

Khans Physicality, Reach And Speed Stymied Malignaggi

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Sunday, 16 May 2010 15:00

This past Saturday night at Madison Square Garden in New York City, Paulie Malignaggi 27-4 (5) gambled early, figuring that in spite of him not being a big puncher, he'd try and exploit what he hoped to be a soft chin on the part of WBA junior welterweight champ Amir Khan 23-1 (17). Paulie thought he had a better chance of catching Khan and stopping him and winning the fight than he would've if he used the ring and circled all night trying to out-box him from outside, something that would have left him at the mercy of Khans straight and powerful left jab. The latter scenario turned out to be the case as the fight progressed.

In the end it didn't matter, because even after Malignaggi attempted to use his legs to thwart Khans fundamental attack, he still was beaten to the punch repeatedly by his left jab. And Khans jab opened up Paulie for the right hands that followed over the top and the thudding left-hooks to the body. After ten rounds of being out-spaced, out-punched and out-worked, referee Steve Smoger smartly halted the fight midway through the eleventh round.

When all was said and done, Amir Khan was too long and strong, fast and technically proficient for Paulie Malignaggi. Khans long reach and straight punching aided by his quick hands had Malignaggi in a real catch-22. When Paulie tried to press the fight behind his shorter arms and lack of fight altering power, he was met by Khans powerful jab which landed flush against his chin. Once the jab was established, the zinging right hands and hooks to the body were there. By the sixth round Malignaggi tried to use his legs but still kept tripping over Khans jab and occasional perfectly timed rights.

From the onset of the fight Khan methodically broke Malignaggi down better than either Miguel Cotto or Ricky Hatton came close to doing when they fought him. A lot of the HBO commentary centered on Malignaggi carrying his hands down at his side as to why he was a sitting duck for Khans jab, however that's only part of the story. The bigger part of the equation is the fact that Khans straight punching and hand-speed were too much for Paulie. Had Malignaggi held his hands high in a conventional fashion he would've never been in position to counter and fire back. His only hope was to try and force Khan to lead (thinking there was an opening due to his low guard) and commit first hoping to crack his defense some, then pivot and counter. Only it wasn't to be because Khan was able to control Malignaggi physically. Paulie tried to hang tough and adjust but wasn't equipped stylistically nor did he possess the power to force Khan to do anything he didn't want to.

The biggest question regarding Khan coming in was his ability to take a big shot, but that was never going to be answered by Malignaggi so the question still exists. Khan may have thrived against Malignaggi this past weekend, but there are bigger obstacles and tests ahead in the junior welterweight division going by the names of Timothy Bradley, Devon Alexander and Marcos Maidana. Bradley and Maidana can really punch and Alexander can really fight and also punches good. All three will force Khan to address their power if he is to beat them with his speed and sound basics before he can impose his own power later in the fight.

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Khans first bout in the U.S. was a smashing success. He virtually shut Malignaggi out for the duration of the fight. Everyone knew he was physically gifted and capable of getting off fast when he has the luxury of leading in the fight. But having suffered a first round one-punch knockout defeat a year and a half ago - the question still hovers over him regarding how well he'll hold up in the line of fire from the likes of Bradley, Maidana and Alexander?

That's just the way it is in boxing when a top-tier fighter and title holder has been stretched by one punch before he's reached his prime.

Frank Lotierzo can be contacted at GlovedFist@Gmail.com