

Do Freddie Roach Fighters Lack Inside Defensive Skills?

Written by Lee Wylie
Monday, 09 April 2012 11:44



If we were to compile a pound for pound list on sheer talent alone, Jorge Linares would probably feature somewhere around the top as a result of his smorgasbord of just about every positive boxing attribute imaginable - decent height, reach, handspeed, footspeed, hand/eye co-ordination and power. Linares was once thought of as one of boxing's hottest prospects, but now, after his second round knockout defeat courtesy of Sergio Thompson - his second

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technical knockout loss in a row - it seems Jorge Linares is now destined to join boxing's "what could have been?" list.

So how does a fighter, who is blessed with all the talent in the world, suffer consecutive TKO losses at the hands of far less talented fighters?

Linares' promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, believed he has the answer when he took to Twitter after the bout.

"Linares needs a new trainer. He has so much natural ability but has no defense. Jorge needs a new trainer, someone that is going to pay attention and teach him defense! Freddie Roach was just too busy and I was told he didn't train him for this one. If you do not get hit, you do not get knocked out. If Linares had defense, he would be untouchable. If I had no chin I would do everything in my power to learn the craft of defense."

De La Hoya does make an interesting point. While I wouldn't go as far as Oscar in saying that Freddie can't teach defense, I would say that there seems to be certain defensive areas that Roach has missed in the tutelage of his fighters.

Looking at Linares, Amir Khan and Manny Pacquiao, we can see a fighters who ARE defensively responsible when attacking. A fighter is at his most vulnerable at the time of his attack, so by being overly aggressive, a fighter may be caught off balance and find it difficult to transition back to defense. This is where Roach has done a terrific job with Linares, Khan and Pacquiao; their balance issues have improved under the guidance of Freddie Roach.

Also evident in Roach's fighters is the ability to move away from danger after an attack, so as to reduce the risk of a counter attack. In other words, Roach has taught his fighters how to maintain defensive concern after the completion of their attack. Roach has embedded this into his fighters through an emphasis on great footwork. If you look at Pacquiao, his ability to move off after an attack is his main form of defense. It's the same with Khan and it's the same with Linares.

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Defense is not only used when under pressure from an opponent. It is also used when a fighter is on the attack. This is the area in which Roach clearly excels. On the other hand, there does appear to be an area in which Roach seems to have either neglected, or has a distinct lack of understanding of: defending on the inside.

Yes, Roach has worked with some great defensive fighters in the past. Marlon Starling and James Toney were indeed defensive specialists. But Toney was already well schooled under Bill Miller and Starling, a naturally gifted counterpuncher, didn't need any defensive refinement.

Even fighters who operate at a distance have to possess some understanding on how to defend in close, Muhammad Ali and Wladimir Klitschko being prime examples. At their best, they are keeping the fight at arms length, either on the end of a jab or a straight right hand. Their objective? To prevent their opponents from breaching their optimum fighting space. That's why we have never seen them mount much in the way of offense on the inside. However, one of the reasons that Ali and Wladimir were able to dominate is because of their ability to prevent an inside fight from occurring by tying up on the inside and locking their opponent's arms up. From a defensive standpoint, they had knowledge on inside fighting.

I believe this knowledge is missing in Jorge Linares', Amir Khan's and quite possibly Manny Pacquiao's work as a direct result of the type of fighter Freddie Roach was... an offensive blood and guts trader who sometimes took five to land his one. If we focus on Khan and Linares in particular, they don't seem to know how to react when confronted with severe pressure.

So how does a fighter defend in close?

The best defensive fighters have a good variety of defenses against every punch available. They are able to maintain relaxation amid heavy fire. If a fighter is putting severe pressure on them, panic is no option. They stay calm and allow their defensive skills to take over, slipping, rolling, elbow blocking, half arm covering, hip rotation and the ability to tie up. I've never seen Linares and Khan display any of these defensive attributes.

A trainer like Freddie Roach likely never had much use for these techniques as a fighter because his entire emphasis was on attack. This could be the reason why Roach was never considered a great fighter. There always comes a time when offense is not always enough.

