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This Saturday night on HBO's Boxing After Dark, Juan Diaz 34-2 (17) and Paulie Malignaggi 26-2 (5) will meet in a junior welterweight bout that will play a significant role in the trajectory of their careers. For Diaz, this will be his first fight since being stopped by Juan Manuel Marquez and also will be his maiden fight campaigning at 140. The last time we saw Malignaggi on national television, he was stopped in the 11th round by Ricky Hatton nine months ago.

Although it may not be a crossroads fight for the 25 year old Diaz and 28 year old Malignaggi, it'll be a long time before we see the loser on national TV again. And what's unfortunate about that is both fighters always show up with the intention of giving boxing fans their money's worth and are willing to fight the best even when they're a decided underdog.

Combined Diaz and Malignaggi are 60-4 (93.7%). The problem is most boxing fans remember the fighters who make up the four, Campbell and Marquez who beat Diaz, and Cotto and Hatton who handed Malignaggi the only two defeats of his career. It's almost to where Diaz and Malignaggi are remembered more for the fights they lost than the ones they won. This is a fact that wouldn't be so dire in MMA, but it's almost a career killer in boxing. No, that doesn't seem right, but it's the sad truth when it comes to boxing. Until the stigma that a fighter with more than a couple losses, despite them coming against elite opposition, isn't worth watching erodes, boxing will continue to force feed fans mismatches. This is a sad certainty that most top 20/30 fighters are left with no other choice but to comply with.

The fact that Diaz and Malignaggi are 2-3 in their last five bouts says something about them being that HBO is willing to put them on. However, regardless of how great the fight may turn out to be or how gallant the loser performs during it, he can forget about being seen again on HBO or Showtime. And that applies even more so for Malignaggi because despite his quickness and flash, he fights in a safety first style and he can't punch. His lack of power and inability to hurt attackers like Cotto and Hatton who were right there, forced him to rush his shots. That reduced the effectiveness of what little power he possesses and led to him fighting more so to survive than to win. On the flip side, when he's in with fighters who are on his level or slightly below it, he's forced to go the distance because he can't put any real hurt on them thus ending the fight in a memorable or impressive fashion. Malignaggi has to beat Diaz to remain a main event fighter on TV or he'll be fighting on ESPN Friday night fights next year as an opponent for the next undefeated fighter who is the flavor of the month.

In regards to Diaz, who just graduated from the University of Houston-Downtown, this will be his first fight in which he wasn't trying to fit his training schedule around his school calendar. So he's probably trained with a clearer head and more time to focus on boxing exclusively for this fight than any other of his career.

Diaz is a swarmer and volume puncher, but he isn't a big puncher. He continually pushes the fight and looks to overwhelm his opponents via his aggression and work rate. His fights are usually exciting because his style leads him to getting hit hard and often as was the case in his

fights with Campbell and Marquez. Most of his fights turn into a near life and death struggle at some-point due to his lack of a definitive finishing punch. If Malignaggi's lack of power causes boxing fans to lose interest in him and cut his career short, Diaz's shortage of power may lead to his time at the top or near top ending sooner rather than later due to his body being taxed so much physically during every fight. On top of that he openly admits that he's prone to getting cut when he fights.

Diaz and Malignaggi are meeting at the perfect time and may be just what the doctor ordered for each other. They are both desperate for a win over a name fighter if they wish to remain in contention for a title fight versus a marquee opponent. And both are capable of beating each other on their best night. Diaz should be a slight favorite mainly because his style should give him an edge in the scoring if the fight goes the 12-round distance, which most boxing observers expect it to.

In Diaz, Malignaggi isn't facing a fighter who can hit or kill the body like Miguel Cotto, nor is he facing a fighter who handled adversity quite as well as Ricky Hatton did before he was on the decline. Against Nate Campbell, Diaz froze and didn't let his hands go once he got cut. In his last fight against Marquez, Diaz fought recklessly once he was hurt, thus providing the sharp punching Marquez open shots as he tried to forge his way in with wide hooks and winging right hands. Malignaggi should have a more realistic shot to move and box versus Diaz.

In the other corner, Diaz isn't facing a puncher or fighter who has the power of Campbell or the sophistication of Marquez. His lack of head movement won't be his undoing against Malignaggi as it was Campbell and Marquez. Campbell's power caused Juan not to push the fight and punch once his cut started bleeding. His predictable attack led to his undoing versus a professor like Marquez. Malignaggi isn't nearly the puncher that Campbell is, nor does he possess the boxing IQ and punch variation of Marquez. Diaz should be able to push Paulie around and win the exchanges due to his advantage in strength along with his non-stop punching attack. Diaz-Malignaggi should be a very action packed and exciting fight. It's wide open for either to win. The fact that it's on HBO and will be available to a decent percentage of the boxing public is a good thing.

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