

It Was Almost As If There Were Two Of Him In The Ring

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 14 November 2009 19:00

LAS VEGAS – Freddie Roach had predicted an early knockout for Manny Pacquiao Saturday night. Miguel Cotto wishes he was right.

For nearly 12 rounds Pacquiao battered the WBO welterweight champion the way the typhoon that had driven Pacquiao out of his training camp and back to Roach's gym in Hollywood had battered the Philippines last month. By the time referee Kenny Bayless stepped in at :55 of the 12th round and stopped what had become a mugging rounds earlier Cotto's face was barely recognizable, his spirit was broken and his world title was gone.

His cheeks were bruised and so puffy his eyes were half closed. His lips were swollen to the point where it looked as if he'd overdosed on collagen injections between rounds. As he stood in his corner, broken and beaten, his mother came to his side and held his hand, kissing his fingers as if trying to comfort a small boy who had run into the town bully on his way home from school.

Cotto had spent much of the second half of the fight in almost constant retreat, circling on his toes and seldom throwing anything at Pacquiao with authority because he knew if he did the beating he was taking was only going to get worse. Yet not even retreat allowed him to avoid what became a constant onslaught from Pacquiao for which he had no answers and no defense.

"I couldn't see where the punches were coming from," Cotto admitted. "I couldn't protect myself."

His corner should have but they didn't, allowing him to go out for the final round when it was clear he had no chance to win and was absorbing almost constant punishment. When Pacquiao again drilled him with a stinging combination that drove him into the turnbuckle, Bayless stepped in and mercifully ended what had become a nightmarish affair for Cotto and a glorious one for Pacquiao.

Pacquiao had by then rearranged Cotto's features, battering his face until it was all but unrecognizable. From the second round on, Pacquiao's superior hand speed and movement had allowed him to control matters, catching him time after time with fierce combinations that quickly transformed a proud champion into a pacifist unwilling and unwanting to throw punches because he was spending much of his time using both hands to try and smother the assault he was under.

The fight started cautiously enough with both men measuring the other but taking few chances. Cotto flicked his jab and tried to land a left hook over Pacquiao's right while scoring to the body on several occasions in the opening round but that quickly changed in Round 2 with both flurrying more and Pacquiao turning up the pressure and quickly changing angles to try and confuse Cotto.

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Pacquiao dropped Cotto to his gloves with a short right hook with more than two minutes still left in Round 3 but that seemed only to enrage Cotto, who attacked, pushing Pacquiao back into the ropes. The two had several fiery exchanges and in Round 4 Cotto seemed to have Pacquiao trapped on the ropes for most of the round when suddenly Pacquiao reversed the situation, flurrying as he did. Cotto went to the ropes and was hit with a right hand and a following left hook that snapped his head around and sent him to the floor a second time. For all intents and purposes the fight was over at that point.

“Manny fought Cotto’s fight too much early,” Roach said, “but as the fight went on Manny’s speed was too much for him. It should have been stopped three rounds sooner when he began to run.

“Manny broke him down. His hand speed was too much. His in and out movement was too much. Once I saw him backing up I knew it was over.”

Pacquiao (50-3-2, 38 KO) was calm in the early rounds even when Cotto was landing some snapping punches and pressuring him into retreat. All along he kept waiting for the moment that quickly came, the one where he could unleash his fury on Cotto and begin what would become a systematic demolition of the welterweight champion.

“I was looking for the knockout shot,” Pacquiao (50-3-2, 38 KO) said. “That’s why I didn’t throw a lot of punches. Then I landed a good right hook.

“The key to the fight was to stay disciplined. We didn’t panic in the ring (early). I needed time to test his power. As the fight went on I was looking for a one-shot knockout.”

He didn’t get that but when Cotto arose from the second knockdown round four was nearly done. As it turned out, so was he.

There was already a bruise under his right eye and as he sat on his stool he wore the blank expression of a man lost in the wilderness as his trainer, Joe Santiago, vigorously rubbed his scalp to revive him. Cotto survived the next round by staying in a defensive shell but Pacquiao continued to outquick him and change angles, always seeming to be a move – and two punches - ahead of him.

The champion’s last stand came in Round 6 when the two were at close quarters most of the round and engaged in several furious back-and-forth flurries. But once again Pacquiao got the final word in, a stinging left hand near the end of the round that rocked Cotto, sending him backwards once again. Cotto quickly spun off the ropes this time and pushed Pacquiao away before he could land another blow but by then the Filipino’s speed was taking a heavy toll on Cotto’s features.

“He hit harder than we expected,” said Cotto’s trainer, Joe Santiago. “He was a lot stronger than we expected.”

For the rest of the night Cotto settled into a defensive shell, his hands held high, staying on his

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toes and circling away with the wary look of a beaten animal in his fast-closing eyes.

Round after round the story never changed. Pacquiao would blister Cotto with fast flurries that bent him over or sent him backwards and then Cotto would retreat only to soon enough be assaulted once again. He had no answer to any of this except to bravely try to hold on until the Filipino storm had blown over.

This, and little more, is what he did until Bayless finally said what Cotto's father had been hollering for several rounds - "Enough!"

But that was well after he was rocked again in the ninth round by another combination that sent him back to the ropes and although he briefly escaped it soon happened again and then a third time. With each crushing flurry, Cotto's face continued to swell like an angry blowfish, his eyes now little more than slits.

"I didn't protect myself," Cotto said before leaving for a full head and body scan at University Trauma Center. "He threw from all angles."

Worse than that, he landed from all angles. No matter where Cotto turned there was no route of escape, no safe haven, nowhere to turn. Pacquiao seemed to be everywhere. It was almost as if there were two of him in the ring.

There was not however because there is only one Manny Pacquiao. Of that, Miguel Cotto, and all of boxing, can be quite sure.