

Junior Welterweights Battle In Madison Square Garden

Written by David A. Avila
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Perception and reality.

When people look at New York City's Paul Malignaggi or Great Britain's Amir Khan the perception is here are two brash guys that talk a lot of smack and lack reverence for anyone other than themselves.

The reality is they're very cognizant of their peers and most of the venomous words are reactionary and inflammatory for a reason. It's called promoting a fight.

Most fans that see Malignaggi or Khan fight on television see two guys who talk a lot and can fight but lack something. That's the perception.

In reality Khan is really a very good kid from a good family who just happens to be one of the fastest prizefighters on the planet. He has blazing speed.

Malignaggi is one of the coolest cats I've ever met. He's a hip Italian with a lot of class and inside the ring he has more heart than you can imagine and skills to match. You don't become a world champion by accident.

What Malignaggi and Khan have lacked is that virtuoso performance against a virtuoso opponent. They'll both get that on Saturday at Madison Square Garden. The WBA junior welterweight title will be at stake. The fight will be shown on HBO.

The junior welterweights are boxing's scariest division.

On the same card as Khan (22-1, 16 KOs) and Malignaggi (27-3, 5 KOs) will be Southern California's Victor Ortiz in a junior welter clash with former lightweight world champion Nate Campbell.

Those dwelling in the 140-pound junior welterweight division may not seem particularly intimidating on first glance, but once they go into action the combination of speed and power is awe-inspiring.

"There's a lot of talent in the division," said Freddie Roach who trains Khan at the Wild Card.

Khan, a rather tall junior welter at 5-foot 10, was a Olympic silver medal star for Great Britain in the 2004 Olympics in Greece. With crackling power and speed galore the confident prizefighter knows many are waiting for him to fall.

"I know I have some fans back home that want to see me lose. I feel this fight will give me more exposure in America and more fans," said Khan, who defeated Mexico's Marco Antonio Barrera last year.

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Malignaggi said Khan has made a fatal decision.

“I have this tremendous desire to put the beats on Amir Khan. More than anything else is doing that,” said Malignaggi who lost the IBF junior middleweight title to Ricky Hatton nearly two years ago in Las Vegas.

Malignaggi, a ultra quick boxer with speed in his hands and feet, feels the boxing media is counting him out because of Khan’s ability to knock opponents cold.

“Seems like anytime somebody has a punch the media jumps all over him. He can punch but I don’t see what the real deal is,” said Malignaggi, who lacks impressive knockout numbers but has only been stopped once on record. And that stoppage came from his trainer at the time Ronnie Shields. “You can’t come to the US without facing anybody.

I don’t know what the big deal is about Amir Khan?”

It’s an interesting match with two fighters known for speed. The experience factor has to go to Malignaggi who has faced the far more dangerous competition such as Hatton, Miguel Cotto and two fights with former lightweight world champion Juan Diaz.

“I’m excited about a shot at the world title. Amir Khan this and Amir Khan that, and I still think he has a lot to prove,” Malignaggi said.

Khan says he’s eager to get in with Malignaggi.

“He’s been talking a lot of rubbish,” said Khan of his next opponent. “I can’t wait to shut his mouth up.”

In the supporting bout, Ortiz (26-2-1, 21 KOs) faces a dangerous foe in Campbell (33-5-1, 25 KOs).

“He has experience, I’ll give him that,” says Ortiz whose last fight was a knock out win over cagey Hector Alatorre in Los Angeles. “I’m prepared for war.”

Ortiz knows all about shootouts in the ring. He was engaged in a firefight with Argentina’s Marcos Maidana last year that saw both fighters hit the deck five times total.

Junior welterweights tend to be able to crack. That’s the perception and the reality.

Julio and Dominic

Coachella’s Julio Diaz (36-6, 26 KOs) has moved up to the dangerous junior welterweight division and faces Herman Ngoudjo (18-3, 10 KOs) in the main event at Buffalo Bills Star Arena in Primm, Nevada. Diaz has lost his last two fights and needs a win against a top level opponent like Ngoudjo to remain a contender.

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“I should have never lost those two fights last year, I have no excuses, but I’ve learned a lot in the process,” said Diaz. “This is a great opportunity and I intend to capitalize on it. I know in my heart that I can go against the best in the junior welter division, but I have to prove it.”

Also on the card is Rialto’s Dominic Salcido a quicksilver junior lightweight who like Diaz, needs a win to remain in contention.

Salcido (17-2, 9 KOs) faces Buffalo, New York’s undefeated Guillermo Sanchez (11-0, 5 KOs) in an eight round bout.

Fights on television

Fri. ESPN2, 7 p.m., Julio Diaz (36-6) vs. Herman Ngoudjo (18-3).

Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Adrien Broner (14-0, 11 KOs) vs. Angel Chacon (30-8-2).

Fri. Showtime, 10 p.m., Sergiy Dzinziruk (36-0, 22 KOs) vs. Daniel Dawson (34-1, 24 KOs).

Fri. Telemundo, 11:30 p.m., Jesus Ruiz (21-2-2) vs. Cuauhtemoc Vargas (15-2-1).

Sat. Fox, 8 p.m., Humberto Soto (51-7-2, 32 KOs) vs. Ricardo Dominguez (31-5-2, 19 KOs).