

Khan Not Likely To Let Maidana Test Iffy Chin

Written by Ron Borges

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Saturday night WBA junior welterweight champion Amir Khan will face interim WBA belt holder Marcos Maidana in the best of all possible matchups for Khan. It is the kind that looks more dangerous than it is.

Maidana is a heavy-handed 140-pound slugger who made his name for himself when he destroyed Golden Boy Promotions' Golden Boy junior grade, Victor Ortiz, a year and a half ago by rising off the canvas three times before knocking Ortiz into a puddle of self-doubt.

Since then Maidana managed to win the interim title (aren't they all interim titles, technically speaking?) in his second try after first losing a split decision to Andreas Kotelnik one fight before the Ortiz upset. His reward for stopping Ortiz was a second title shot against someone named William Gonzalez (which immediately brings up this question: "Who he?").

Maidana (29-1, 27 KO) stopped him in three rounds and has since defended his title twice, the latest a shaky victory earlier this year over long time trial horse and one-time WBO champion DeMarcus "Chop Chop" Corley that did not exactly make him look like he belonged in the same ring with Khan...which of course is why he's now there.

Khan's only loss came several years ago when he was knocked cold by Bredis Prescott in one round, a stunning but not totally unexpected result of his somewhat suspect chin and the absence of a top flight trainer looking after him. Not much can be done about your chin but the presence of four-time Trainer of the Year Freddie Roach in his corner the past several years has resulted in a considerable improvement in both his defense and the way he goes about launching his offense. That has resulted in a consequent change in his chin. The chin itself remains suspect but his ability to keep it from being tested is where Roach comes in.

Khan was always a dangerous offensive fighter and a powerful puncher as his record (23-1, 17 KO) and one-sided recent win over former champion Paulie Malignaggi in Khan's American debut make apparent. What he and Roach now have Saturday night on HBO is a perfect stage from which to not only display that offensive firepower but to look like you've beaten a more dangerous fighter than Maidana really is while doing it.

That is not to say Maidana is without danger. He can punch and if he clips you twice the lights can begin to dim. But as Corley showed his skills are such that there are many opportunities to damage him as well and Khan is well capable of doing that with minimal risk, as Roach surely knows it.

"I think we will go after Maidana at some time in the fight but after we break him down," Roach

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said this week. "That will take some rounds. He's a very durable guy but we will break him down. I think we'll knock him out in the late rounds.

"He knows how to set things up now. He just doesn't go in there and look for a one-punch knockout. He knows how to break a person down and he knows how to work behind his jab and not reach for the body like he did when he got stopped. He's just become a completely different fighter. We haven't lost a round since we've been together. I mean, we haven't lost one round."

It may not be quite that easy against Maidana but don't be surprised if it is because he is similar to what Malignaggi and Marco Antonio Barrera were when Khan faced them – more mirage than reality. Barrera, of course, was once a great fighter but he was not by the time Khan got to him. This is a familiar road in boxing, where the young man on the rise gains his reputation at the expense of the diminishing one of an older former champion.

Although Malignaggi was never in the class of Barrera he, too, was damaged goods by the time Khan undressed him in Madison Square Garden, gaining well-deserved credit for his performance but extra credit for beating a shadow of the man his opponent once was.

Maidana is not cut from the same cloth but the bottom line is the same. He is more feared for his punching power than is deserved not because he doesn't possess any but because his ability to land against high-quality opposition is suspect. He is, in a way, comparable to fighting Ricardo Mayorga. Mayorga was dangerous because he was unorthodox and carried a wallop but he was not the formidable opponent some thought because he lacked technique and boxing skills. When facing a skillful and well-trained opponent, he became more a cape than a bull.

For Maidana to be successful he needs an opponent who looks upon boxing as if it's T-ball. You stand there to be hit and then he'll do the same and we'll see who can take the most punishment and still prevail. Khan is no longer willing to do that, a factor largely attributable to joining forces with Roach.

"I think he's going to run," Maidana said last week. "If he wants to stand and trade with me, that's good. That's my kind of fight."

He's right but it's not the kind of fight he's likely to get unless he can land a haymaker early that so diminishes Khan that he regresses back to his early days when he thought boxing was simply an exchange of punches until someone falls down. Anything is possible inside a boxing ring of course, but such a scenario is unlikely and because of it so is an upset.

"We know he's probably the biggest puncher of all the guys (he's faced) because his record says it all on paper," Khan said. "We have to be careful. His punches could hurt you in the first round or the last round so we have to stay on edge and stay sharp and focused all the way through the fight.

"Everyone knows Maidana is a big puncher. We respect that. We know he's strong and likes to fight. We're not going to fight in the corner. We don't want to make that mistake. We made that mistake in the early days."

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In other words, Amir Khan understands what he's got in front of him Saturday night. He's got a fighter who's only dangerous to him when he's in front of him. So guess where he won't be?

"I know one thing – when I hit him with one of my hands the fight is over," Maidana boasted. Considering the fact that Khan's chin has looked suspect more than a few times he may have a point. The question is will he ever get to the point where those hands land in the kind of devastating way he hopes?

Frankly, it's not likely.

"Amir has really become a very good professional fighter," Roach said. "He knows how to fight. He likes to mix it up a little bit too much sometimes, I think, but I won't take that away from him because he knows (now) when to do it and when not to."

That latter point is why Amir Khan is in the perfect fight tonight to elevate his profile and his potential as a box office draw. He'll know when to fight Marcos Maidana and when not to and the latter may be more significant than the former.

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