

He Might Be Too Big For Pacquiao: The Case For A Joshua Clottey Win

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Four words.

In the end, what happens in this fight will come down to four words: Is he too big?

Aside from bulk and strength, what does Joshua Clottey have that can beat Manny Pacquiao on March 13th?

In order to make a case for Clottey -- which I'll now try to do -- you have to make it backwards, thinking in terms of the negative factors that Manny Pacquiao will have to overcome instead of any offensive attributes that Clottey may have.

Here are the givens: Manny Pacquiao is a more gifted fighter than Joshua Clottey. He's quicker handed, more mobile, more versatile, is a better puncher for their comparative sizes, has more of fighter's heart, has a history of passing the Big Stage tests that Clottey fails, and, since there's a ton of money to be made if he wins, has the boxing establishment behind him in the event the fight goes to a decision. Clottey would damn near have to kill Pacquiao to win a decision. And Joshua Clottey, as we've repeatedly seen, is no killer in the ring.

But let's flip the script a little bit. Let's imagine that we're training Joshua Clottey (since he may actually need a new trainer if Godwin Kotey can't be brought into the US by fight time), and we've got to devise a strategy for him to win. What's he got that can be worked with?

Clottey is an enormous welterweight, and a tremendously physically strong one. By the time the two fighters hit the ring, he's going weigh in the vicinity of 165 pounds, bigger than a middleweight. Pacquiao, regardless of the weight he comes in at, is still a junior welterweight with junior middleweight legs. Size is Clottey's most obvious advantage.

There's a point of diminishing returns in how many divisions a fighter can jump before he's finally reached the place where his punches don't have a great effect on his opponent. At around this same point, the inverse issue -- what happens when a sturdy little guy is finally hit solidly by a guy who's too big for him -- tends to assert itself.

Someone playing devil's advocate could say that Pacquiao certainly had no trouble hurting welterweight Miguel Angel Cotto, and that Cotto -- a better puncher than Clottey -- didn't seem to bother Manny much on the occasions when he tagged him.

But Clottey takes a much better shot than Cotto. And he sees incoming punches much better. Add to this that his defense is a lot tighter than Cotto's, and all of it more or less nullifies using Miguel Angel as a gauge for how Clottey's going to deal with the punches.

And, although he started falling behind very early in the fight, I got the sense that Cotto actually

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was disturbing Pacquiao with his power. He was definitely moving him back with every shot he landed in the first couple of rounds. And those weren't Cotto's biggest shots, they were just his average punches; it was the size of the guy throwing the punches that was pushing Manny across the ring. Make no mistake: Pacquiao will feel the punches from anybody above 147 pounds.

If Clotley is no Thomas Hearn in respect to punching power, he's not Floyd Mayweather either. I've never seen him in a fight where he's failed to hurt his opponent. What he does at that point is what's open to criticism. Although I don't believe a leopard can change his spots, I do think that, given the stakes of this fight, if Clotley discovers that he can hurt Pacquiao, he's going to become very tough to handle.

This will be more true if he's not getting hurt by the quick handed shots that Pacquiao is sure to dart in and out to land. You have to factor into this equation Pacquiao's real appetite for fighting. He is capable of being a smart boxer, but not one who is temperamentally suited to playing things safe. He always wants to test this opponent's heart. And this time it could come back to bite him.

If Clotley, as a leopard, can't change his spots, to some degree you can say same about Pacquiao. Imagine Frazier deciding that discretion was the better part of valor and opting to play it safe. He couldn't do it, and I don't think Pacquiao can either.

Just to be clear here: Manny Pacquiao is a great, great fighter. If you want to say he's the best in the world, I won't debate you. But his last four fights may have made him look better than he really is. I say may have. Three of those four fights meant very little. David Diaz had no business being in the same ring as Pacquiao. And it's pretty clear that both Oscar De La Hoya and Ricky Hatton were no longer professional prizefighters by the time they fought Manny.

But Cotto could have been another story. And Pacquiao looked nothing short of sensational in beating him. But what if Cotto really was used up from the Margarito fight? I didn't think much of it at the time, but I kept hearing stories from his training camp that Cotto was being roughed up by his sparring partners, and that everything they threw at him landed. What if those stories were true?

And what if Joshua Clotley represents the first truly big, in-his-prime opponent Pacquiao has faced since moving up in weight? Clotley, with his tight defense, tested chin, solid conditioning, and by-the-book punching is the toughest nights work even for big guys.

Pacquiao, in order to penetrate Clotley's high hands and tight defense, has to shoot his punches a little wider than usual to reach him, has to loop things just a bit. And he has to step inside to deliver those shots. Even though he has the faster hands, he's still got to take a circuitous route. And Clotley, fast handed himself, throws very straight shots. He also throws an absolutely beautiful short uppercut. It's not out of the question that he'll be able to throw one right up the middle when Pacquiao moves into range.

If Joshua Clotley gets hit by Manny Pacquiao's best punch early and discovers that he can

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handle it, he will have taken one of Pacquiao's two best attributes away (speed being the other.) If he then finds that his own punches push Manny back, it will encourage him to be more aggressive.

At this point, he could still be outpointed. But that's assuming two things: that Pacquiao can get in and out to score with impunity, and that he'd be willing to win the fight by scoring a safety first decision. As stated earlier, that's just not who Manny Pacquiao is. He's going to keep looking for a way to kayo Clottey.

The best case scenario for Joshua Clottey would be that, even after Pacquiao finds that his punches don't have the effect he'd expected and that he's being bothered more than anticipated by incoming punches, Manny stays committed to the knockout. That kind of mistake could prove to be the thing that causes Pacquiao to be the one who's knocked out.

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