

Shane

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 05 April 2010 17:00

Nazeem Richardson believes that Shane Mosley is a problem. "Shane will fight anybody," he said, "and that's not good business. I'm firmly convinced that you could convince Shane to fight one of them Klitschkos." He's "just a gladiator," mused Richardson.

Gladiators didn't pack heat. Shane does –and when it comes to shooting straight and fast, he's mighty good. He's a gunfighter.

Gunfighters had codes. The Old West needed order even in the absence of lawmen, and these codes were unwritten but understood. They were standards for living when living wasn't for long. "Never wake another man by shaking or touching him," said one of them, "as he might wake suddenly and shoot you dead." "Always drink your whiskey with your gun hand, to show your friendly intentions," went another. Chivalry was upheld; "Cuss all you want, but only around men, horses, and cows." Shane has a few more additions, never written. The trajectory of his career suggests that "duck no one" is the first of them.

Eight years ago this gunfighter got a spur caught on a viper. The late Vernon Forrest fought like a reincarnation of "The Cincinnati Cobra" Ezzard Charles and as a result, ophidiophobia spread through the upper ranks of welterweights. Shane faced Forrest when Oscar De La Hoya, Tito Trinidad, and Ike Quartey wouldn't. Forrest beat him during the 1992 Olympic Trials and he beat him again on a winter's night in 2002, knocking him down twice as he did. Six months later, Shane lost the rematch. Vernon considered him an equal despite these victories.

Six years ago, the gunfighter's shots bounced off of Winky Wright's arms and elbows like popcorn off a movie screen. Wright was, like Forrest, avoided for years. Shane fought him just to prove that he would. He lost. Eleven months later, he fought him again and lost again, by a hairsbreadth. "A lot of fighters ran from me," an appreciative Wright told the press, "Shane was the only one who would fight me."

"This is what fights are about. This is what the boxing world needs," Shane replied, "it isn't the money."

It is now.

Floyd "Money" Mayweather is undefeated; but then, so were gunfighters who shot at cans on stumps in a yard. While his talent is undeniable, Floyd has been spending more time shaking his fist at his legions of critics than he has at any true challengers. That zero on his record is more jealously guarded than Sutter's Mill. It sparkles gold in his eyes and he wants it to sparkle in yours, though to his critics the value of that zero is clear. Lest we forget, Shane himself was 38-0 before he accepted the challenge of Vernon Forrest; and he could have matched and surpassed Mayweather's 40-0 years ago had he too taken the primrose path. But he didn't. He has five losses on his record. In a clear head on a clear day, these losses look less like blemishes and more like rebukes of Mayweather's choices.

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It doesn't end there. The contrast between Mayweather and other elites in the class over the past few years is stark. Mosley, Miguel Cotto, and Antonio Margarito have all faced each other. Mayweather has been the odd man out. Since his campaign at 147 began in 2005, Mayweather has had six fights. He knocked Sharmba Mitchell down twice en route to a sixth round stoppage, and hoped fans forgot the previous year when Kostya Tszyu knocked Mitchell down twice as much and stopped him twice as fast. Mayweather then faced Zab Judah who had lost to Carlos Baldomir only three months earlier. The plodding Baldomir, whose previous two fights were over two Mayweather conquests, was next. It was what everyone already knew it would be—a clinic. After deflating the ego of a rusty De La Hoya, he answered the challenge of junior welterweight Ricky Hatton, with the contractual condition that they meet at welterweight.

The last time Mayweather was in the ring, he faced a natural *featherweight*. The contract stipulated that they meet at 144. Floyd added insubordination to insult. He weighed in at 146 and paid a \$600,000 fine to Juan Manuel Marquez for the advantage. Six months later another natural featherweight from the other side of the world was eating five times a day to keep weight on to fight a welterweight avoided by Mayweather.

