Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 06 March 2010 18:00

Last week the Pacquiao and Clottey camps held a press call for the boxing media. One of the things that came out during the Clottey call is that he'll be without the services of his first trainer for this fight, Godwin Kotey. Kotey was denied a US visa, and instead Lenny DeJesus will work his corner the night he fights Manny Pacquiao.

The following day team Pacquiao held their conference call. During the call Freddie Roach was asked if he thought Clottey would be drastically effected by him not having Kotey in his corner during the fight. Roach basically said that it might play at small part, but it wouldn't matter as to the outcome. Freddie continued on and said that it doesn't matter who works Clottey's corner, and that he had the greater fighter and that is what determines the outcome of the fight, not the trainers. This is a sentiment I totally concur with.

When Roach was asked about Pacquiao's weight, he said Manny would weigh-in at "147 and come into the ring about 149/150." He went onto say, "size doesn't win fights, skills do." Roach likes to come off as the "aw shucks" type of guy and act as if he doesn't deserve any credit for Pacquiao evolving into the great fighter that he's become. But he must get at least 5% of the credit for it. As it's been stated here before, professional boxing is 95% the fighter and 5% the trainer. However, great fighters need that last 5% that a great trainer brings.

Roach's statement suggesting that Pacquiao is the greater fighter and that it doesn't matter who trains Clottey couldn't be more honest and accurate. Roach has nothing to do with how fast, hard and accurate Pacquiao can punch. He also has nothing to do with the angles in which Manny can get off in tight spaces with such hard shots.

Going into this fight Clottey's style and fundamentals are pretty much what you'd want for your fighter to posses if he was fighting Pacquiao. His high guard with his chin down and elbows in should be pretty effective against Pacquiao. But Manny's quick straight lefts may be able to penetrate it and if he's able to punch around Clottey's gloves with his right, there's a good chance he can open Clottey up. And you know what? There's nothing any trainer working Clottey's corner can do about that.

Trainers are limited by the physical limitations of their fighter. Pacquiao's attack angles won't be such a big factor if Clottey can handle his power, but Manny's hand speed and ability to get off so fast will be. Blazing hand speed often causes fighters to fight in a more measured manner and pick their spots more, and since Clottey isn't known as a fighter who throws punches in bunches and overwhelms opponents with his work rate, this puts him at a huge disadvantage. Again, Roach has no bearing on that whatsoever.

Later in the call Roach said Pacquiao won't follow Clottey to the ropes nearly as much as he did Miguel Cotto in his last fight. He emphasized that since Clottey's best and most effective punch is his uppercut, he doesn't want Manny to be where he's most vulnerable to that. Now that's something where the trainer does play a major role. Then again, if Pacquiao gets carried

away during the fight and goes after Clottey on the ropes and gets clocked and loses the fight, that's not his trainer's fault.

Here's a great boxing truth: You've got to have the right horse in the stable. No trainer can "make" a fighter. A great trainer can improve a fighter tremendously. But if a guy can't fight, you can't make him into a fighter. And it's seldom that a trainer, regardless of how good he is, can transform a good fighter into a great one.

Since Pacquiao has become such a superstar and thought of by many boxing aficionados as being the best pound-for-pound fighter in boxing, Roach has been considered one of the few premier trainers in boxing. Granted, he's a very smart ring strategist and is excellent at figuring out his fighter's opponent's weakness. But lately Roach has been quoted saying "I have the greater fighter" during the build up to Pacquiao's fights. And that may be Roach's biggest and most underrated strength as a trainer. The fact that he doesn't try and put his handprint on every little thing that Pacquiao does. Freddie knows that little things here and there make the all the difference in the outcome of fights.

Roach has been a great asset to the ascension of Manny Pacquiao. And the fact that he hasn't tried to add too many ingredients has been huge. He sees the great physical skill-set and fighting aptitude that his fighter posses, and lets the greatness come to the fighter instead of trying to force it. And he must also be credited for not allowing Pacquiao to over-train and leave his fight in the gym the week before it. This is something that Pacquiao and a plethora of other world class fighters would do without a seasoned and top-tier trainer like Roach being there to rein them in.

Frank Lotierzo can be contacted at GlovedFist@Gmail.com