

The level of certainty that Floyd Mayweather is going to have his way with Juan Manuel Marquez on Saturday in Las Vegas, taking advantage of his superior speed and strength, is something like the degree of inevitability many folks held onto when they sized up the Dec. 2008 Manny Pacquiao-Oscar De La Hoya bout. Am I wrong? Didn't many of you, and us, dismiss the Pacquiao/De La Hoya bout as a shameful, cynical exercise in revenue generation? Didn't most experts say that Oscar's strength edge would be the overwhelming asset on that night? They--we--didn't factor in how much his weight loss would drain him, how much accrued wear and tear had diminished him. And many of us didn't give Manny Pacquiao enough credit coming on, for his willpower, his far-above-average handspeed, his vastly improved skills.

Entering tomorrow's fight at the MGM Grand, is it possible that enough folks aren't entertaining the notion that a two-year layoff might have actually made the 32-year-old Mayweather(39-0, 25 KOS) more mortal? Or that just maybe, he really did hurt his ribs back in June, and that his body is in betrayal mode? Or if the rampant rumors that Floyd's broke as a joke have been weighing him down mentally, and might disrupt his concentration? And wow, Floyd didn't want to weigh 144 pounds, and paid through the nose to not do so...What does that mean? And what if the 36-year-old Marquez (50-4, 37 KOs) is the Pacquiao in this go-round--what if people aren't able to picture his accurate launches hurting Mayweather in their mind's eye, but some stinging blows do land and hurt a fighter who historically does not even get buzzed, let alone dropped or stopped? Has to happen someday, doesn't it? Now, I'm of the mind that it won't happen Saturday. But I say the same thing I said going into Pacquiao/De La Hoya: there will be some pleasing back and forth action. There will be some hard rounds to score. Back then, I gave Oscar the nod, not properly factoring in the level of dementia that had someone letting him weigh in the day before the fight, contracted at 147 or under, at 144 pounds. (He gained just three pounds by the night of the fight, and didn't exploit his obvious upper hand. Pacman weighed 142, and hydrated/chowed to 148 1/2 before the clash unfolded. There is no way that Floyd will be lighter than Marquez on Saturday; I promise right here and now that I will stand next to Floyd Mayweather Sr at General Santos City Airport and accuse Pacman of using steroids via bullhorn if Marquez weighs more than Mayweather.)

But let's traffic in the possibility, that on Saturday, once again the man used to fighting in lower weight classes, Marquez, will snort at our primitive handicapping methods, and will wow us with his technical brilliance and ferocity. Shall we?

No?

You find yourself wondering what happens if Floyd decides to get cookin' earlier than usual, and blitzes Marquez as Juan Diaz did, and how Marquez can hope to fend that off? Basically, so do I. The greater likelihood--because Mayweather is such a careful character, so smart as he sizes up his foe and makes certain that the traps he's setting are the right traps for the right time and place--that he'll bring Marquez into the deep end of the pool, and yank him under and hold his head for a spell. Marquez won't stay under, he's too proud to be stopped. But Floyd will take a

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UD12, by a three point margin. That's how I guesstimate things.

What about you, TSS Universe? Fire away your pred, with result, and round. Feel free to tack on your take on the overlooked undercard, John-Juarez II and Katsidis-Escobedo. Here's how our crew sees it going down.

BERNARD FERNANDEZ A former ringside physician has determined that Juan Manuel Marquez' pre-fight urine-drinking provides him with no competitive advantage. Oh, yeah? What about in clinches, when Marquez leans in and breathes into Mayweather's face? That alone should provide a few seconds of opportunity during which the Mexican presumably could take advantage of "Money's" natural gag reflex. Apart from that, though, the guess here is that Mayweather -- even if slightly rusty from a 21-month layoff -- is too big, too young (32 to 36 for Marquez, who has many more miles on his boxing odometer) and too skilled to have his much-anticipated comeback declared dead on arrival. Call it Mayweather by eighth-round stoppage, but JMM gets a nice payday and goes home with more than the proverbial pot to pee in.

RICK FOLSTAD No surprise here. Mayweather by decision. He's too quick and naturally bigger than Marquez.

RALPH GONZALEZ As magnificent a fighter as Juan Manuel Marquez is, all the urine sipping in the world isn't going to help him win against a naturally bigger and faster opponent like Mayweather Jr. Would a huge upset by Marquez, who was shown sipping his own urine as part of his preparation on HBO's 24/7, add legitimacy to this ancient practice? This match should be very intriguing to watch but I expect a unanimous decision going to Lil Floyd.

DAN HORGAN Mayweather is the bigger and better athlete, end of story. His hand speed coupled with his size will be too much for the 36-year-old Marquez to handle.

