Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 30 January 2010 18:00

Manny Pacquiao's former American trainer, Rick Stehely, recently spoke about his former fighters' upcoming bout with the tough and durable Joshua Clottey. Stehely was in the corner the night Pacquiao scored an 8th round knockout over Thailand's Chatchai Sasakul to win the first of his seven world titles - the WBC flyweight crown.

Stehely said he can't see how Pacquiao can lose.

“I think this is a kind of an easy fight for Manny. Clottey is bigger and is physically stronger but Manny’s got everything else. He’s got the speed, he’s got the skills plus Clottey is a blocker. It's almost like if Manny goes out there and throws punches in bunches, he doesn’t have to hit him hard.”

No doubt Stehely sees the same scenario most do unfolding when Pacquiao and Clottey meet on March 13th. Pacquiao does have all the advantages when it comes to natural skills. And there is a scenario in which the fight could turn out to be easier than his previous fight with Miguel Cotto was if he follows the fight plan Stehely outlines below. Of course all pre-fight plans look great on paper and work terrifically in the gym.

“Every now and then crack him hard but just touch him, move a little bit and I can see Clottey sitting up there with his hands over his face most of the fight and when he does open up Manny nails him with a good shot because of his speed.”

That's pretty much the fight plan I'd detail for Pacquiao to carry out when he meets Clottey. Boxing Clottey and picking his spots will keep Pacquiao a step ahead of him the whole way without leaving himself vulnerable to a fierce counter attack. Manny is on top of the boxing world right now. A win over Clottey and he's still the biggest draw in boxing and in line for some monumental pay days against either Floyd Mayweather or Shane Mosley and perhaps one of the junior middleweight title holders.

Pacquiao is now at the point where he just has to win against the upper-tier welterweights he faces. Granted, a spectacular showing enhances his drawing power - but it's not necessary for him to score Hatton-esque type knockouts at this time.

Since the fight with Clottey has been announced, it's been implied by many that this is a fight where all Pacquiao has to do is show up on fight night with gloves on and let his hands go. With the subtle undertone being Clottey always underwhelms in a big spot under the bright lights when fighting marquee opponents like Antonio Margarito and Miguel Cotto. Although in Clottey's defense he did injure his left hand against the iron-jawed Margarito during the fight. So it's really just his fight against Cotto where Clottey let what looked to be a decision victory in his favor slip away and go in Cotto's favor when he stopped fighting with a sense of urgency during the 11th and 12th rounds.

The loss to Cotto pushed him to the back of the line and propelled Cotto into the mega payday and super-fight with Pacquiao last year. However, things have a way of coming full circle in boxing and now it's Clottey who has the opportunity of a lifetime in front of him. If he were to upset Pacquiao, Clottey would become bigger than even his countryman hometown hero of Ghana, Azumah Nelson, overnight. Not to mention he'd make a fortune fighting Pacquiao in a rematch or defending his newly won WBO welterweight title against Floyd Mayweather or Shane Mosley.

Pacquiao and his trainer Freddie Roach are too smart to be sucked into thinking Clottey will be the same fighter he was against Cotto the last time we saw him. It's reasonable to assume Roach will have Pacquiao adopt the mindset that he's going to face the best Clottey we've ever seen. The Clottey faction must know that their fighter doesn't posses the speed or boxing aptitude to beat Pacquiao by trying to outbox or out-think him. Clottey is physically stronger and has a cast-iron chin. For him to score the upset he must make the fight a war and hope that his strength and chin carry the day against the quicker and more explosive Pacquiao.

Since he let the Cotto fight slip away Clottey has heard about it every day. Knowing that beating Pacquiao is his only chance for redemption and to erase the memory of the way he under performed down the stretch against Margarito and Cotto, Clottey will be a very dangerous opponent. All he has to do is beat Pacquiao and his critics will be silenced and he'll have scored the signature win of his career.

When Margarito and Cotto fought Clottey, they smartly left him alone. By that I mean they didn't push for the knockout once they discovered how tough and durable he was and also that he'll leave you alone if you don't force him to fight to protect himself. Therefore they were safe and content to just go about boxing him and not fighting him, especially during the last third of the fight when Clottey didn't cut loose.

Manny Pacquiao is an attacker at heart. He likes to fight and thrives on going to war. When he steps into the ring with Joshua Clottey, if he can fight his natural urge to seek and destroy, he'll have a less taxing fight on his hands. However, if he goes at Clottey and looks to be the first fighter to stop him, he'll not only have a tougher fight, it's not a reach to believe he'll be more susceptible to getting beat.

Pacquiao's former trainer, Rick Stehely, has outlined the ideal fight plan for Manny to implement when he fights Clottey on March 13th. The intrigue of the fight will be to see if he follows it. If no one in Clottey's corner can light a fire under the guy, and if Roach drills into Manny not to go crazy, speed and skills might be enough to win the fight. But it's crucial that Pacquiao not wake this guy up.

Frank Lotierzo can be contacted at GlovedFist@Gmail.com