

BIG Props For A L'Il Boxing Maestro

Written by Ron Borges

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NEW YORK – The best kept secret in boxing will remain that way Saturday night. At least he will if you're watching HBO's broadcast of the Miguel Cotto-Joshua Clottey welterweight title fight from Madison Square Garden.

Fight fans in England, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the Philippines will get to enjoy the defensive wizardry of undefeated Ivan Calderon (32-0, 6 KO) as he attempts to defend his WBO junior flyweight championship from the challenge of Rodel Mayol (25-3, 19 KO) but not so in the country where he is fighting. Calderon is on every well thought-out pound-for-pound list and is a joy to watch – at least for those who have gotten to see him – because he is a crafty boxer with complete understanding of the nuances of the manly art of self-defense.

He is a guy who seldom gets hit. On some nights he never gets hit, which is as difficult to accomplish in boxing as staying dry is while swimming. He's like David Carradine on "Kung Fu."

This is by choice but it's not a result of holding and running. Calderon has an escape clause of his own creation, one that requires he throw a high volume of punches while anticipating what might be coming back before its even been launched at him.

Once there was a greater appreciation for such a boxing maestro. He would have been considered a grand master, a professor of pugilism. These days they call him boring.

Fans and too many TV executives would rather see two guys slug each other in the face as if boxing was a bar room brawl or an MMA choke fest. That lack of appreciation is coupled with what even promoter Bob Arum, who books Calderon, concedes is a punch that carries with it no real power.

Even Calderon recently told Yahoo! Sports' Kevin Iole that, "I'm always giving, never receiving. I think they want to see me receive a little, too."

Actually they'd like to see him receive like Arturo Gatti and Micky Ward, even though the suits at HBO had to be browbeaten into buying the first of there classic brawls.

That will never happen because Calderon is a defensive genius who intends to stay that way. He is a modern Willie Pep but with a lot less pep on his punches.

He is busy in the way carpenter ants are busy but not in the way fire ants are busy. It is a sad comment on American fight fans that such a guy is so underappreciated he'll be defending his title off TV but so it goes for a little man with a little punch and some big skills.

There is hope however for lovers of more than heart and heat that if he wins again Calderon may yet get to match his ice with Brian Vitoria's fire. The IBF champion twice beat Calderon in the amateurs before going on to win an Olympic medal but Calderon insists he found the

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answer in their third fight, a victory for patient persistence over pure power.

That night at least, the world will surely get to watch Ivan Calderon, Zen master of boxing, work. Actually, the world will watch him Saturday night. It's only in the United States where you'll have to wait a little longer to view a little boxing perfection.