

Ricky Hatton Returns, Of Course

Written by Ron Borges

Thursday, 13 September 2012 11:00



Tszyu (left) read the writing on the wall, and on his face, and never came back to the ring after Hatton (right) thrashed him. Hatton apparently couldn't resist the call to re-arm. (Hogan Photos)

On Friday former junior middleweight champion Ricky Hatton is expected to announce he will launch a November comeback after three years in retirement. The bigger news would be if he wasn't coming back.

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The 33-year-old Hatton's decision to return to a sport he left flat on his back after Manny Pacquiao quite literally knocked him stiff on May 2, 2009 is an old song being sung anew. Nearly always it turns out to be a blues song.

Many years ago, heavyweight champion Sony Liston said prophetically of boxing, "Some day, they're gonna write a blues (song) for fighters. It'll just be for slow guitar, soft trumpet and a bell."

The latest man likely to hear that unwritten anthem inside his head will be Hatton, a boxer who gave everything he had to the fights but not always to training. His weight problems were legendary, often blowing up from his fighting weight of 140 pounds to over 200 in a matter of pale ale soaked weeks after a match.

Each time he went back into training he taxed his body more and more, the work of paring off the pounds taking a toll he could not see but soon enough began to feel.

He was thrilling to watch, a lunchpail operative who related so well to the rank and file fight fan they not only fell in love with him but followed him to America like lemmings when he first began to fight in the States in 2006.

The night of his greatest triumph, an upset of future Hall of Famer Kostya Tszyu to win the IBF light welterweight title in his hometown arena in Manchester, England was as memorable for the electric atmosphere in M.E.N. Arena as it was watching youth dismantle age.

Hatton entered a darkened hall to the throaty singing of over 21,000 flash light holding fans bellowing out the words to "Blue Moon," the anthem of Hatton's beloved Manchester City soccer team until the lights flashed on him. It was a frenzied moment topped later by the sight of a suddenly aged Tszyu quitting on his stool after 11 ever more one-sided rounds before gamely arising to lift Hatton's hand up in a show of sportsmanship triumphing over despair that is rare in sport or any other walk of life.

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Kostya Tszyu was thanked in the ring by Hatton, who said he only hoped he could be half the champion Tszyu had been. To be fair, he had the math about right.

That night Tszyu was 35 years old. He never fought again. Now here's the man who dethroned him, wandering lost in the larger world without boxing, returning at nearly 34 to try and recapture the feeling he had that night. It seldom happens that way.

Hatton has admitted to having sunk into a deep depression after the loss to Pacquiao, which came on the heels of a similarly brutal knockout loss to Floyd Mayweather a year and a half earlier. He suffered through long bouts of binge drinking and drug abuse until, he once told the BBC, he contemplated suicide before bouts in rehab and a return to the gym began to allow him to sort out his life.

Hatton began training fighters and opened his own promotional company, which did well on a small-time basis for a while until BSkyB, one of Britain's television networks, ended its contract with him in May. The belief is he's coming back in part to sign a new promotional deal with another British TV outlet, one that will also televise his company's shows even when he's not the featured attraction.

It is not unlike what Oscar De La Hoya did for a while to get Golden Boy Promotions off the ground. The problem is for Hatton to be successful he'll have to stay off the ground and that is where the soft guitar, trumpet and the bell come in.

Hatton (45-2, 32 KO) is reportedly planning a November return to the ring in hopes of setting up a rematch with WBA welterweight champion Paulie Malignaggi, who Hatton stopped in 11 rounds 3 1/2 years ago one fight before Pacquiao would send him into retirement. That is he believes, a winnable fight and maybe he's right because while Malignaggi is a slick boxer he has no significant punching power. But even if he's successful there will be somebody after Malignaggi and somebody again and then a night when nothing works right.

Perhaps this is just about love. Maybe it's about money. More than likely it's about both. Regardless it is a familiar story, one that always ends in the same way. It ends with a shadow leaving an arena the way Kostya Tszyu did the night he met young Ricky Hatton.

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It was nearly three hours after the fight and the M.E.N. Arena was empty. Even Hatton was gone, off to celebrate with his friends at every pub in Manchester. Only then did a broken man appear, walking next to his friend Russell Crowe, the Australian actor.

He moved slowly, his face hidden behind dark glasses that could not totally obscure the swelling around his eyes or the hurt on his face. He was silent as he shuffled along, a man who had stayed too long in a grimly punishing business.

No matter how grand the applause on Friday when Hatton announces his return to boxing, before too long the working class hero of Manchester, England will see a similarly misshapen face looking back at him...from his own mirror. Then he'll hear Sonny Liston's still unwritten blues song and then he'll hear a bell for the last time.

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Radam G says:

Paulie "Magic Man" Malignaggi of nowadays will KAYO Ricky Hatton. Oh, YUP!

First of all, RH pseudoKAYOED Paulie. Paulie's problem was bad coaching and bullshyt histrionic from drama queen trainer, "I'm gonna stop it" Buddy McGirt.

I'll take the Magic Man to slice and dice up RH face, and then the doctor or the corner of RH will surrender like Redcoats are known to do. It is one thing to talk about keeping a stiff upward lip, and another thing to follow through with it. Holla!

Matthew says:

This can't end well. It almost never does. Hatton abused his body between fights when he was active, and he abused his body after he retired. Even with clean living, his face-first, rush-in style doesn't translate to a long career. I wish him luck, because he seems like a good guy, but I doubt he has much left. I would pick Maglinaggi to win a rematch.

MARK LENNOX says:

could not agree more,Ricky should stick to training youngsters and tell them where he went wrong.He could make it big as atrainer.

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solaris says:

I like Hatton, he was an exciting fighter (albeit somewhat flawed defensively) and a humble guy out of the ring. But I always felt like he got a bit too much credit for beating Tszyu that night. Tszyu came in to that fight after a layoff of almost two years before he took on Hatton (because of surgery on his shoulder) and had one tune-up bout in a rematch with Sharmba Mitchell, who he knocked out.

Tszyu took on Hatton in his own backyard, and severely underestimated the young lion, making comments that the fight would probably be stopped on cuts, referring to Hatton's propensity to bleed earlier on in his career, and failing to realize that Hatton had fixed his bleeding problem (which was caused by vaseline trapped in some scar tissue). I think a prime, well-prepared Tszyu would have been too much for the one-dimensional Brit to handle...