

## Mayweather 2009: Possibly A More Fully-Flowered Fighter?

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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With Mayweather-Marquez just around the corner, the talk of Mayweather's 21-month absence from the ring has been dominating the conversation surrounding the fight. Earlier this week some of boxing's highest profile trainers were asked to weigh in on how they think Floyd will be affected, if at all, by the longest period of inactivity of his career.

The last time Mayweather 39-0 (25) fought, he stopped the then undefeated junior welterweight champ Ricky Hatton in the 10th round to retain his WBC welterweight title. Against Hatton, Floyd didn't really dominate the fight but he did pretty much control it the entire way. During the first five or six rounds Mayweather did what he always does; that's let his opponent bring the fight to him and give them a false sense of security. Hatton had a few runs during those rounds but never hurt Floyd or had him in trouble. After eight rounds Hatton was behind but he wasn't being outclassed as much as he was being set-up by Mayweather.

Starting in the ninth round Mayweather picked it up and began to do what no other active fighter in boxing does as well as him, and that's using his opponent's aggression against them. The more Hatton felt desperate and felt the fight slipping away, the more reckless he fought, and that didn't happen by accident. It was Mayweather's boxing brain at work. In the end Floyd lured Ricky to follow him half way across the ring and then dropped him with a beautifully timed lead left-hook to the chin. Hatton beat the count but went down again via Mayweather's next flurry and the fight was rightfully stopped.

In the twenty one months since beating Hatton, Mayweather may not have fought in the ring but he's been fighting and surveying who's out there in his mind. And that's huge. Many times when fighters are not under the duress of training and preparing for a fight they actually become bigger students of the sport. Sometimes they can pick up things that they never saw before by watching tapes of their previous fights or watching their future or potential opponents fight.

Boxing is so mental and much more cerebral than most think. When fighters watch boxing after they let it go for awhile, you'd be astonished how much they pick up that they totally missed. No, it's usually not newsworthy or earth shaking, but the little things add up. And at the end of the day it's the little things that make a huge difference in winning and losing fights. It's no different than like in the NFL where most games are decided by two or three plays. It could be something as small as Mayweather realizing while watching the tape of his fight with Hatton that every time he jabbed Ricky to the body, Hatton tried to come over it with his right hand and left himself wide open. After watching that Floyd very easily could see that had he done a little more jabbing to Hatton's body when they fought, he might have opened him up and stopped him a little sooner than he did.

When Sugar Ray Leonard retired after beating Kevin Howard, like Leonard, Mayweather knew inside that he wasn't done fighting after Hatton. Leonard stayed in shape by consistently running and going to the gym two or three times a week. Mayweather emulated Leonard in that way during his contrived retirement. The difference is Leonard was preparing himself mentally

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and physically during his absence for one fighter, Marvin Hagler. By the time Leonard fought Hagler he knew how many breaths Hagler took before he punched.

Unlike Leonard, Mayweather hasn't concentrated on one particular opponent. Hearing what Mayweather has said since he's signed to fight Juan Manuel Marquez, it's easy to glean that he's been more reflective on himself and maybe even has picked up a few things that he feels will make him a little more complete than he was before. The layoff has more than likely matured Mayweather even more as a fighter and he says he feels stronger. The fact that he just may understand his strengths a little better now and has worked on the few mistakes or slight over-anxiousness he may have had in his late twenties, makes him an even more well rounded fighter in his early thirties.

Fighters learn and pick things up long after they retire. It took George Foreman ten years to finally grasp the concept that knockouts can be scored without going after the opponent as if he kidnapped your daughter. Stepping back and making the opponent commit never entered George's mind when he was in his twenties, but due to his physical liabilities in his forties, he scored some devastating knockouts as a counter-puncher, despite the fact that he was a bigger puncher and faster in his twenties.

Floyd Mayweather knew how to fight at the highest level in boxing when he retired. Had he been active during the past 21 months he wouldn't be any better or further along than he will be when he steps into the ring against Marquez. The layoff preserved his body while at the same time his scope as a fighter has broadened. Going the distance won't be a problem and there's a good chance Mayweather will probably be even more relaxed now than he was in 2007. Once a fighter reaches the level of a Floyd Mayweather, sometimes watching fights like a fan can be beneficial to them. Often times even great fighters fight themselves during a bout and make the fight harder than it had to be. If that existed in Mayweather at all before, it's gone now.

Based on hearing Mayweather talk and seeing the way he's conducted himself on camera, he comes off more confident than cocky. Sure, he's clearly bigger, stronger and faster than Marquez and has just about every advantage imaginable. Somehow his demeanor exudes that it's not about Marquez and more about him, in that I mean Floyd would bet on the 2009 version of himself to beat the 2007 version. The inactivity very well may have helped Mayweather flower more as a fighter. It wouldn't be a shock at all to see that Mayweather is even a more relaxed and a better technician against Marquez than he was when he fought Hatton.

The only question that should concern Mayweather or his fans is, how will his body respond and is he more susceptible to a freak accident or injury, not whether or not he'll be rusty or have the capacity to fight 12 hard rounds at a fast pace against a very skilled and determined Marquez.

That's "Money" in the bank.

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