On January 3rd, the expectation that Mayweather would meet Manny Pacquiao disappeared in the horizon as promoter Bob Arum declared the fight 'dead'. The proxy fight between the two camps continued on a global scale. Shooting began—on the internet, in what's left of the dailies, on sports programs, and both sides got personal. The disappointment crossed continents. UFC president Dana White had a shovel in his hand as boxing assumed its usual position of a dead horse.

And then Shane rode in, on a white horse.

Like the stray gunfighter of the same name in Jack Schaefer's novel, "he came steadily on," and "without slackening the pace" moved "steadily on *our* side." On our side. "I don't need the money," Shane has said repeatedly, "I have money. I want to fight the biggest fights for the fans, the legacy fights."

Larger forces had a hand in shifting circumstances. A lesser bout against Andre Berto was cancelled in the aftermath of an earthquake, and Shane, though gracious, was left with the tumbleweeds. When Pacquiao signed to face Joshua Clottey, Floyd was left scanning the field. Shane's in-the-ring challenge after the Marquez fight still echoed in his ears and he was under pressure to come to terms. It seemed that the ever-elusive Floyd was finally cornered.

"He was forced into it," claims Jack Mosley.

The elder Mosley told this writer that Shane has been ready and willing to fight Floyd for at least ten years and that father and son have long since deconstructed the Mayweather style. In fact, "he's been beating Floyd up every week for years already," Mosley claims, "so unless Floyd does something different, he's going to get beat up again," this time literally. What's more, Mosley believes that Floyd has not improved but devolved. Due to injuries and perhaps even fear, he is not the fighter he was at junior lightweight or lightweight. How difficult will Floyd be for Shane? Jack scoffs at the question. "I don't think it is going to be a hard fight for Shane," he

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says –unless Floyd decides to “run like Bugs Bunny.” Forget about Shane’s loss to Cotto. Mosley insists that scar tissue in Shane’s nose blocked over 40% of his oxygen intake during that fight. It was surgically corrected before the Margarito fight and we all saw the difference. As a result, Shane’s conditioning is better now than it has been for years, and Mosley promises that his son is prepared to give Floyd “a whole lot to think about.”

Years ago, Shane extended his glove to hungry, avoided fighters. Shane, now 38, is still hungry. He has also been avoided. The courtesy he gave others is now being returned, albeit from an unlikely perch. Shane has an opportunity to prove once and for all that he is the best, if not the faster gun in the wild welterweight division. His benefactor seeks the same and will stand opposite him in more ways than one. Floyd, who claims that Shane had once refused to fight him because of a “toothache”; Floyd, whom Shane called a lowdown “liar” for even questioning his willingness to fight anybody.

Floyd has been knocking over carriages instead of trains but wants you to believe that he’s Jesse James. Criticism of his resume is valid though it doesn’t mean that he isn’t right –Floyd Mayweather Jr. *is* Jesse James. We’ve seen his brilliance. To Jack Mosley, Floyd has diminished from whatever he was ten years ago. Mosley may be wrong. All of his critics could be wrong. Perhaps the true height of Floyd’s brilliance is still unknown precisely because he has not been tested. Perhaps his best is yet to be seen.

We’ll see it soon because he’ll need it.

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The mountain resort at Big Bear Lake in California has an elevation near nine thousand feet. The air is thin at that altitude and the scenery is breath-taking. In the solitude of a training camp, where a man’s mind narrows to a fine edge and his mission takes on the kaleidoscope colors of a defining moment, an aging gunfighter is polishing his guns.

May 1st at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas is high noon.

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Nazeem Richardson’s statements were derived from ‘Guard Your Grill Boxing, episode 131’ (<http://www.youtube.com/user/guardyourgrilltv>). Burt Bacharach and Hal David wrote the lyrics to “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,” which is reproduced in part in the second paragraph. “The Code of the West” is found in the work of historian Ramon F. Adams, including his book *The Cowman and His Code of Ethics* (1969).

Special thanks to Jack Mosley.

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Springs Toledo can be contacted at scalinatella@hotmail.com.