

The Broken Man

Written by Springs Toledo
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When the Japanese mend broken objects, they aggrandize the damage by filling the cracks with gold.

~ **Barbara Bloom**

By the time Sonny Liston became the Heavyweight Champion of the World, he was a broken man, a man with a past, and in the disturbing words of Harold Conrad, he was someone who “died the day he was born. Liston looked out from behind a mask and saw a hostile world aligned against him. Where an adolescent with a healthy self-image develops morale, Liston developed a different brand of motivation. It looked like revenge. If a second-hand confession by one of his seconds is true, he was also a cheat. That’s no surprise –Broken men are often desperate men, and desperate men are often amoral.

Antonio Margarito is not far from the dark place where Liston lived.

Manny Pacquiao, by contrast, is light-hearted. He is much more than that. The transcendental fighter that we saw last year has evolved into a transcendental figure –and a promising politician. In June, I sat in the Grand Ballroom of the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan during the Boxing Writers Association of America’s Awards Dinner and watched him ascend to a podium above a hail of flashing bulbs. His poise was perfect as he delivered a well-crafted speech spoken from memory. Most fighters are pugnacious when a microphone is stuck in their grill. This one was presidential. Congressman Emmanuel Dapidran Pacquiao doesn’t need boxing anymore. He has found a new and exciting venue to raise not only the spirits of his countrymen, but their quality of life.

As Manny looks up with plans to soar, his latest Mexican opponent looks down and broods. And he’s a big one. Joshua Clottey should have proved too strong for Manny, but instead proved unable to overcome an innate aversion to risk that travelled the short distance between his psyche and his style. He could not mount a sustained attack.

Margarito will have no such inhibitions.

Remember the original Hands of Stone. Every one of Durans accomplishments after 1980 was a desperate telegram from a fallen hero with something to prove. When his opponent mattered and the stars were aligned, Duran would fight for his very name. He sought nothing less than his own redemption. Margarito seeks the same. He believes he has what all of us sinners wish we had –a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to cancel out his disgrace in one night. This alone makes him dangerous.

Victory is possible if he proves durable enough to absorb a Pacquiao blast and avoid the exclamations coming after it. If Margarito is able to force the smaller man backwards, he may be able to do what Clottey failed to try to do; and that is physically dominate the best fighter on the planet.

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It is possible, though not likely.

Manny is a complex counter puncher who fights in three dimensions; Margarito a predictable pressure fighter who fights in one. In defying his strength and conditioning coach's recommendation to gain more weight, Manny is affirming an old school tenet: be natural. Margarito will enter the ring a middleweight, but he is as naturally slow as Manny is fast. He can and will be nailed by counters. Manny may not have the muscle mass to handle Margarito in the clinches or even fight him for long in the trenches, but neither is part of the Roach strategy. That strategy complements a confusing style energized by speed and precision. Manny zeroes in on nerve centers –the short left landed on the right side of David Diaz's jaw, the left hook on the right side of Ricky Hatton's jaw, the right to Miguel Cotto's left temple and right uppercut to the point of his chin –These punches are fired, literally, within the blink of an eye. They don't land so much as detonate on those nerve centers.

On Saturday night, Margarito's nerve centers will be as easy to find as they would be on any other Saturday night. He will climb four stairs anyway, this broken man, and millions will watch him try to fill his cracks with gold.

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