GEORGE KIMBALL Historically speaking, boxers of a certain age not named Ray Leonard have not fared well in comeback fights after layoffs as long as Mayweather's, but the odds are so stacked in his favor -- and forget his two fights at 135; Marquez is being asked to fight at 14 pounds above his optimal fighting weight--that he ought to win anyway, wearing Marquez down by the ninth or tenth round. (The ongoing wrangles with the law won't make much difference; that stuff is all business as usual around the Mayweather household.) And if things aren't going Mayweather's way? What are the odds on a disqualification, anyway? If Money can't figure a way to foul his way out, you can bet that Uncle Roger will.

FRANK LOTIERZO Mayweather will win the fight. He has the size and the perfect style to neutralize Marquez. If he didn't have almost everything tilting in his favor I question whether or not the fight would be happening, despite Marquez calling him out. Mayweather will win by decision, but if he's got a referee who's halfway on his side it's not a reach to envision him stopping Marquez.

MIKE LYNCH Floyd Mayweather TKO-11. We've all seen Manny Pacquiao and Bernard Hopkins seamlessly move up in weight in recent years. But we've also seen Kelly Pavlik fail in

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the same endeavor. Marquez will be the smaller, slower man and lesser boxer in the ring on Saturday. He's a hall-of-famer when he hangs them up, no doubt, but I just can't see him beating Mayweather unless Money is extremely rusty or has the rib injury flare up. If Marquez gets this win, he gets my vote for the best p4per in the world.

RAYMOND MARKARIAN Let's see if Marquez utilizes the jab that Oscar De la Hoya loves to call the Mayweather kryptonite. Floyd Sr. once said that this fight will be the second coming of Gatti vs. Floyd Jr. a few years back. I do not see it being that brutal, especially with two natural counterpunchers going at it. Do not expect the size difference to be a factor either. Pacquiao proved that theory wrong and Marquez is nearly equal to Pacquiao as a fighter. Marquez will probably catch Mayweather will some decent shots in the early rounds. Zab Judah had some success attacking Mayweather early and so did Ricky Hatton. Mayweather is known to take his time dissecting his opponent. So expect him to come out somewhat cautious. If Marquez is wise he will wait for Floyd to fire first but it is easier said than done. I expect it to go the distance. And I have been feeling conspiratorial lately. The Markarian Crystal Ball sees a Pacquiao vs. Mayweather fight penciled in for early May 2010. There is just too much capital in that potential mega fight for it not to happen. Make no mistake, in this game Money talks. And Money Mayweather will win this fight. Marquez's only hope is a knockout or a landslide decision. Because if it is close, and the fight is a tossup going to the scorecards, expect Marquez to get screwed, Malinaggi style. Mayweather by decision in any way, shape, or form.

JOHN NGUYEN I think this one will be more competitive than a lot of people think, and for the following reasons: The size difference in this fight is not as great as many have made it out to be. Floyd is an undersized welter, which is why guys like Paul Williams aren't even up for discussion. While JMM is definitely the smaller man, let's not forget that he made his name as a featherweight, and Floyd started his career only four pounds heavier at 130. Secondly, Floyd's last two showings prior to his two-year hiatus were anything but scintillating. He eked out a close decision against Oscar De La Hoya that was more about Oscar losing the fight than it was about Floyd winning it. Against Ricky Hatton, he knocked out a smaller, vulnerable foe in a fight that saw Mayweather bothered by Hatton's speed early on. Add two years to those less than sterling performances, and it's anyone's guess what we'll get. Lastly, Marquez is just a darn good fighter. He's probably the most complete fighter in the game, even at age 36. He's honed his craft and developed a steely toughness over the course of a career that could be an allegory to perseverance. He's never been dominated or even convincingly beaten, and I truly don't think he will be on Saturday night. If I'm pressed for a prediction (as I am here), I'll reluctantly pick Floyd in a close, competitive decision that has plenty of competitive suspense. JMM is nobody's dog, and I think he'll push Floyd more than we're used to seeing. Don't be surprised if the urine-sipping old fella pulls this one out. Nguyen's Pick: Floyd by close decision

Aaron Tallent Throughout his career, Juan Manuel Marquez has proven to be one of the best fighters in the world and his two bouts with Manny Pacquiao have shown that he is one of the toughest. For those reasons, I don't think Floyd Mayweather will be able to knock him out, but I don't think Marquez will have many chances to lay gloves on Mayweather either. Mayweather by decision.

PHIL WOOLEVER Mayweather TKO 9 - "Money" as only a 3-1 favorite illustrates true Vegas

PREDICTION PAGE: Mayweather/Marquez Preds Go Here

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conservative cash concerns. Unless rust or reaggravated injuries slow him down, Mayweather slaps the publicized, proverbial piss out of Marquez, who does as much as possible against the natural size disadvantage. Bring on the Pacman!