

Cotto Won, Clotley Only Has Himself To Blame

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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As a result of the Cotto-Clotley WBO welterweight title bout this past weekend, the boxing world is buzzing. Which is to be expected from a fight that was exciting and saw momentum changes during the course of its 12 closely contested rounds. The split decision verdict in favor of Miguel Cotto is at the heart of a somewhat mild controversy.

Although Cotto deserved the decision under the way boxing is scored, it was a close fight. Another issue possibly contributing to the dispute over the decision is the terrible 10-point must scoring system currently in place. The one point margin unless there's a knockdown during the round is brutal. Unless one fighter beats the other half to death, it's a 10-9 round. Yet Cotto who was in the process of losing the first round lands a single jab resulting in a knockdown and wins the round 10-8. And Clotley wasn't even hurt! Some system!

Something else getting lost in the debate is the difference between punishment absorbed and administered, and winning rounds. Some of the rounds that Cotto won were very close and he didn't inflict much punishment on Clotley, but he did out-box him and earned the round partly due to Clotley not being busy enough. Which is perplexing since Clotley said before the fight that he'd have to be impressive in order to get the decision over Cotto fighting in New York City.

It's also annoying hearing Clotley cry after a close fight that he was "the aggressor." The problem with that is a fighter must do more than just come forward to earn the round. In Clotley's mind he may have felt that he was imposing himself physically on Cotto, but that's not the point. The point is he was following Cotto around the ring and not cutting him off. On top of that he wasn't throwing nearly enough punches to win enough of the close rounds. Regardless of what anyone says, clean punching counts most when scoring a fight. Granted -- Cotto wasn't landing crisp and clear punches at a high rate, but he was throwing and connecting while he was moving whereas Clotley was just moving to him.

It's boxing and fighters are allowed to use their legs and utilize the ring. Cotto may have been in retreat, but he was doing that to keep Clotley from getting set to punch effectively in an attempt to nullify his uppercuts and hooks to the face and body. Conversely, notice the low amount of body punches that Cotto threw. As noted in my pre-fight piece, Cotto's body punching would open himself up to get countered up top by Clotley if Miguel concentrated on the body. Obviously, Cotto understood that and made a conscious decision to box Clotley before the bell rang for the first round. Instead of trying to kill Clotley downstairs, he used his jab and either hooked off it or threw the right hand behind it to score.

The reality is Cotto isn't an overwhelmingly strong welterweight. Miguel is no longer the catch and kill style fighter he was earlier in his career and as a junior welterweight. Sure, he can punch, but he's not going to impose himself physically on the stronger welterweights in the division. It's easy to see that after being physically handled by Mosley and Margarito that Cotto figured his best strategy against another strong fighter like Clotley would be to fight in spurts and pick his spots.

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Cotto is more of a counter-puncher now than he is an attacker. Now he'll only attack if he feels the risk/reward is in his favor or if the opponent goes to the ropes like Clotey did during a couple rounds during the fight. Rope-a-dope may have undone George Foreman, but it clearly cost Clotey a round or two that he needed to secure the decision.

Clotey's transition into cruise control during the 11th and 12th rounds are what cost him the fight when all is said and done. The scoring system hurt him because a lot of the rounds he won he inflicted more punishment, but didn't put Cotto down, so they had to be scored 10-9, definite quirk in the system. Most of the rounds Cotto won were close. He may not have inflicted much punishment on Clotey, but he clearly out-worked him and scored more.

Cotto fought the fight with the intention of boxing and keeping Clotey off him and not letting him turn the fight into a war. Against Mosley, Cotto was able to pull it out because Shane was too busy looking for a sensational knockout while being countered by Cotto, not with the kind of punches that inflicted any damage, but they scored. In his fight with Margarito he tried to move and counter-punch. The problem was he couldn't hold Margarito off and was overwhelmed by his aggression and high punch output.

For the first 10 rounds Clotey inflicted more punishment and did just enough to win no less than five rounds and possibly six. A few of those rounds were clear cut, but they were scored the same 10-9 as were the rounds Cotto won. Cotto wasn't as dominant but he boxed smartly and picked his spots effectively enough to merit more of the tight rounds.

Going into the 11th round the fight was up for grabs for both fighters. In rounds 11 and 12 Clotey didn't apply enough pressure nor did he throw or land enough punches to win him the rounds. All he had to do was let his hands go. Cotto no doubt fights cautious in the later rounds and looks strictly to box and stay out of trouble, and Clotey allowed him to do it. In a fight that Clotey dealt out more punishment during the rounds he won than Cotto did to him in the rounds he won, he didn't quite win enough along with being down a point due to him going down in the first round.

In the final analysis -- Clotey should've won the fight and was controlling it with only two rounds to go. Yet, against a fighter who showed all the guts in the world and was fighting with impaired vision due to a cut caused by an accidental head-butt, he just didn't fight with the urgency he needed to in order to seize the fight. Clotey would've won a split decision had he'd been willing to suck it up when the fight was hanging in the balance like Cotto did.

Forget about who inflicted more punishment. Under the current scoring system as to how fights are scored, Cotto won the fight. And Clotey only has himself to blame!