

Body Bombs To Fly At MSG, Clotney Says His Will Matter Most

Written by Ron Borges

Tuesday, 09 June 2009 19:00

Saturday night Joshua Clotney doesn't believe it's his body of work that will determine who leaves Madison Square Garden as welterweight champion of the world. He believes it will be decided by whose body is still working.

Clotney gave up the International Boxing Federation portion of the 147-pound championship to get a shot at one of the biggest names in boxing, WBO titleholder Miguel Cotto, and he took it with the intention of taking shots at Cotto's ribcage. This can be a wise or painful strategy depending on who lands first because that is also Cotto's game, one that has become almost a lost art since the retirement of Micky Ward.

Ward was one of the last truly great body punchers in boxing, a guy who pulled out many late victories by assaulting someone's liver or kidneys until they were no longer properly functioning. Yet body attacks, while effective, are also dangerous to their practitioners because they can open you up to retaliatory attacks from close quarters. They are like low-flying bombing runs that can result in sudden victory or return flak that does its own fatal damage.

Clotney, an African fighter now living in the Bronx who is as strong as a musk ox, understands this just as he understands he and Cotto, at times, will be mirror images of each other because both like to make their living dropping body bombs. Surely each will land some vicious shots even though Clotney favors a Winky Wright-like, high-handed defense that protects his head while covering up his body with his long arms before he launches quick, multi-punch combinations.

When those shots to the vital organs land, the tale will be told. Not necessarily the first time or even the 10th time but at some time. Of this at least, Clotney is sure.

"If he is not going to stand there and fight I am going to chase him all over," Clotney (35-2, 20 KO) said. "If he does stand there and fight it is going to be a beautiful fight. My combinations and hand speed and my body shots are going to make it a beautiful fight.

"It all depends on what he is going to do. If he runs and keeps running I will keep chasing him. The body shots are going to affect both of us because I am going to hit the body a lot. If he is going to feel the body shots then he's got a problem. If I feel the body shots, then I've got a problem."

That is about as succinct an analysis as one could ask for about what's most likely to affect the outcome Saturday night because Cotto (33-1, 27 KO) is as skilled a body puncher as Clotney and just as willing to take the risk involved to launch such an attack.

But all men feel the same when their body is hammered properly. The great heavyweight champion Joe Louis made that abundantly clear when he was once asked by a reporter about an upcoming opponent who "didn't like it to the body."

Body Bombs To Fly At MSG, Clotney Says His Will Matter Most

Written by Ron Borges
Tuesday, 09 June 2009 19:00

“Who do?” Louis said. It was a point well taken and one that seems particularly poignant in this match up. While Cotto is a wide betting favorite Clotney is the kind of hard man who gives everyone fits and who is fit enough to take as well as he gives. Yet both he and Cotto understand who they are.

They are men and any man can be hurt, especially if a well-placed hook strikes what trainer Eddie Futch used to call “the floating rib.” No one really knows what that is or where it is but strike it and the result is predictable – total, helpless collapse to the floor.

While both Cotto and Clotney understand this neither expects it, except from the other. In Cotto’s case, neither does most of the world. He is considered one of the sport’s best boxers and has the record to back it up. Clotney, on the other hand, remains little known by the wider public, although well respected within the industry of hard knocks.

His two losses were both suspect, one coming in 1999 when he was well ahead on the scorecards against Carlos Baldomir before he inexplicably lost his mind in the 11th round and got himself disqualified for repeated head butts that had already cost him two points on the judges’ cards.

The second loss was odd for other reasons. He was doing well against Antonio Margarito three years ago and appeared to be on his way to at least pushing the now disgraced former champion to the brink when he broke his left hand in the fourth round. One round later he severely injured his right hand as well, yet still went the distance and lost by a small margin on two of the three scorecards.

That latter performance may have hurt Clotney in more places than his hands because it made clear to many welterweights that this was a guy to be avoided if at all possible. That’s because he was more trouble than he was worth, a guy very likely to beat you yet one over whom a victory would not greatly enhance your marketability. Hence, it is to Cotto’s credit that he has accepted the challenge of Clotney and it is to the challenger’s credit that he recognizes that.

“I feel that I am undefeated,” Clotney said. “That’s why I really want to get to Cotto. When I get to the ring and Cotto beats me fairly, I will tell everybody that I lost for the first time. But for now, I doubt that I am going to lose.

“I respect Cotto for giving me a chance to fight him. I respect that so much because he is a man and he gave me the chance.

“I am an unbeatable guy. I am not scared of him. It’s not going to be an easy fight for me at all but Cotto is going to get hit a lot. Even if he wins it is not going to be easy at all. He’s not going to be able to fight somebody else. He is fighting only me. He is fighting Joshua Clotney, who will never allow anybody to beat him.”

Clotney believes he is underrated in large measure because he is a fighter who spent his formative years in Ghana, the country that produced the great Azumah Nelson as well as Ike Quartey. It is a place known for hard-headed, ham-fisted fighters but it remains a place where it

Body Bombs To Fly At MSG, Clottey Says His Will Matter Most

Written by Ron Borges
Tuesday, 09 June 2009 19:00

is difficult to become a star.

Ultimately, Clottey left first for England and then the United States to seek his fortune in boxing and although he won the IBF title he quickly had to relinquish it just for the opportunity to make a decent payday against Cotto. So to call him the underdog Saturday night is perhaps to understate the difficulties for fighters like himself.

Yet while Clottey will acknowledge such things he refuses to bow to them. Like taking a hard body shot to the liver, it is all just part of his job's description.

"I don't think I can change that," Clottey said. "I beat (Diego) Corrales convincingly. I beat Zab Judah. I lost to Margarito but I fought and beat other undefeated guys. It is very hard for (people) to talk about the fighters from Africa or from Europe because you don't always see them. They are beating good fighters but it's not recognized and not giving you the credit.

"I am not worried about all that because I am from far away. I am a different caliber of boxer. I know there are people who don't respect me but I know what I do in the ring. I am only thinking about this.

"I want to be somebody in the game. I want to fight for millions and I think beating Cotto on TV will get me there. That is what I want now."

That and the chance to land one more body shot in the right spot than Miguel Cotto does.