

Cintron's Manager/Lawyer Can't Quite Wrap This One Up

Written by Bernard Fernandez
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Legal ethics require Josh Dubin to consider the evidence before and during a trial. From a purely evidentiary standpoint, if Dubin were to go before a jury with only his strong suspicions that Kermit Cintron was wronged in his two defeats to the now-disgraced Antonio Margarito, he understands that the verdict likely wouldn't go the way he and Cintron would prefer.

Every lawyer, you see, knows that the law isn't so much about justice as it is about what's legal. Trials are won and lost not so much by what a shrewd counselor knows or thinks he knows, but by what he can prove to the 12 good men and true sitting in that jury box.

Dubin serves in the dual capacity of attorney and manager of Cintron (30-2-1, 27 KOs), the Reading, Pa.-based former IBF welterweight champion who takes on Alfredo Angulo (15-0, 12 KOs) Saturday night in Hollywood, Fla., in the top undercard bout of an HBO-televised show headlined by WBC welterweight titlist Andre Berto's defense against Juan Urango. Cintron is, in fact, a warmup act, but he could lose even his hold on future second billings if Angulo were to finish what Margarito and his possibly loaded handwraps began.

"All I have is suspicions and circumstantial evidence," said Dubin who is keeping Cintron under wraps from the media, so to speak, with one of the more pivotal bouts of his career just a few days away. "I've yet to speak to Naazim Richardson (the trainer for Shane Mosley who detected Margarito's incriminating handwraps, which led to the California State Athletic Commission suspending both Margarito and his trainer, Javier Capetillo). I'd like to.

"It would be extraordinarily difficult for us to prove, in a legal sense, if anything untoward happened in Kermit's two fights with Margarito. The best thing we can probably do at this point is to concentrate on the future and move forward.

"Does Kermit have his suspicions? Yes. Do I have my suspicions? Yes. Does Emanuel Steward (Cintron's former trainer) have his suspicions? Yes, absolutely. But suspicions and conjecture is where it stops.

"I'm somewhat biased, of course, but my first vocation is as an attorney and jury consultant. As such, I have to maintain my objectivity. Part of my job is to see the other side of the coin and play devil's advocate. I have to be very careful about appearing that we're crying over spilt milk while at the same time I have to protect Kermit's best interests."

Margarito and Capetillo were caught, um, red-handed when Richardson, in Margarito's dressing room prior to his Jan. 24 bout with Mosley at Los Angeles' Staples Center, spotted irregularities in the way Capetillo was wrapping Margarito's hands. Forced to enter the ring with rewrapped hands, Margarito – a 2-1 favorite – not only didn't whack out Mosley, as many had expected, but he seemingly punched with far less authority before he was stopped in nine rounds.

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Margarito's confiscated handwraps were inspected by a California Department of Justice senior criminologist, who viewed them under a stereomicroscope and with an X-ray fluorescence spectrometer. His determination was that the wraps contained sulfur and calcium, two primary elements of Plaster of Paris. When mixed with oxygen and water, sulfur and calcium make Plaster of Paris.

While the ensuing scandal might not have had the national and international repercussions of say, baseball's steroids controversy, the fallout was immediate. Margarito's improbable rise from journeyman to the "most feared man in boxing," as his promoter, Top Rank founder Bob Arum frequently insisted, was naturally questioned. But beyond that, fight fans were left to wonder if several of the emphatic victories Margarito had scored during his ascension, most notably the two over Cintro and his July 26, 2008, come-from-behind stoppage of Miguel Cotto, were on the up-and-up.

On an even wider scale, it must be noted that it was Richardson, then an assistant trainer to IBF/WBC middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins, who detected irregularities in Felix Trinidad's handwraps prior to Hopkins' Sept. 29, 2001, unification showdown with the undefeated Puerto Rican slugger in Madison Square Garden. Fighting with certifiably legal handwraps, Trinidad, who also had been favored, was tuned up to a fare-thee-well by B-Hop before being stopped in the 12th round.

Richardson thus qualifies as the keenest sleuth since Hercule Poirot, but everyone in the fight game was left to wonder how often loaded handwraps had slipped past the scrutiny of state commission inspectors who might or might not have been qualified, or even of representatives of the other fighter's camp sent to the dressing room for just such a purpose.

Was Margarito – now disdainfully known by many as Marga-Cheato – a solitary figure trying to skirt the rules? Or is he the tip of an iceberg, emblematic of a bigger problem than anyone had dared to imagine?

For his part, Hopkins claimed not to have been surprised that Trinidad and Margarito were found out. The ageless wonder from Philadelphia is shocked only that more miscreants haven't been similarly exposed.

"If you put on tape, then gauze, then tape, then gauze, it's like a (plaster) cast," Hopkins said. "It's like being hit with a baseball bat. I'm giving out some secrets here, but you can dip your hands in ice water and that tape will, like, marinate and become harder."

Dubin was not with Cintron for his first fight with Margarito, but he wonders if an ethically-challenged trainer with some quick moves of his own couldn't pull a fast one even as commission inspectors and representatives of the other fighter looked on.

"We had a representative from our camp in (Margarito's) dressing room watching Margarito having his hands wrapped (for the second fight)," Dubin noted. "Had something suspicious been going on, we would have detected it, I think."

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“Now, I don’t know who was in Kermit’s dressing room for the first fight with Margarito because I wasn’t with him then. If I remember correctly, it was either Manny or Joey Gamache who watched Margarito’s hands get wrapped for the second fight.

“Look, you’re dealing with a white substance that may have been adroitly slipped into the wraps. Who knows how detectable it would have been visually? My hat’s off to Naazim Richardson for catching it. Maybe Manny or Joey Gamache, whoever was the observer, didn’t catch it.”

