

Floyd's Layoff: A Time To Mend And Mature

Written by Rick Folstad
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You've got to love the nickname.

Floyd "Money" Mayweather Jr., doesn't hide what inspires him to fight. It's a measurement, a figure, the guy with the most commas and zeros on his paycheck goes home the big winner.

So if Tuesday's conference call started a little late, it's understandable. When you're the self-acclaimed greatest boxer in the world making some of the biggest money, you don't use clocks. You go by your own time. People will wait.

When the call did start, it opened with a lot of talk from Mayweather and his camp about pay-per-view numbers, his popularity figures, interest rates, unemployment, marketing, tax shelters and the gross national product. It was like listening to an accounting seminar. No wonder they call him "Money."

With boxing writers listening from across the country, Mayweather also talked about uncles, his two-year layoff, game plans, recent history, Manny Pacquiao, blueprints, staying focused, comebacks and HBO commentators who commentate but who have never been in the "heat of battle."

"(They) are always tough on me."

He also blessed everyone, said he loved his father (who comes to the gym often to watch his son train) and he talked about what it felt like to buy shoes for needy school kids in Las Vegas.

"There's more than one side of me," he said.

Oh yeah. And once in awhile, the name Juan Manuel Marquez came up during the call. Remember him?

A six-time world champion in five weight classes, Mayweather (39-0, 25 KOs) faces Marquez (50-4-1, 37 KOs), a five-time world champion in three weight classes, on Sept. 19 in a welterweight fight at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas on HBO pay-per-view.

Some are calling it the fight of the year. Maybe. They gave it the name, "Number One/Numero Uno" in honor of the place the two fighters call home.

"There's a blueprint on how to beat Marquez," Mayweather said, calling the Mexican fighter a real "bulldog" in the ring. "But there is no blueprint on how to beat Floyd Mayweather."

They've had almost two years to draw one up.

"I don't worry about a fighter's game plan," Mayweather said. "All 39 fighters I fought (and beat) had a game plan."

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But he did say he's been training as hard as he's always trained and he doesn't feel like he's lost a step or two since his last fight, a December 2007 mugging of an out-classed and out-gunned Ricky Hatton.

"If your opponent throws 2,000 punches in a workout, you've got to throw 6,000," Mayweather said. "If he runs four miles, you have to run six."

Mayweather said they don't count rounds when he trains. They do 20 or 30-minute sessions. He said the first thing he does when he goes to the gym is turn the bell off. He'll fight nine-minute rounds if he's having a good night and doesn't want to stop.

Originally scheduled to fight Marquez in late July, a rib injury to Mayweather pushed the fight back two months. All that did was give everyone more time and ammunition to speculate on what might happen. Give Mayweather this: He didn't pick an easy guy for his comeback party. Marquez is 36, but he's a tough 36.

Asked about coming back to the fight game after his 21-month hiatus, Mayweather said he didn't know if that was a long layoff or not. But he isn't worried.

"I feel fast, strong and my timing is there," he said. "I think the break actually helped me. My body had time to mend and I think I (matured) a little mentally."

Roger Mayweather, Floyd's uncle and trainer, reminded everyone that Floyd isn't the first guy to take a little break in the middle of his career.

"Sugar Ray Robinson took three years off," Roger said. "Muhammad Ali took three years off. Those fighters who they call great? They all had long layoffs."

Roger himself almost had a long layoff from the fight game last month after being accused of attacking a woman boxer.

When the legal problem was brought up, all Floyd would say was that he wasn't going to allow it to be a distraction. He said he and his camp had to remain focused.

Finally, he was asked what his toughest fight was. He thought about it for a second.

"Life is tough, putting up with all the (BS)," he said. "Fighting is the easy part."