hours of the morning and the darker hours of the night is at risk. All of it. Yet he is not the story.

The only story, it seems, is the rise of Manny Pacquiao. Long considered one of the best fighters in the world (and since the retirement of Floyd Mayweather, Jr. having ascended to universal acclimation as the best pound-for-pound boxer on the planet), Pacquiao is in Las Vegas for a coronation as much as a confrontation.

He is here to defeat Hatton, the reigning RING magazine junior welterweight champion and a formidable enough opponent that Mayweather is the only man to have ever defeated him, but it seems the multitudes see that outcome as already having been written. Although Hatton poses an obstacle of some significance, the betting public and most of the media do not see it that way. Nor do they see Hatton.

They see only Pacquiao and the only question they have is whether or not he can supplant the man he beat into retirement last December, Oscar De La Hoya, as the new face of boxing by destroying Hatton in similarly one-sided fashion. Lost in all this is that Hatton will enter the ring at the MGM Grand Garden Arena a desperate man and desperation, in the right hands, is not easily dissuaded.

Despite the fact he is guaranteed no less than \$12 million to face Pacquiao (who is guaranteed the same), Hatton will have much more to lose than a fight. This he understands and, upon occasion, is willing to discuss.

For all he has accomplished, the boxing world is ready to dismiss Hatton as little more than a gregarious ticket seller, a fighter akin to another popular Brit from a bygone era whose celebrity was always hard to understand here in the States – the horizontal heavyweight Henry Cooper.

Cooper was never a world champion, something Hatton has twice become. He was never 45-1, as Hatton is today. He was just a brave man willing to shed much of his own blood to go as long as he could with men who outclassed him like Muhammad Ali, Floyd Paterson, Ingemar Johansson and even Zora Folley, all of whom knocked him out. Hatton, on the other hand, has been stopped only once, by Mayweather, yet seems to understand that if he loses to Pacquiao he will be dismissed as little more than a plucky, portly pugilist far more popular than his skills should have warranted. A British phenomenon if you will.

As motivation goes, that is considerable inspiration. Whether it is enough to overpower Pacquiao is not the issue to Hatton, for he believes the dismissive way he has been looked at these past few weeks is only part of what will take him to a place no one expects Saturday night.

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“I think you have all made up your mind already,” Hatton (45-1, 32 KO) said to the skeptics at the fight’s final press conference this week. “I’ve been reading what you have been saying and what everyone has been saying. That doesn’t scare me. I’ve been here before. I’ve been the underdog before.

“I hear what you say. ‘He’s an over-hyped, over-protected, fat beer drinking Englishman.’ Guess what? That ‘he’ is going to shock the world again.

“It doesn’t scare me being in this position. This is my weight division, not his, but I understand that I’m the underdog. I understand why people are picking on me, especially since Manny Pacquiao is the number one pound-for-pound fighter in the world who just had an exceptional win over Oscar.

“I don’t want to sound too disrespectful to my promoter, my friend, Oscar, but Manny could’ve done the same thing to a punching bag that night. That’s not the Oscar we’ve come to love over the years. He couldn’t pull the trigger any more.

“(Pacquiao) may have fought at 147 but trust me, this is a new weight division for him. I’ve never lost at this weight. I’ve always proved too big and too strong.”

That is how Hatton sees himself once again even if the world does not. He concedes that if he fights Pacquiao in the same wild-eyed way he did Mayweather, Jr. he will lose, but he believes that will not happen in part because he is now two fights into being trained by Mayweather’s father, Floyd, Sr., and because that union has brought him back to a more balanced approach to boxing.

Although Hatton insists he will be as resolute and aggressive as ever, it will be tempered by wisdom and a new self-control. Taken in combination with his physical advantages in strength and stoutness, he believes it makes him an opponent too strong for a man who began his career at 106 pounds and who has fought only once at 135, once at 147 and never at 140.

“I don’t think Manny has fought anybody as fiery, as ferocious, as rough and certainly not as big and as strong as Ricky Hatton,” Hatton said. “There’s one thing that comes to mind – Ricky Hatton is a handful. He’s all over you.

“There’s no doubt in my mind who is going to win the fight. I’ve never been so certain. I’ve never been more confident. I just believe that as long as Ricky Hatton does what Ricky Hatton does best I’m going to be too much in all areas for Manny. I’m not selling that for you to sharpen your pencils. I’m saying that because it’s what I believe.

“Manny is not the most elusive. He puts himself in the pocket. If there’s a hit, it comes square on. He likes to engage. Obviously anyone who likes to engage there’s dangers for me and I’m aware of that but if he wants to have a fight with me I do strongly believe he’ll come out second best.”

Hatton believes what he says, even if the world does not. He believes he is better than he has

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ever been given credit for and much the better in this fight despite the fact he respects Pacquiao and all he has accomplished.

When he thinks of his own career, Hatton believes he has proven himself to be more than he once seemed, a process he feels began when he defeated Kostya Tszyu to first win the 140-pound title. That night in his hometown of Manchester, England, Hatton was not seen likely to leave the packed MEN Arena with a champion's belt. Although Tszyu had begun to show his age, the world believed then, as it does now, that Hatton lacked the right stuff to win against a high-level opponent.

The world was wrong then, his buzzsaw style breaking Tszyu down until he quit on his stool after 11 rounds that grew harder and more furious with the passage of each three-minute segment. He is convinced those same experts are wrong again because he discounts having been stopped by Mayweather, looking at it as a bad night and, more importantly, as simply losing to someone no one has been able to defeat.

"Mayweather has beaten everybody else so I don't think I should feel ashamed of my performance against him," Hatton said. "I've got one of the best records in boxing. I won four world titles, two weight divisions. Yeah, granted I got beat by Mayweather but I get the impression they're downing the important things. I think I've done very well in my career.

"I don't feel no pressure to perform. Anybody who knows boxing knows I can fight."

Yet in almost the next breath, Hatton seems to concede that, well, maybe there aren't enough people who know boxing. Or maybe some of them aren't quite sold on him yet either.

"To be honest with you, I've come up my whole career with people thinking I was just an exciting kid," Hatton said. "Just a brawler. I put too much weight on between fights. My lifestyle is going to catch up with me. Kostya Tszyu is going to flatten me. It seems I spent my whole career with knockers and even with this fight nobody's given me a prayer as well. It's those knockers that I want to knock on their asses May 2. I just feel like sometimes everybody just sees me as a little fat brawler and I know I'm better than that. That's my inspiration."

That and one other thing that he talks about far less. In the end, Ricky Hatton knows he can think what he wants about himself but his legacy will be written by others. Historians, boxing writers and fight fans will decide where he stands and all he can do to affect that is to stand tall against a little man from the Philippines who holds not only his own future in his hands but also that of Hatton's. The only person who can alter that equation is Ricky Hatton himself.

"I'm thinking of my legacy now because I know that while I believe I'm still in my prime there isn't much time left," Hatton said this week in Las Vegas. "I've learnt a fighter only gets one shot at being something special and it can go very quickly."

That shot comes Saturday night. The boxing world has pre-determined it will not go well but the boxing world has never yet convinced Ricky Hatton they are right about him and he's convinced 45 of the 46 men that he's faced of the same thing.

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It is why he believes when so many others do not and it is why it will take some convincing for Manny Pacquiao to turn Ricky Hatton into another Henry Cooper. Maybe more convincing than he expects.