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If we take a look back throughout history, more often than not, the defender has gotten the better of the attacker; James Corbett got the better of John L Sullivan, Gene Tunney got the better of Jack Dempsey and Jack Johnson got the better of Jim Jefferies. The modern era is no different. The ability to defend, and in particular the ability to defend in close, cannot be overlooked.

Telling times lie ahead.

The next couple of months could prove to be very detrimental for Freddie Roach. He has two fights coming up, against two proven inside fighters, against his two prized assets - Amir Khan and Manny Pacquiao. During their first bout, Amir Khan's lack of an inside game was brought into light from the third round onwards as his opponent, Lamont Peterson - who normally operates as a boxer - took on the persona of the brawler and swarmed all over Khan, throwing nothing but power shots in close. As was evident during his win over Marcos Maidana, Khan had no answer to Peterson's severe pressure. Khan's only response was to push his opponent off which eventually led to a two point reduction against him. If there have not been any improvements made to Khan's inside game, then it is not hard to imagine Peterson utilising the same strategy that won him the fight last time out.

While Freddie Roach deserves an awful lot of credit with regards to his transformation of Manny Pacquiao's offense-- namely his two handed attack and balance issues--is there any evidence of him improving Pacquiao defensively on the inside?

Against Antonio Margarito, a slow plodding fighter, Manny found himself on the ropes on more than one occasion. If we take a look at those instances when Pacquiao's back was up against the ropes, his only answer for defense was more offense. There were also occasions early in the Miguel Cotto fight when Pacquiao's back was against the ropes. Pacquiao's response to his opponents offense in that fight was to cover up and wait for Miguel to stop throwing. It is no coincidence that between rounds during most of Manny Pacquiao's fights, you will hear Freddie Roach tell him to keep off the ropes. Apart from those two occasions that I've mentioned, Pacquiao's offense has been so overwhelming of late, and his footwork has been so good, that we have not seen him forced into an inside fight. While he is considered the underdog, Timothy Bradley's footspeed, stamina and inside game could provide the perfect foil for Pacquiao's offensive. If Pacquiao is forced into an inside fight, I'm not sure I can envision him competing with Bradley in close.

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These next two fight's could be THE defining fights of Freddie Roach's illustrious training career. A win in both of them for Khan and Pacquiao, and the two Linares defeats will merely be deemed as unfulfilled potential in a promising young fighter. However, unless there have been significant steps taken with regards to improving his fighters' inside knowledge and ability, we could be in for two of the biggest back to back upsets in recent memory. Suddenly, Freddie Roach, who is considered by many as the finest trainer in the sport, would be faced with the ominous notion that a gaping hole in his tutelage may have resulted in the demise of his two star pupils, culminating in three high profile defeats in a row as a result of his neglect on the inside nuances of boxing.

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

I think the title of this copy is off. Freddie's whup-a\$\$es lack inside meanness, roughhousing and dirty-mean fighting PERIOD! They are so use to being able to cleanly, comfortably and fairly whup arses from the outside and clinching and pushing off in the inside. But there will be days that fighters won't let you do that, i.e., Peterson-Khan Bout. And days that you will have a bias referee letting your opponent get away with dirty fighting you, while warning harassing you for all type of imaginary violations. So you just need to be prepared to fight dirt with dirt. Andre "SOG" Ward is an archmaster of that play.

The no joke Coach Roach's pugilists need to let go of the punked-out clean, fair fighting and get straight NASTY and naughty! Blood demands blood. [Yall saw -- back in da day -- what the GOAT Ali did to Big Chucky Werpner when the referee wouldn't warn Werpner for rabbit punching the GOAT behind the cranium.] Holla!

ultimoshogun says:

Interesting points about Manny's lack of an inside game...things could get real interesting if his legs begin to cramp again and is forced to fight inside or along the ropes.

ali says:

I said a long time ago Pac had no skills on the inside now people are starting to notice I was right.

Radam G says:

Everybodee and dey momma know what you say about Da Manny all the time, SCLA Ali! You are the typical hater. I once thought that you have a toady personality, but NOPE! You are straight-up parasitic and chameleonic with yo' Ebonican and Urbanites. [It is all GOOD! That is

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your choice and to each his own poison.] That is the way that a weakling survive da hood. You latch on and/or blend in with the Boys in the Hood baddest haters, so they will never do the do on you. I ain't hatin'! Yo do what you do... "TO SURVIVE...DA GHETTOOOOOO!"

