

## Will The Malignaggi Punches Be As Effective As The Malignaggi Mouth?

Written by Ron Borges  
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Paulie Malignaggi can talk. Fortunately for him, he can also fight.

Whether he can fight well enough to unseat WBA super lightweight champion Amir Khan is a point much debated this past week as the two of them prepared for tonight's hands-on discussion of the subject at the Theatre at Madison Square Garden, a debate that was, not surprisingly, a loud one.

Khan feels Malignaggi is merely a distraction to be dealt with on his way to bigger fights in the division against Timothy Bradley and Devon Alexander, two belt holders with admirable skills and a higher profile than Malignaggi. Yet despite having only five knockouts as a professional, the slick-fighting, silver tongued Malignaggi is not without his advocates, the biggest one being the most important one in matters like this.

"Everybody is saying Amir Khan this and Amir Khan that," Malignaggi (27-3, 5 KO) said. "I think Amir Khan still has a lot to prove. Boxing critics and media people tend to crown a king before he's on the throne and a lot of times it blows up in their face.

"I've been a world champion so it's not so much being a world champion again that motivates me. It's just a matter of really the redemption that everybody thought I was finished as a fighter. Then as this camp went along I just got a tremendous desire to put the beat on Amir Khan.

"He talks a lot and he's getting a little bit ahead of himself. He's getting a little bit on my nerves. He's getting a lot of bit on my nerves, to tell you the truth. The most enjoyable thing is going to be beating the s--t out of him not winning the title. That's going to be the second most enjoyable part."

Khan is getting on Malignaggi's nerves? Khan talks a lot? My mother use to say in such a circumstance that's the pot calling the kettle black but whatever.

Khan has indeed seemed to approach Malignaggi as little more than a course requirement before moving on to his major – which would be major money fights to unify the 140-pound title against Bradley and Alexander. On one level that is understandable because Malignaggi doesn't bring the money or the titles that come with fighting the other two, nor does he bring much of a punch. But what he does bring has been enough to win him the IBF version of the super lightweight division and then two successful title defenses before being stopped by Ricky Hatton two years ago.

Since then he's twice fought well-respected former champion Juan Diaz and beat him both times, although he only got credit for the second. That rematch came only because Malignaggi made enough noise about how he had been ripped off in Diaz's native Texas that the media got behind him and Diaz had no choice.

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The same is not true for Khan who could have fought who he wanted and by the end of the night he may wish he'd made a different choice because Malignaggi is not only annoying at a podium, he's annoying in the ring.

Although he would have trouble breaking a dozen eggs with a sledge hammer, Malignaggi's boxing skills can embarrass a man because he has speed, accuracy and boldness. What he doesn't have is a big punch, but if he can hit Khan with enough small ones it has proven to add up in the past.

Just ask Diaz, who came into his first fight with Malignaggi feeling as Khan does now that he would walk through his light hitting opponent and stop him. By the end of the night however, Diaz had been totally outclassed, saved only by a shady set of scorecards that could not save him in the lopsided rematch that went easily to Malignaggi. Despite that strong evidence arguing for respect, Khan's trainer Freddie Roach, seemed to give him little of that this week.

"We have an advantage in every aspect of the game," Roach said. "Speed, power, boxing ability. Everything he does well, we do better. He's on an upswing right now but it's about to end."

Perhaps so but many in boxing believe Roach wisely chose to avoid concussive Marcos Maidana (28-1, 27 KO), who stopped Victor Ortiz in his last outing, in favor of Malignaggi because he knows one place Khan does not hold an edge over anyone, including the hard-nosed Malignaggi, is in the chin category.

"I have a less knockout ratio than all those guys but I'm more known than Devon Alexander," Malignaggi argued. "I'm more known than Bradley. I'm definitely more known than Marcos Maidana. I don't know what the big fuss is about Marcos Maidana.

"He got beat by the guy Amir beat for the world title so I don't really know. Maidana? I don't think he can fight worth s--t. He can punch but I don't think he can fight, not even a little bit.

"You've got to face somebody who has accomplished something. Why do I have to be careful with Amir's power more so than anybody else that I've fought in the past? He's knocked out a bunch of lightweights.

"I don't know what the big deal is about Amir Khan. I'll make it an interesting experience for him. Bet on that. I'll make sure I torture him. I'm going to beat the s--t out of him.

"Last year, when I was getting ready to fight Diaz for the first time, people were like 'Paulie Malignaggi can't punch. How is he going to stop that unbelievable pressure from Juan Diaz? Diaz is just going to walk through him.' What happened?

"Exactly!

"Any of you guys ever get smacked in the face? Take it from me. I've been hit in the face plenty of times. No punches tickle."

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Malignaggi's point is that he will hit Khan (22-1, 16 KO) quickly and more often than he's ever been hit before. He believes he will avoid Khan's power with his speed and boxing skills, avoiding his assaults the same way he did the slower Diaz's, while countering and leading with enough of his own well-placed punches to make Amir Khan wish the visa problems that kept him sequestered in Vancouver for the past few weeks before he was finally admitted back into the U.S. several days ago had never been solved.

In the end of course, the prognosticators might be right this time. Khan might be too strong and just as fast as Malignaggi. Malignaggi's inability to test Khan's chin may prove to be his undoing. He may even get overwhelmed if Khan reaches the point where he believes he can safely get into punching distance and let his hands go freely.

Then again, Malignaggi looks at the people saying such things and shrugs with the acceptance of a fighter who has made a good living proving people wrong by showing them he was much more than what he appears to be.

"Writers are good for writing," Malignaggi said. "We all have attributes. But can you pull them off against a world class opposition? That's what a world class fighter does. He takes away the attributes you do best.

"Everybody, when they get in the ring, has good attributes but when they get in with really good fighters can they still use a lot of those attributes?

"Amir comes with a certain set of skills but any fighter that knows what they're doing can use those attributes against him. He has no idea what he's getting into."