Written by Rick Folstad
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TAMPA - Interesting tattoos. They spread out across the arms and torso of Miguel Cotto like a creeping vine, growing upward, closer and closer to his cheek and chin, toward that crazy Mike Tyson look that Cotto might want to avoid.

When it's jokingly suggested by a member of the media that Cotto doesn't let the tattoo creep up onto his face ala Tyson, Cotto just grins. He'll do what he wants, but I'm guessing the artwork won't stretch past the collar line.

The tattoos have grown some since the last time Cotto (34-1, 27 KOs) was here training at the Fight Factory. That was this spring when he was getting ready to fight Joshua Clottey in June at Madison Square Garden. He won that fight, but it didn't come easy. He won by split decision and received a bad cut over his eye from a head butt early in the fight. Any questions about his heart were answered.

So he and his growing tattoos and his young trainer, Joe Santiago, are back in Tampa, training for his fight with Manny Pacquiao (49-3-2) on Nov. 14 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

Cotto likes training in Tampa. There aren't a lot of distractions here and the weather in October is hot and humid, kind of like it is back home in Puerto Rico.

"Puerto Rico is my country and that's where I live," he said, talking with the media after a two-hour workout that included skip roping, bag work, a session on the focus mitts and some crunches. "But there are a lot of distractions when I'm there. That's what I like best about Tampa, there are no distractions. I do two things when I'm here. I train and I rest. Train and rest."

Cotto's training regimen is a lesson in routine. Everything is planned, precise and consistent. And he seldom says a word. He just listens to his music and works the rope or the bag or the mitt. The last time we were here when he was getting ready for Clottey, he went through the same routine he went through for Pacquiao, again, hardly saying a word.

He doesn't give out secrets.

Promoter Bob Arum, who promotes both Pacquiao and Cotto, was in town this week to see how the second half of his promotion was doing. Earlier this month, he was in the Philippines checking on Pacquiao, who is training in his home country intil later this month.

"I'm very, very careful not to favor one fighter over the other," Arum said as he watched Cotto train. "Right now, with Manny so far away, it makes it easier (not to show favoritism). I never interfere. I just want to see that they are both getting the best possible training."

Arum might not have a favorite, but Pacquiao is a bigger draw right now than Cotto, and he'll

get a bigger piece of the pie.

“I take great pride in this fight,“ Arum said. “We have two guys who are going to make their biggest payday on Nov. 14. Pacquiao will make over $20 million and Cotto will make over $10 million. And I helped create that.“

Still not showing any favoritism, Arum said Pacquiao’s biggest advantage going into the fight was having trainer Freddie Roach in his corner.

“Manny is an offensive machine,” he said. “He blends in his defense in the best possible way. In essence, he turns himself into a magician in the ring. He can disappear while in plain sight.

“Manny is an explosive puncher, but he doesn’t have the ultimate power Miguel has. Miguel is the bigger guy, and Manny might be vulnerable to Miguel’s left hand to the body and the head. It’s how Manny reacts to those left hands that will be the story of the fight.”

Arum said there are no secrets about what each one brings into a fight.

“They both have histories,“ he said.

The two will be fighting for Cotto’s WBO welterweight title, though they’ve abandoned the 147-pound limit and agreed to a catch weight of 145 pounds.

Asked what he thought of the catch-weight, Cotto said if he thought he’d have trouble making 145 pounds, they wouldn’t have taken the fight.

“I weighed 146 when I fought Clottey,“ he said. “I’m in my best shape ever.”