Money May doesn't have an inside game EITHER! Never has. He stays to the outside by elbowing upside da cranium, slap jabbing, Kangaroo hooking to the jaw, turning his back and dropping his head. Dude is optical illusionist superstar on those who live by make-believe actuality and hardcore reality distortion. I'm straight-up with da moola maker.

He's told me a million time that he cannot stand _____! And he just want them to put their pennies in his pot. You KNOOOOOOOW DAT! I see! I See! Money May is SMART about dip-sh*ttin his peeps! Holla!

Grimm says:

History is full of Linares', where the parts and the sum simply didn't add up the way they should.

Now, fighters with a lack of inside game/defensive skills are all too common today. Come to think about Victor Ortiz v Berto - when hurt by Berto, Ortiz was all over the place, jumping and bouncing, hoping to avoid getting hit again. His hands? Down his waist. His head? There to be hit. Ortiz was, in this fight, the perfect example of a fighter of the new millennium - pretty exciting, all offense, and almost guaranteeing knockdowns one way or the other with the lack of defensive skills. Of course, the case was the same with Berto. The blame isn't all on the trainers. Todays market crave for blood and knockdowns - the MMA-generation of fans simply cannot appreciate old-school artists of the sweet science, and hence - if a boxer wants maximum exposure on TV and thus getting paid accordingly - everybody seeks to be that offensive minded, all-action knock-out-or-go-down-trying-kind of fighter.

But also...training a fighter, defense is the first, second and third issue. However, there comes a time when a trainer simply cannot resist the very nature of the fighter he is training. Some guys are simply born a certain style, with a certain attitude, and you better take that nature and mold it - do the best of it, like a swordsmith working with different kinds of raw material. Pacquiao, for sure, was and will always be to offensive, to energetic, to really have the patience to learn the defensive craft. I would even say it would be contra-productive to have tried to do it. A unique offensive-machine like that, should focus only on refining the obviously effective parts of his attack. Khan is a different story. Neither his offense or his skills as a outside-fighter are quite enough to neglect the inside/defensive tools - however, he may already have passed the critical point of age in his career where he really can pick this up. The golden age of usurping skills is short - which is wy the cuban amateur system focus so hard on boxers between 7-12. After that, from the late teens and on, it's just about sharpening the existing tools.

From a long post to a short conclusion: I give Roach thumbs up. He got his fighters at a certain age, he took a long good look at them, he sensed their nature and the depth and variety of their abilities, and he figured out what he could mould, what he could refine, what he could develop - and what he couldn't. That is also the sign of a great trainer - knowing when not trying to make their fighters into something they aren't and will never be.

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Radam G says:

Jack Johnson, GOAT Ali, Sugar Ray Robinson, Big [Rev.] George Foreman, Sonny "Night Train" Liston, Tommy Hearns, Pinklon Thomas, Money May, Terry Norris and I can name a whole ton more, were/are known for not having "no skill for the inside." Holla!

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=Grimm;15268]History is full of Linares', where the parts and the sum simply didn't add up the way they should.

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As fine a post as I've ever read.

Radam G says:

Ditto Dino da Vinci! Holla!

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Real Talk says:

Oh BOY!!!! Now Lamont Peterson was fighting dirty..smh. Man you are full of excuses. Body work is dirty now huh....cut the jokes. This is pro boxing not the olympics, bodyshots count. Amir had all he could eat of that black top body work, good old rough house boxing game that's becoming a lost art but is still a beautiful thing in this Universe. All that pss psst psst, flash only get's you so far. Sooner or later you gon have to get nose to nose, toe to toe or do what we call clutch together, an if you aint got any pocket game I don't know what to tell you LOL. May the force be with you. Team Peterson!!!! Dueces

Radam G says:

Hehehehehe! Both team will need the force, Real talk. And body snatching is no doubt a wonder craft, but the cranium to the mug is a nice, sweet trick of the trade. And you don't need to push down the noggin or hold it to stop that trick.

This time around, Team Khan has gotten some phat old school TOTT. And what LP did in the last bout, in this one, he will NOT! Da Great Khan is going to put it on him so badly that Lamont is going to look SHOT! Holla!

