Written by Kieran Gallagher Special For TSS
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L'il Hatton has been brought in to be the noble loser. If and when Canelo gets past Ricky's bro, who should he fight next? (Hogan Photos)

One of the things I love about boxing is the way it throws together two men from far flung corners of the globe – men separated by not only geography but also language, culture and ethnicity. The type of fighters who, had they entered any other profession, would likely have never laid eyes upon each other. One of the more intriguing cultural clashes in recent times – though probably not in a boxing sense - sees unbeaten sensation Saul ‘Canelo’ Alvarez meet Matthew ‘Magic’ Hatton on March 5th for the vacant WBC Super Welterweight belt at the Honda Centre in Anaheim, California.

Alvarez, the son of ranchers, grew up riding horses in Guadalajara, Mexico. Had he never found boxing it is likely he would have followed his family into the ranching business fulltime but fate had other plans and Alvarez now looks like being the most successful Mexican export since Corona, tacos and black tar heroin. With his shock of red hair, teenage freckles, and sheepish smile there is a gentle, boyish quality about him but once in the ring he is every bit as hardened and ruthless as compatriots like Chavez, Barrera and Morales.

Matthew Hatton (or 'Ricky's little brother' as he is more commonly referred to) also worked in the family business before he took up boxing – fitting carpets in the grim industrial heartlands of Manchester, England. Hatton – with his clipped northern tones and no-nonsense, slightly earnest, approach to life - is something of a throwback to a more halcyon era. An era in England's past when men were called names like Stan, Arthur and Cecil and didn't face the challenges of a moribund economy, mass immigration and a criminally underperforming soccer team. Hatton will be looking to lift his nation but more cynical observers believe he will do nothing more than uphold the great British sporting tradition of the noble loser.

That these two fighters should even be contesting Manny Pacquiao's vacated WBC super welterweight belt is controversial. Alvarez spent the vast majority of his career at welterweight while Hatton has never even fought at 154lbs and is only rated as fifth in the 148lb division. The WBC has since given the justification that all top contenders at Super Welterweight were unavailable but two of them were quick to dismiss that excuse. Ryan Rhodes and Vanes Martirosyan, ranked fourth and sixth respectively, went public with the fact they were never even contacted. You might expect this kind of skullduggery from the WBA but the WBC is meant to be the best regarded of the sanctioning bodies. Although, describing the WBC as the best regarded sanctioning body is probably a bit like saying Hodgkin's disease is the most well thought-of form of cancer.

So the back-street machinations of WBC aside, what have we got?

Alvarez was brought up the hard way. He fought his first professional bout at 15 with no amateur experience – an age which, incidentally, would have left the promoters liable for prosecution had it been staged in Hatton's country. Five years and 35 fights later, Alvarez had won them all except for the minor blemish of a draw in his fifth fight. Even for a Mexican that is an astonishing figure. To put it in context, IBF Light Middleweight holder Cornelius Bundrage, age 37, has had one less fight than Alvarez, while WBO holder Serhiy Dzinziruk, age 34, and WBA champion Miguel Cotto, age 30, have both had one more. Alvarez is only 20 years old! It's certainly fair to say they do not mess around in Mexico.

2010 was an impressive year for Alvarez. Despite stepping up a level in competition, he came through with flying colors, scoring four knockouts in five bouts. Among those victories was a ninth-round knockout win over Jose Cotto (yes, that's the less famous brother… are we beginning to see a trend?), a spectacular one-punch, sixth-round knockout of Carlos Baldomir, and a solid points victory over wily old campaigner Lovemore N'Dou.

It's clear that Golden Boy Promotions has a new Golden Boy. Alvarez has already attained the stratospheric level of fame in Mexico that is ordinarily reserved for elite soccer players and if

Oscar De La Hoya can replicate even a fraction of that Stateside, it can only be a good thing for boxing. Part of the plan is to get him speaking English – something most top Mexican boxers failed to accomplish. If he can learn the lingo and continue knocking out opponents then maybe, just maybe, the retirement Pacquiao and Mayweather may not sound the death knell on boxing, after all.

It seems inconceivable that Hatton could upset this and – to be realistic - that's probably why he was picked. De La Hoya has been quick to talk up his experience and European belt but the likelihood is the Englishman does not have tools to trouble Alvarez. His technical ability is limited by comparison and – with only 16 KO's in 41 wins – we're not far from Paulie Malignaggi territory. On the other hand, Alvarez is not only a big puncher but clinical with it. The one chink in his armor is a lack of hand-speed but Hatton is slower and will not be able to exploit it. The only gamblers backing Hatton will be frothing-at-the-mouth English jingoists - the smart money will be placed on the red-headed Mexican man-child to claim the WBC belt.

So granted, in a purely boxing sense, this may not be the most exciting of match-ups but for me there is an intriguing, almost literary, quality to it. I imagine years before, Alvarez riding his horse in the barren Mexican desert like some kind of tragic young hero from a Cormac McCarthy western and then I think of Matthew Hatton – lunchbox tucked under his arm – arriving at a red-brick terraced house in rainy Manchester to lay a carpet. And the idea that years later they would meet in California to fight for a world championship is unlikely, poetic and exciting. The Mexican vaquero versus the English carpet-fitter… it has a ring to it.

The fight will probably suck, though.

Comment on this article

FighterforJC says:

I thought the writer was referring to Hatton as the lunchbox under Alvarez's arm.

Badass9999 says:

Very witty and informative read- I agree hatton will get bashed- can't believe he managed 2 even get the European title !

kcast-408 says:

nice article. but i view this fight as a good step up for alvarez..