

The Leopard Didn't Change His Stripes

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 13 March 2010 18:00

A few weeks before Saturday night's fight with Joshua Clottey, WBO welterweight champion Manny Pacquiao serenaded him on the Jimmy Kimmel late-night TV show, although nobody but Clottey and maybe his new trainer, Lenny DeJesus, realized it at the time.

Pacquiao sang, "Nothing's Gonna Change My Love For You" that night and Saturday Clottey proved how sadly true those words could be when he refused to fight for 12 slumber-inducing rounds in front of the third largest live boxing crowd in the United States in 30 years. The 50,994 people who paid \$50 to park at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, TX and a whole lot more to get inside (unless they were in a \$35 standing room only spots that were so far above the ring the occupants watched the entire fight on the 60-yard long TV screen above the field) came to see a fight. What they got instead was Dancing With A Star.

The star was Pacquiao. His dance partner was the reluctant Clottey, who for most of the night kept his fists pinned against his ears and his long elbows draped down by his sides to protect his ribcage. Perhaps since he was fighting in an NFL stadium Clottey thought a prevent defense was acceptable. In boxing it is not.

Willie Pep was a defensive mastermind who allegedly once won a round without throwing a punch. Perhaps so but we doubt it. Either way, no one wins a world championship without throwing a punch, which seemed to be Clottey's ill-conceived hope. It is the same way he fought against Carlos Baldomir, Antonio Margarito and Miguel Cotto in his other losses. Although he was more aggressive in those fights he was never able to push himself when it counted. Against Pacquiao, he couldn't push himself at all, losing every round on the scorecard of judge Duane Ford and deservedly so, while dropping 11 of 12 in the opinion of the other two more kindly but less fact-based judges.

Clottey was outpunched better than 3-to-1 by the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world in part because of Pacquiao's superior speed and mobility but the truth of the matter is Clottey stopped punching whenever his last day of sparring was. He had no intention of coming to Cowboys Stadium for anything more than what it turned out to be – the biggest and safest payday of his life.

By the end of the affair, Pacquiao (51-3-2, 38 KO) had out thrown him 1,231 punches to 399, had battered his ribcage all night long and countered the few right hands Clottey landed by the same wide 3-to-1 margin.

It was not unexpected that Pacquiao would dominate Clottey, who was not half as dangerous as promoter Bob Arum made him out to be. What was unexpected by some was that Clottey would concede the fight before it had begun, going back to the non-aggression pact he's agreed to in every one of his big fights and, frankly, in more than a few of his lesser ones as well.

"He went back to his old style," said a disgusted De Jesus, a Bronx locksmith by trade who

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could not find the key to unlock Clottey's aggressive side. "He needed to throw punches to create openings. I think he felt Manny's power and didn't want to take a chance."

De Jesus had never trained Clottey before, taking over after Godwin Kotey could not get a visa to leave Ghana in time to prepare Clottey. De Jesus may now regret that decision because it proved to be one of the most frustrating nights of his 30-odd years around boxing. Round after round he appealed to Clottey to open up. He begged him to take a chance. He did not misinform him as the fight wore on, telling him from the midway point of it that he was losing.

Every time he did, Clottey asked for a drink of water.

De Jesus might as well have been talking to the stool Clottey was sitting on because he would get as much of a rise out of it as he did out of Clottey. In the end, frankly, it was a shameful performance. Clottey was never in trouble because he took great pains to be certain he wouldn't be, refusing to try anything as dangerous as throwing a punch. Oh, occasionally he landed a surprise right hand and did manage to head butt Pacquiao inadvertently several times. But he didn't do anything to create even a hint that a fight might break out, even as Pacquiao peppered him more and more with body shots and a busy right jab that didn't always land because of the way Clottey had his hands around his head but served as a constant reminder to the African former titlist that if he did venture out of his cocoon there was somebody waiting for him with a flyswatter.

"Come on!" DeJesus hollered at him in the corner at one point. "You gotta take a chance. We're in a fight. What are you waiting for? You gotta take a chance."

Actually, he didn't and so he didn't. Instead he waltzed around with the best fighter in the world for 36 minutes and then left the ring conceding he hadn't won the fight. It was an affirmation of Pacquiao's dominance that was unnecessary.

"Most people can't really adjust to Manny's speed," said his trainer, Freddie Roach. "They can see it and they say, 'Oh, he looks fast' but you really don't know how fast he is until you get in there with him. I thought he won every round. Clottey's got good defense but good defense is not enough to win a fight.

"Manny pitched a shutout against a middleweight but that middleweight should have used his &^%\$#\$\$% power! Let's face it I'm frustrated that Clottey didn't try to win the fight."

Probably so was Pacquiao but he kept his emotions in check. He was steadfast and intelligent, raining punches in to try and break down Clottey's defense without getting foolhardy and making a mistake. Even if he'd made one it's difficult to know if Clottey would have noticed, his hands so often stuck to his ears as if affixed with super glue.

It was proof once again that in boxing, as in life, you can't often change who you are. An athlete of some prominence once said with fractured syntax, "A leopard don't change his stripes." Joshua Clottey (35-4, 21 KO) is such an animal.

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As for Pacquiao, he is king of the jungle still, having gone 19-1-2 with 15 knockouts since joining forces with Roach, a four-time Trainer of the Year who is as skilled at his end of the sport as Pacquiao is at his. While there is talk of his next opponent everyone knows there is only one man for Pacquiao to fight and that's Floyd Mayweather, Jr. or, if Pacquiao gets lucky, Shane Mosley if Mosley can upset the undefeated Mayweather on May 1.

Until that bit of business is taken care of everything else for Manny Pacquiao will be like Saturday night at Cowboys Stadium – a place holding waste of time.