Radam G says:

BTW, Real Talk, YUP! LP did indeed adroitly get on his inside dirty-fighting along with that slick, righteous body work. Inside dirty-fighting ain't bad. It is part of the profession, even in the amateurs. What ever trick of the trade that a pugilist gets away with counts. Only punks will meanlessly bytch about dirty syet. Not !! I simply stated a fact. And not in an adverse way. Once again, "Freddie Roach['s]" fighter lack dirt, because they have been too great in cleanly whuppin' arse.

Of course, LP landed tricky low blows in an artful way against Amir when the referee's vision was obstructed. The late, greats Smokin' Joe Frazier, Jack Dempsey, Archie "The Old Mongoose" Moore, Floyd Patterson, "Homicide" Hank Armstrong and Jersey Joe Walcott were master at the trick of the trade of popping muthaboxers on the hip bones and thighs in ways that the referee could catch them. [The purpose is to slow down the movements of a "jiggy-wiggy, rollerskating, bouncing-around-the-square-jungle bytch" in the words of the oldtimers.]

Your homeboy LP got this trick of the trade down pack. So on your's truly, there is no reason to attack. I'm always calling a spade a spade. None of my spit is on the fly made. I'm from the old school, not a New-Jack fool. And Amir got the answer to beating LP in bout II. Holla!

Radam G says:

I musta fo' got! The greatest dirty-inside fighter of our days is no doubt Old B-Hoppy! He is a triple master of gettin' away with da dirty-inside fighting ripple disaster. One thing that you may want note, Real Talk. In Sin City, mutha-officials can now use the instant replay jive, so this awesome trick -- dirty-inside fighting -- of the game is probably on the way out.

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Danggit! Technology is fudging with a naturally crooked sport. It's all up in da game's grill and is about to make me go ape-syet, because of "I'm be missing" THE crooked-arse banana-ness of the whup-a\$\$.

My music idol, Tiny Tim is probably turning over in his grave. He's the cool cat who coined the phrase that boxing is crooked like a darn banana and composed and sang a latent song about it. The cat was a real fan.

WTF! "It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday...." Holla!

ali says:

Triple O.G Mike Tyson had no inside game. Was that a typo?

ali says:

Having inside fighting skills ain't all about offense. Being able ro make your opponent miss in the pocket is part of it too. It funny how people say Mayweather has a similar style to James Toney but he has no inside game when anybody with some boxing knowledge knows James Toney is a great inside fighter. Watch this fight with Cotto, Mayweather is not only going to beat Cotto on the out side but on the inside too.

Radam G says:

SCLA, MT was not an inside fighter. Every time that he got inside, he'd get tied up, or he would extend his arms between the opponents' underarms. Go and take a serious peep at the Iron One for yourself. Teddy Atlas was known to criticize Mike for not doing jack when in the inside. Mike was known for knocking out fighters from the outside with a leaping-like hook and an overhand right, and occasionally a dangerous-thrown-from-the-outside uppercut. And Mike did have a great jab. He was much more like Big [Rev.] George Foreman and Sonny "Night Train" Liston than he was like inside-kick a\$\$ers Jack Dempsey, Carmen Basilio and "Homicide" Henry Armstrong.

Now, of course, some of the greatest inside-outside fighters of our time and all times are no doubt James Toney, Don Curry and Roberto Duran to name a few. But Money May is not one -- and I repeat is not -- an insider fighter. Learn boxing, SCLA Ali. The prime Money May was a Philly crab/shell fighter with good foot movement. And he was an out fighter with the slap jab, kangaroo hook and a razor-beam right cross. Now the old Money May is a stand-around Philly crab/shell fighter who occasionally come forward on bad legs and get on his whup-arse and, of course his bullsh*tology of optical illusions.

Don't get thing twisted, SCLA Ali because of your personality for great parasitism and chameleonism. Money May looked like syet against dumb-a\$\$ Victor Ortiz. Money May did look all that great against old-arse Sugar Shane Mosley. And Money May did look average in coming in overweight against Juan Manuel Marquez.

