

ONE AND DONE: Monte Barrett To Fight Tua Tomorrow, Wave The Ring Adios

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 15 July 2010 19:00

Monte Barrett ignored the salad, and the bread basket, and the ice tea in front of him at the Palm Steakhouse in Manhattan on Tuesday afternoon press conference hyping his Saturday night showdown against David Tua.

He stared straight ahead, and only occasionally, did a remark, by event promoter Joe DeGuardia, or Tua promoter Cedric Kushner, prompt him to change his facial expression.

That expression, I couldnt read it. Was it nerves? Tua is a fearful hitter, and even if he is 37, one can be pretty certain that his neuron shifting left hook is still capable of rendering Barrett, now 34-9, into a state of less than full consciousness.

It didnt come off as super confident, it must be said, and if Barrett wasnt in fact feeling like a world conqueror, like it was agiven that hed be the one to untrack the comebacking Tuas march to a title shot, he couldnt be blamed. The North Carolina-born, longtime Queens, NY resident, who turned 39 on May 26, has lost his last three fights (to David Haye, Odlanier Solis and Alex Ustinov), and has been shifted, firmly and conclusively, into the role of gatekeeper.

Once one is in that role, it is inordinately hard to get back to a sunnier designation. The phone calls still come, because there is no shortage of sharks looking to find someone with a name to pad a resume. But the calls come 14 days, or less, before a bout. The money is usually pretty good, as even sharks often like to think that they have a conscience, and understand it is only fair and decent to part with a decent chunk of change in exchange for the obliteration of a few more brain cells.

We heard Barrett speak at the Palm, and for anyone concerned that hed taken too many shots, that being stopped five times (by Wladimir Klitschko, Nicolay Value, Cliff Couser, Haye, Solis) and engaging in too many gym wars had stripped him neurologically, they had to be happy. He spoke well. No slur. No thick tongue. No hesitation. No manners of speech that many of us dont often enough focus on, overlook because we harbor guilt that we are complicit in the lasting damage.

Her talked about how happy he was to again cross paths with DeGuardia. Hed been in Joes stable for many years, and though theyd had a falling out, theyd kept in periodic touch. Then, he gave a hint to me about why hed been staring straight ahead, lost in a fog.

This is my last fight, he said of the tussle with Tua (51-3-1 with 43 KOs; No. 2 WBO), which is the main event of a pay-per-view event, TNT at the Tropicana, in AC. I wont be fortunate enough to be heavyweight champion. And this fight isnt about money, its about redemption.

The back to back to back losses hurt his pride. He was battling some injuries, and a bad marriage, and some money woes after the market tanked. He took fights on short notice, without having having trained like he shouldve. But he still had, and has, he said, a love for the

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game, as tortuous, as punishing as its been.

I feel restored, he said. Im still in love with boxing. But win, lose or draw, I am done with fighting completely.

Barrett has been putting his money back to work, not in the market, but by investing in himself. Hes been telling everyone that hes never been in better shape (he hooked up with No Body Denied trainers, out of Springfield, NJ), and counseling them to take his hot tipe, and bet money on him to beat Tua.

TSS took Barrett aside after he spoke, to get more insight into his farewell announcement. The boxer, who turned pro in 1996, explained why as he looked at his son, eight-year-old Brandon Barrett. I have all my sense, he said. Im still a good looking guy. But you need to know when to let it go, when its a wrap.

Many dont, do they? Whether its the decent pay, or the encouragement from friends and neighbors who call you champ, most dont know when its a wrap. Barrett says he does. I want to be there for my son. I want to go out with my head held high.

What about that stare, I asked him. What is that about? Are you distracted? Sad. Scared for the future? Barrett gave me the Manson lamps for a second, and then suggested I go into business as an FBI profiler.

I was zoning in a good way, he said. Ive been training eight weeks for this fight.

This was his game face, the fighter said, and I shouldnt read anything more into it. There was no mulling lost opportunities, title shots lost, unfulfilled potential. Nope, its time to move on. I have friends who are 39, talking about going to NFL tryout camps. Let it go.

That gatekeeper label, does it bother him?

Its a word, he said. Its the opinion of a person. You have a winner and a loser. And you got to know your position. It doesnt define who I am.

As little Brandon ran over to his dad, pouting over something, and dad leaned down, and hugged him, and whispered encouragement in his ear, and had the kids frown upside down in ten seconds, it became obvious that the little boy who Monte has had custody of for two years didnt give a damn about where his dad slots on the heavyweight scene.

No, Barrett reiterated, even if he pulls off the upset, and he gets another call for the services of the gatekeeper, he will stick to his word. No more fights. Im a man, and the only things a man has are his word and his balls. I now realize, more than ever, that one punch can end a life. Its always been in the back of my mind but the older you get, the more you are struck by your conscience.

SPEEDBAG FYI the PPV will run from 8-11PM, and the main event will kick off at about 10

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PM, according to DeGuardia. He explained that while he'd like a robust market to exist, so he could put on solid cards on free TV, the marketplace forces him to go the PPV route, so these two veteran heavyweights can make a decent purse, and he won't lose his shirt. You buy this pay per view and you support our sport and these boxers and the undercard guys, he said. DeGuardia, by the way, is one of the very best at seeking out sponsors, and adding to his bottom line, and his fighters' purses with his salesmanship. The Hustler Club and Ferragamo are both on board as sponsors.

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. Tickets are priced at \$100 (ringside), \$50 and \$30. Star Boxing is currently holding exclusive \$200 VIP Packages, call for more information. Tickets may also be purchased at any Ticketmaster outlet, or by going online to

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. Tickets are also available for purchase at the Tropicana North Tower Box Office or by phone at (609) 340-4000. The Tropicana Casino and Resort is located at 2831 Boardwalk, Atlantic City, NJ.