

F-LO TAKEDOWN: Mayweather Versus 10 Of The Greatest Welters In History

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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I recently read a long piece by Gavin Evans on Ring TV.com's blog where he discusses what would happen if Floyd Mayweather Jr. fought ten of the greatest welterweights in history. In it Mr. Evans concludes that Mayweather would lose to Sugar Ray Robinson, Sugar Ray Leonard, Charley Burley and Thomas Hearns. I totally concur with him, and don't believe any one of the four greats listed, at their best, would have to struggle in any way to defeat Mayweather.

On the flip side he sees Mayweather coming out victorious over Henry Armstrong, Kid Gavilan, Jose Napoles, Carmen Basilio, Emile Griffith and Mickey Walker. Here, I couldn't disagree more. Had Jose Luis Castillo been awarded the decision he earned and deserved versus Mayweather in their first fight and Floyd had one loss on his record, Mayweather's name wouldn't be involved in this conversation.

Evans said, "Even keeping it to the last 100 years, there are greats we have to leave out – Jack Britton, Ted 'Kid' Lewis, Barney Ross, Jimmy McLarnin, Luis Rodriguez, Roberto Duran, Pernell Whitaker, Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya."

Maybe the fact the author included Oscar De La Hoya as one of the all-time great welterweights in history tells us all we need to know about how limited his scope is pertaining to professional boxing. Just in case anyone is not sure - Oscar De La Hoya was not a great welterweight. As a fighter there's not one thing he did great. Sure he was tough and fought the best of his era, but never did he once separate himself from the three best welterweights he fought, Pernell Whitaker, Felix Trinidad and Shane Mosley. Giving him the benefit of every doubt he went 1-1-1 in those bouts.

This "today's fighters are faster, stronger, better conditioned, and have more skills" type BS has to be seen as the nonsense it is. Fighters today are at a deficit in each one of those categories. The argument that the old-timers could do no wrong is ill founded, just as the one suggesting today's fighters are human wrecking machines is flawed.

As for Mayweather, I really believe many of his staunchest supporters confuse the combination of slickness, sharpness, great reflexes, and the alertness under fire that Mayweather possesses with speed. Superficially, they look like the same thing. Zab Judah is faster than Mayweather, and was out-speeding him for the first five or six rounds of their fight (he hits harder too.) He just doesn't have near Floyd's boxing IQ.

I'm not going to break down the sizes and weights precisely of the greats listed for this. If you don't know their record and physical measurements then Mr. Evans's piece is great remedial reading for you. I write for a sophisticated boxing observer, and am fully aware that some miss what I'm saying. That's okay because there's a plethora of boxing content available via the Internet in 2010.

It's important to understand that, although Mayweather is a slick enough fighter by today's

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standards to outthink and outmaneuver virtually anyone he faces, all of the fighters Evans writes about would have seen everything that Mayweather could show them dozens and dozens of times. Evans excludes Luis Rodriguez from his top ten welterweight list, but believe me, there's not one thing that Floyd Mayweather does as well as Luis Rodriguez.

If Jose Luis Castillo could pressure Mayweather into what should've been his first defeat, Henry Armstrong, stronger, faster, better conditioned, and possessing a far more daunting workrate (to say nothing about the tricks of the trade involving his elbows, forearms, and head that he'd use), would run Mayweather out of the ring. It's true that Armstrong wasn't a great puncher at 147, so Floyd would probably survive. But there's no offensive component to his arsenal that would allow him to bother Hank for a minute.

In Jose Napoles, Mayweather would find himself facing someone even slicker than he is, but with one significant difference. Napoles could punch. Mayweather wouldn't dare trade with Mantequilla. In a straight out boxing match, they'd be close, but because Napoles was much more offensive-minded, it would be hard for Floyd to win a decision. And Napoles' power would keep him on edge all night. Realistically, Floyd's only chance would be to try to potshot Jose in order to bust him up and force the TKO win (Napoles had a tendency to cut around the eyes.) That happened to Napoles exactly twice in 88 pro fights. I don't like Mayweather's odds.

Although Mickey Walker was not as great a welterweight as Ray Robinson (no one was), he's the guy who, aside from possibly Hearns, would beat Mayweather most easily. And he'd have a great time doing it. Nothing in Mayweather's anemic offense would slow Mickey down for a fraction of a second. He would put more pressure on Floyd than Mayweather would believe possible. The guy who Walker most resembled offensively was Roberto Duran. He never let you rest, he mixed his combinations brilliantly, working the head and body, and he was a murderous puncher with either hand. And, unlike Floyd Mayweather, Walker loved to fight.

Harry Greb, probably the second greatest fighter who ever lived behind Robinson, couldn't stop Mickey Walker (and he knew a lot more ways to cut up his opponents than Floyd Mayweather will ever imagine.) Heavyweight champion Jack Sharkey, a 200 pounder with real pop, couldn't do it either. Does Gavin Evans really believe that powder puff punching Floyd Mayweather, the guy who couldn't knock out a used up Oscar De La Hoya or an overfed, over-aged featherweight (admittedly a great one) in Juan Manuel Marquez would kayo a prime Mickey Walker? Among a long list of really stupid assertions, this one may be the dumbest. Mickey Walker routinely knocked out 200 pound men who weren't stiffs. And he would have knocked Floyd Mayweather loopy without the slightest problem.