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Money May is not going to do inside tangle with Cotto. And you can bet on that. If Money May does, expect the upset of the decade. Holla!

ali says:

M..ike was a inside fighter that got tied up a lot...and he occasionally jumped in with left hooks and did damage but for the most part he used a jab to get on the inside...I never said Mayweather was a inside fighter I said he can fight on the side Pac can't at all im not hating triple O.G im just keeping it real...I thought u said it was a dumb *** ref now its Victor...mark my words Mayweather is going to fight Cotto on the inside at least half the time and beat him at what he does best.

Radam G says:

They all can fight in the inside, SCLA Ali. But they are just so fast and talented that they don't need to. [As a light flyweight that is the only way that Da Manny fought. He is a serious arse thrasher inside if and when need to be. He will smash the hinny of Bradley with lots of inside swimming.]

I don't know what you are spittin' about in regards to Vicious Victor. He did a dumba\$\$ thing in butting Money May. The referee was a dumba\$\$ in not controlling the fighters, and not standing between them after he penalized dumba\$\$ Vic. What part of my spit, do you do not get? My mind is made up and quite clear. Thank you! Holla!

SouthPaul says:

Victor's mostly to blame for that debaccle. Starts it off with an intentional headbutt then stands around as Pretty Boy Floyd starts teeing off on 'em. He looked like the half witted airhead chick not getting a joke. That or half stoned. He's the Jeff Spicoli of boxing.

[IMG]<http://www.hollywoodtuna.com/images/bigimages/spicoli.jpg>[/IMG]

brownsugar says:

[B]Grim That was solid,..... Real Talk,... good to see you back in the mix again...[/B]

[B]Like Grim said good trainers mold their fighters according their natural inclinations... Pac attacks,.. so does Amir,.. Roach has honed their offensive skills with enough defense to greatly reduce their probability of getting hit too much,... but not to the point where they look like a reincarnation of a skiddish Hector Camacho in his relay running prime.. [/B]

[B]Roach's guys love to be on offense,... and Roach taught them how to attack without putting their chins on the line. But the Key word is attack... from a distance. in and out... with good stamina and plenty of spring in their wheels....[/B]

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[B]a good combination of qualities to become a winner. [/B]

[B]nothing fancy but good overall basics that makes these guys offensive engines.... sharks on dry land.[/B]

[B]Roach has even taught Chavez to fight in close while pushing his oponents back so they can't T-Off on him with force. They built up his stamina to point where he's able to plod forward crowding guys out,..... shutting them down offensively while he windmills with butter punches on the inside. [/B]

[B]It masks Jr's deficiencie, minimizes the punishment he takes,... while optimizing his offense. [/B]

[B]Guys like Mayweather or Pernell Whitaker aren't taught in a gym,... They Just "ARE". Some guys are driven to become the whole package....driven by ego and conciet... not only do they want to win but they want to be aesthetically pleasing doing it and they have the advanced motor skills and intelligence to execute. [/B]

[B]There's no need to harp on Roach out of a twitch reaction originated by fickle fans...and malcontent observers....Roach has done the best he could with what he had to work with. (remember Michael Moorer)[/B]

[B]Roach has had the recipe for victory about 75% percent of the time,... those aren't bad odds. [/B]

[B]Although I feel his managerial, matchmaking, and weight stipulating skills are masterfully calculated, highly underrated... and 2nd to none. [/B]

Radam G says:

I disagree! Everybody is taught in the gym or somewhere in life. They just become great at it. Indeed, they are no doubt driven by ego, but not conceit. Conceited suckas don't even make it out of the amateurs. I can start naming. Humbleness bring the greatest about this kick-arse sport. What a pugilist do to get those butts in those seats is not him personally. Holla!

brownsugar says:

thanks for the feedback RG, pretty decent comments.....

pride, self esteem, conciet, vanity, ambition,..... and the need for attention all share 98% of the same DNA,.. it's just the nuances that makes one quality positive and the other negative. But they're all necessary components for the real "showmen" of the ring. most of them have all the qualities.... and a fair measure of humility too....

Jaime729 says:

All fighters have different styles - a good trainer should adapt and improve the fighter by strengthening weakness and further improving strengthens. Not every fighter is the same and

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should not be trained as a clone of someone else !

Do you Freddie roach's fighters lack defensive skills - although you can't argue with his successes - a lot of struggles and poor performances by his fighters come against fighters who work on the inside.