What is indisputable is this: Having been pounded twice by Margarito, Cintron ceased to be regarded as a growth property. Steward exited as chief second (Cintron is now being trained by Ronnie Shields), and Cintron’s longtime promotional company, Main Events, also dropped him like a hot potato. He now is promoted by DiBella Entertainment, which seems to specialize in reclamation projects.

There are some slight differences between Cintron’s two losses to Margarito. In the first, on April 23, 2005, Cintron was never counted out; he was taking punishment when Cintron’s then-trainer, Marshall Kauffman, threw in the towel in the ninth round at Caesars Palace.

Cintron pieced together a five-fight winning streak thereafter, all the victories inside the distance, before he attempted to even the score against Margarito in their April 12, 2008, showdown in Atlantic City’s Boardwalk Hall.

Cintron, then the IBF 147-pound champion, claimed he had put any and all bad memories of his first meeting with Margarito behind him, but, although he had his moments, he was put down and out from a crushing body shot in the sixth round.

“He hit me with an uppercut and I couldn’t breathe,” Cintron said at the time.

As a lawyer who is obligated to consider all the evidence, Dubin is not prepared to cast too many aspersions on Margarito’s pounding of Cintron in the rematch. After all, Margarito absorbed some big shots from a big puncher and still went on to win, as he did in his July 26, 2008, bout with Miguel Cotto.

“Kermit is a very emotional guy,” Dubin said. “He wears his emotions on his sleeve sometimes. But he was relatively upbeat after the second Margarito fight. He said, ‘I don’t want anyone in here hanging his head.’”

Still, a private conversation between Cintron and Dubin suggested that maybe the beaten – and beaten-up – ex-champ was not as fine as he wanted his corner team to believe.

“He told me, ‘Josh, I hit that guy with as hard a straight right as I’ve hit anyone in my life,’” Dubin recalled. “‘I felt it reverberate all the way through my arm and down my leg. Then he looked at me as if to say, ‘Nice shot,’ and he kept on coming.’”

“That had to be psychologically demoralizing. Kermit is a big puncher. Hey, you’ve got to give

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Margarito some credit. I don't think anyone was loading up his chin."

But those handwraps, those possibly tainted handwraps ...

"There's a few indisputable facts here," Dubin said. "One is that to this date, Kermit's only two losses are to Margarito. To this date, the only two times he has been stopped have been against Margarito.

"I've never seen Kermit go down like that (in the ninth round of the rematch) like that. OK, it was a perfectly placed body shot, but he never went down like that before.

"When we got back to the dressing room in that fight – which was very competitive in parts; Kermit went toe-to-toe with the guy – he put his arm around me and said, 'I feel like I got slammed in my ribs with a hammer. I've never been hit that hard in my life. Every punch the guy threw hurt.'"

So now all that's left is the questions that forever will go unanswered.

"I would be lying if I didn't concede that these matters have been discussed in the Cintron camp," Dubin said. "Kermit and I have had some pretty substantial discussions about it.

"It's sort of an interesting paradox. There's really no way to go back in time and find out, unless someone preserved Margarito's handwraps from both of his fights with Kermit. In the absence of those, all we can do is speculate, and speculation isn't proof of anything.

"But I do take issue with those who equate loaded handwraps in boxing with steroids in baseball. If indeed Margarito loaded up in his two fights with Kermit and in other fights, it's much, much worse. With steroids in baseball, the only thing that's getting harder is the ball. No one's life is in danger. In boxing, somebody's life is always in danger, more so if there's anything to these allegations."

For the record, Cintron isn't the only boxer to regard a setback or setbacks to Margarito as being possibly bogus. Remember, Cotto was doing very well against him until Margarito began to turn the tide in the sixth round of their bout at the MGM Grand. Margarito finally won on an 11th-round TKO.

When the Margarito handwraps flap came to light, Cotto refuted the notion that the Mexican slugger was somehow an innocent dupe unaware of what Capetillo was doing.

"We are boxers and we have to be alert from the moment the trainer puts the handwraps on and puts on our gloves," Cotto said. "(Margarito) tells the people that he doesn't know what the trainer put on his hands. That's a lie. You're aware."

So perturbed was Cotto that Arum, who also promotes Margarito, had come to Margarito's defense that he threatened to end his association with Top Rank when his promotional contract expired.

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"I'm going to stay with them until the contract is finished," Cotto said before his five-round wipeout of overmatched Brit Michael Jennings on Feb. 21. "After that, we're going to sit with the company and talk."

Any friction between Cotto and Arum seems to have been eased. In any case, Arum makes no apologies for siding with one of his fighters, even if it was at the risk of ticking off another member of the Top Rank stable.

"We stand by our fighters," Arum said. "No amount of monetary gain can make me throw Antonio Margarito under the bus."

It'll be interesting to see whether Margarito resumes his career after his year-long suspension is over, and whether he will be obliged to forever wear a scarlet letter as a dirty, rotten cheater. It's a pretty safe bet, though, that Capetillo not only has been thrown under the bus, but it rolled over him before backing up and doing it again.

As a society, we have been preconditioned to tolerate cheating and bad behavior, if not exactly to condone it. Dog-fighting pariah Michael Vick could soon be back in the NFL. The Los Angeles Dodgers' Manny Ramirez got socked with a 50-game suspension for testing positive for a drug that increases testosterone, although you have to wonder why he'd have an interest in ingesting anything whose purpose is to boost female fertility. If Manny being Manny means he returns from suspension with a hot bat, figure on the Dodger Stadium faithful to overlook any past transgressions.

Meanwhile, Kermit Cintron and Miguel Cotto have defeats on their records that might not be legal proof of anything that was done wrong by Antonio Margarito, but, really, can you blame them for wondering?