

Style, Speed And Confidence - The Case For Pacquiao Over Cotto

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Tuesday, 10 November 2009 19:00

As a boxing purist it's impossible not to be a big fan of Miguel Cotto. He like Marco Antonio Barrera altered his style later in his career as he moved up in weight. Cotto used to fight almost exclusively as the attacker as a junior welterweight; now as a welterweight he fights more in retreat and as the counter-puncher against the bigger and stronger welterweights in the division. Cotto being able to fight effectively whether he's pushing the fight or stepping back and countering places him in select company as a fighter.

I'm a Miguel Cotto fan and there's no doubting the fact that he's a real fighter and has gone out of his way in testing himself against the best fighters available. He fought his best fight as a welterweight against Shane Mosley exactly two years ago. And in that fight Miguel showed versatility in that he had a very good counter right hand and even used his left jab effectively going back. But if you've watched Mosley throughout his career it's inescapable not to see that Shane isn't his most effective when he's forced to push the fight from bell-to-bell.

Cotto realized early in the fight that Mosley was stronger than he was and that winning by a knockout wasn't plausible. So Miguel smartly induced Mosley to lead and then countered him as he pressed forward looking to end the fight with a lottery punch. The fight was close, but the reading I came away with was the result was driven more so by Mosley's inability to press effectively than Cotto's ability to step back and counter.

Since fighting Mosley, Cotto has taken on two of the best welterweights in the world in Antonio Margarito and Joshua Clottey. Both of whom are big and strong welterweights with a cast-iron chin that forced Miguel to box in retreat. The problem was Margarito and Clottey were more in their element bringing the fight to Cotto than Miguel was in his stepping back and looking to counter, although he did have success against both and squeaked out a decision over Clottey.

When he gets into the ring to fight Manny Pacquiao, Cotto will resume his role fighting as the aggressor which is his more natural style, especially if he's fighting someone his size or who he perceives as being smaller than him.

Pacquiao's natural style and Cotto having to make 145 have to come under consideration when picking the winner of this fight.

First there's the catch-weight issue and Cotto being contractually bound to weigh-in at 145 or less. I know Cotto came in at 146 in his last fight against Clottey, but he was right at the 147 limit in his two previous fights with Michael Jennings and Antonio Margarito. And anyone who thinks there's not a substantial difference between making 145 and 146 has never been around a fighter who was drying out before a fight. It's not as simple as him moving his bowels a couple of times before the weigh in.

The reality is Cotto has to do that among other things just to get down to 148 or 149. Those last 2/3 pounds will be a grind for him trying to shed. And it's wrong to assume that by Miguel

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re-hydrating himself thirty-six hours before the fight will undo the previous ten days of depleting his body's nutrients, it just doesn't work like that. Maybe Miguel won't be as compromised getting down to 145 as I believe - but it bothers me and weighs into my thoughts as to who's going to win the fight.

The other problem is the style clash favors Pacquiao. For Cotto to beat Pacquiao he has to bring the fight to him. Cotto has to force Pacquiao to fight him off under duress and not allow him the time and space to get off first with his quick hands that come from every unorthodox angle imaginable. If Miguel can force the fight on the inside and whack Pacquiao's body, his speed and southpaw style will be somewhat nullified. And maybe in the process he'll take a little out of Pacquiao and slow him down.

Cotto has a good jab but it's not fast enough to prevent Pacquiao from slipping it and countering with blistering combination's with power that Miguel not only won't see, but are very capable of discombobulating him. And if that happens it'll cause Cotto to fight with more trepidation and try to think his way through the fight. And Pacquiao's the wrong guy to fight with hesitation and to try and wait on. His speed, angles and power just don't allow his opponents that luxury.

As stated earlier I watched Cotto systematically change Zab Judah from a supremely confident fighter into a guy who was just trying to find anyplace in the ring where he could catch a breath. The difference is Pacquiao throws more punches than Judah and a little faster and from more unconventional angles. If that weren't enough for Cotto to contend with, add to that Pacquiao hasn't shown that he's anything close to being a front-runner and doesn't come undone if things aren't going his way during a patch of the fight.

Pacquiao also has a punchers mindset and like most punchers believes down to his core that his power will always bail him out of a tough spot. Also, Manny hasn't endured much punishment during the course of his career. He's been stopped twice but that was over tens years ago when he was a teenager and just into his twenties. His last loss was more than four years ago when he was out-boxed by a declining Erik Morales; and he didn't absorb any meaningful punishment in the process.

Conversely, Cotto's had some physically taxing fights since he faced Judah two and a half years ago. He's also had his face busted up and cut in two of his last three fights and there's no way that that's not a legitimate issue for him both physically and psychologically.

Most fight observers agree with the consensus that Cotto's heart and character are every bit equal to that of Pacquiao's. But it's hard to deny that Pacquiao will enter the ring as the more confident fighter on fight night.

The Las Vegas oddsmakers have instilled Pacquiao as a 3-to-1 betting favorite. For it is Cotto who will enter the ring thinking that he has to take it to Pacquiao and in doing so he'll be walking into a buzzsaw with the capability to hurt him or get him out with something he doesn't see. And even if he can stand up to the best Pacquiao has to offer, the combined speed and power may be just enough to keep Miguel from going at him the way he must in order to win the fight.

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After looking up at Mosley, Margarito and Clottey, I expect Cotto to view Pacquiao as the smaller fighter and approach him as if he's the bigger guy and feel the pressure to bring the fight to Pacquiao. And in doing that, especially early, Cotto will be taking on Pacquiao when he's at his best. It's not a given that Pacquiao will get Cotto out, but I think he'll have enough to keep Miguel from imposing himself and getting close enough to where he can make his left-hook a factor in the fight.

Once Cotto gives up a little of the ring geography, Pacquiao will sense that he's gained Cotto's respect and start to dictate with his speed and activity. Most likely he'll be content in controlling the fight and not take any unnecessary chance, but if Miguel's face begins to swell and bleed, Pacquiao will go in for the kill and try and get Cotto out.

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A style advantage along with speed and soaring confidence will carry Manny Pacquiao to a stoppage victory over Miguel Cotto before the tenth round.

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