Written by Michael Woods
Wednesday, 30 December 2009 18:00

In theory and in practice I am vehemently opposed to people tossing out unfounded allegations against someone. Supply evidence, then we can talk. But saying someone is using steroids, or EPO, or HGH, based on a theory, or your gut instinct....I have to consider, what if the allegation were thrown at me, and I was 100% innocent. I'd be mightily irked. And so too would you be.

Manny Pacquaio has been hammered from all sides with folks insinuating and coming right out with the contention that they think he's been cheating, that he's been using illegal performance enhancers to give him an edge in competition. Floyd Mayweather Sr, Paulie Malignaggi, Miguel Cotto and Kermit Cintron have either accused Manny, or insinuated that he's been using PEDs. One has to wonder, where's all this smoke coming from? Is it possible that there's fire lurking? That these folks aren't just lobbing unfounded barbs at Manny, that their allegations and hints aren't just sour grapes, or posturing, or a ploy to lure Manny into a fight?

By and large, there hasn't been much in the way of coverage from the standpoint of: what if Manny is using PEDs, or was using PEDs? I think that is rightly so; I'd be more comfortable if none of us trafficked in the innuendo and speculation, and worked within the realm of evidence, and facts. But it's out there, and a topic of conversation and speculation. Perhaps it's a symptom and sign of the times we live in...

TSS reached out to Malignaggi, just off a solid win in his Dec. 12 rematch with Juan Diaz. The Brooklyn-based pugilist has never been shy about speaking his peace (I picture him exiting his mom's womb and barking at the labor and delivery crew to get the room cleaned up, stat!), and he shared with TSS what he bases his allegations, which he's careful to label opinion, upon.

First off, Malignaggi is of the belief that if the Pacquiao-Mayweather negotiations are at a fatal impasse, Yuri Foreman, and not he, will get the coveted date with Pacquiao. Malignaggi has been mentioned as stand-in for Mayweather.

He started off by insisting that " I have nothing against Pacquiao" but then went from mellow to madman in a 30 second span.

First off, the boxer wonders why Team Pacquiao isn't going after big-time newspapers, with deep pocketed owners, for libel, for insinuating that Pacquiao is drug cheat.

"If Pacquiao's so sue happy, why not sue the New York Daily News?" he asked. "Maybe they know the steroid allegations are true."

By and large, Malignaggi thinks it is impossible, utterly impossible, for a boxer to put on 15 or more pounds between March 15, 2008, when he fought Juan Manuel Marquez and weighed 129 pounds at the weigh in, and Nov. 14, 2009 when he fought Miguel Cotto and was 144 pounds at the weigh in, and more on fight night.

"It's not natural looking," Malignaggi said. But, I countered, what if Manny's supremely blessed, that unlike some other fighters who go up in weight, and look a bit bloated, and lack definition, he's just a special creature?

"He's not supremely blessed," Maliganngi said. "I know body builders. They can't put on 17 or whatever pounds of muscle in a year. It's not doable, in my opinion. These are my speculations, my opinions based on certain factual evidence. Does his weight gain look normal to you? And his head looks like it has blown up in size, too."

I offered to Malignaggi that perhaps we should be attacking the system, if we believe it to be lacking, rather than the individual.

"We can blame the system a little bit, but if you were Manny, wouldn't you want to leave no doubt? Or speculation?" said Maliganngi, who believes that by not agreeing to the terms set forth by Team Mayweather, and opposing a blood test within 30 days of the bout, Pacquaio appears guilty.

Pacquiao has agreed to take 3 blood tests: the first during the week of the kickoff news conference in early January, the second random test to be conducted no later than 30 days before the fight, and a final test after the bout. A video making the rounds from the HBO 24/7 series shows Pacquiao submitting to a blood test two or three weeks before he was due to fight Ricky Hatton, and that has cast doubt on Team Pacquiao's stance that Manny is disinclined to get a blood test too close to a bout, for fear he may be weakened. Originally, it was reported in error that that test was taken 14 days before the Hatton bout, but subsequent reports pegged the test as being taken 24 days before the scrap. Malignaggi feels Pacquiao has been caught lying, that the report from Team Pacquiao that he "has difficulty taking blood" is a cover story. "Why is he effing lying?" Malignaggi said, heatedly.

The New Yorker doesn't believe too many fighters in the lighter weight classes are using PEDs, but thinks usage isn't uncommon in the heavyweight division. "That's hard to do and make weight," he said.

The question is asked of Malignaggi: why does the issue make him so steamed?

"I don't like cheaters," he said. "This is not baseball. You're not just hitting home runs. You have to worry about peoples' lives. Miguel Cotto in my opinion has been beaten by two cheaters. Manny if he's cheating is taking away from guys who are doing things the right way. His team is reneging on their words."

And what if you're wrong, Malignaggi? What if Manny is clean, and you are hurting his rep with these allegations?

"I bet everything I own that I'm not," he said. "But we'll never find out. Hey, I would take the test in a heartbeat. I would want people to know I'm clean. He wants to leave doubts!?? His entire legacy is being questioned, he's willing to hurt his legacy and leave $40 million on the table?"

Maliganngi, after reminding TSS that he was correct in predicting he'd be gamed by judges in the first fight with Diaz, insisted that he isn't singling out Pacquiao for a personal vendetta. ""I've never had anything against him. But that's enough now. I call it like I see it."

What about those who'd say he's just trying to anger Pacquiao, to lure him into a fight?

"No. I expected he'd take the random tests to get this fight. No way I thought he'd throw away everything. That blew me away. It was cool to have my name mentioned."

Malignaggi thinks the boxing media has dropped the ball, and not exercised due diligence in examining the possibility that Manny has used PEDs.

"I understand most people like Manny, and not Floyd. Just cause that's the case doesn't mean Manny might not be cheating. It's nothing to do with him personally. But I call a spade a spade. Too many people avoid the possibilities because Manny's a likable person. He's got that front, his country loves him. That front works like crazy. Floyd plays the bad guy, but he's natural. Just don't downplay the fact that Manny might be cheating. You have to open your eyes and at least be willing to look at it. This is bigger than me. The fact that the fight is not being made, you have to question the integrity of Pacquiao."

Malignaggi then offered an analogy to the Manny-refusing-to-be-subjected-to multiple-random-drug-tests prior-to-a-fight-with-Mayweather deal. "It reminds me of the drunk guy who's pulled over at 3 AM. He has a field sobriety test, the cop knows he's drunk, he looks and acts drunk. But he refuses a breathalyzer test. That don't mean the cop don't haul him to the police station."

I reiterate...I don't think anyone should be casting aspersions based on circumstantial evidence. But with so many people ganging up on Manny, I think fight fans are owed some details on why people are accusing Pacman of using PEDs.