Does Evans realize what a life-taker Florentino Fernandez was? And Griffith had his way with him bettering him boxing and physically moving him around the ring wherever he wanted. Emile took the trilogy he had with Benny "Kid" Paret who was an aggressive fighter who could box and punch. But he couldn't handle Griffith's upper-body strength, pressure and hand speed. It's doubtful that Mayweather has ever seen the likes of a Paret, let alone suggesting he could handle a welterweight who not only was the first to drop Dick Tiger, but chased him up to light heavyweight. Tiger was so good he beat Jose Torres to capture the light heavyweight title and held onto it until he was knocked out at the very end of his career by Bob Foster.

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Griffith was an aggressive counter-puncher. He wasn't manhandled by middleweights the likes of Nino Benvenuti, Carlos Monzon and Dick Tiger. Emile was too strong for the great Luis Rodriguez to box for the duration of the fight. What does Floyd Mayweather possess in his arsenal to keep Griffith from walking him down and working him over? Nothing, based on his fights with Judah, Baldomir and De La Hoya.

Mayweather's slight advantage in height wouldn't have mattered a bit. And for Evans to consider Mayweather the puncher in a match up with Griffith is laughable. Griffith threw straight punches and they were fast. He also could throw short powerful hooks and uppercuts inside. Couple that with his freakish physical strength and stamina, how does Mayweather hold off a fighter who he holds no physical advantage over? Fighting Griffith, as it would be the case with Basilio, Mayweather would discover early in the fight that it's a lifetime difference moving back on your own than it is when you're being forced to do it. Mayweather being forced back would be fighting to stabilize the fight and wouldn't be in control like he was facing the fighters he's fought. It would be impossible for him to win a decision over Griffith being forced to fight Emile's fight.

As for Kid Gavilan - he would've reigned for years as welterweight champ had Sugar Ray Robinson not been fighting in the same division. As Evans correctly stated, Gavilan lost a disputed decision to Robinson the first time they fought. In the rematch for the title Robinson won a non-controversial decision over Gavilan. However, that was Robinson at his best. A welterweight who had a better punch assortment, hit harder, threw more of them and faster than Mayweather ever dreamed he could. Plus Robinson was mean and nasty and almost impossible to hurt at 147. If Gavilan can hang with Robinson and deal with a rough-house and tough guy like Carmen Basilio, what's Mayweather gonna do with Gavilan?

I completely disagreed with Evans when he said Mayweather hits harder than Gavilan. He may hold the edge in defensive prowess, but he's not beating Gavilan with his defense. A motivated Gavilan would neutralize Mayweather's speed and defense. When Gavilan cut loose he put combinations together in multiples. If Mayweather engaged him he'd lose because "The Keed" would get there with more and wouldn't have to break off the exchanges. In order for Mayweather to beat Gavilan, he'd need to be at his best and catch Gavilan on a night where he wasn't fighting with a sense of urgency - and even at that it wouldn't be enough. If Evans only sees a split decision for Mayweather, he's telegraphing how unsure he is about the outcome. I'm not. Gavilan controls Mayweather inside and outside and wins a comfortable decision over a fighter who isn't a better boxer or strong enough to unnerve him.

Imagine if De La Hoya was more aggressive and stronger on the night he fought Floyd. Oscar has no inside hook or right hand and had Mayweather stymied with his roughhouse tactics and a half hearted jab that he threw. If Basilio could drop Gavilan for a nine-count, and bull Robinson around the ring for fifteen rounds as he smothered him (and that was a middleweight Robinson), how on God's earth would Mayweather keep Carmen off of him?

Some fighters are too strong to box - and that's what would've transpired had Basilio and Mayweather crossed paths at their welterweight best. Mayweather's seize the moment pot-shot offense doesn't match up with the real authentic swarmers like some of the greats from past

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eras. (There's a dearth of good attackers/swarmers fighting today). Basilio pushed a beast like Gene Fullmer back and forced him to fight in retreat. Mayweather's hand speed would keep him from getting totally overwhelmed, but he's never experienced the type pressure and aggression that Basilio would bring. Imagine Castillo three fold with more tenacity and power. When Mayweather let his hands go against Basilio, it would be out of need and he'd be rushing his punches, therefore he'd have even less on them. Floyd couldn't beat Carmen fighting in the mode where he's just trying to keep Carmen off of him. And he doesn't have the physical strength or power to keep Basilio from forcing the fight from bell-to-bell. Maybe Mayweather opens a cut on Basilio and the fight would be stopped, but even at that he'd be behind in the scoring. Again, some fighters are too strong to box, and Carmen Basilio was one of them. Mayweather wasn't nearly strong enough to outbox Basilio and would have to hold on just to make it the distance.

At least Mr. Evans had the presence of mind to recognize that four of his top ten welterweights (Robinson, Leonard, Hearns, and Burley) would have beaten Floyd Mayweather. From there on, his sense once again deserts him: he believes that three of the four fights would have been close, with only Hearns potentially winning decisively. You don't get close to beating fighters of this caliber without a formidable offensive arsenal. Floyd Mayweather has nowhere near the tools to be competitive with any of these four. Three of them would have knocked Mayweather out effortlessly. Leonard might not have, but he would have completely controlled the fight from start to finish. But if forced to pick, Leonard would've had to have been pulled off of Mayweather the way he was Hearns the first time they fought.

Floyd Mayweather doesn't have the strength or physical skill to defeat one of the ten welterweight greats Mr. Evans listed. Having Mayweather going 6-4 is a pipe-dream, 0-10 is more like it. And in case anyone is wondering, Manny Pacquiao equals Mayweather here as well, as he would also be shutout going 0-10 against the same field of welterweight greats.

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