A quick look at Miguel Cotto with his short-cropped hair, intense stare and no-nonsense personality fails to include that he derives from Puerto Rico a small island paradise about the size of Connecticut.

Cotto is a pure fighter.

But the stoic Cotto (30-0, 25 KOs) is yet another marvelous fighter from that island with a population of about 4 million residents who seem to pop up every decade.

It's Cotto's turn to determine if he can be included in the pantheon of great Boricua fighters when he meets Sugar Shane Mosley (44-4, 35 KOs) at Madison Square Garden on Saturday Nov. 10.

HBO pay-per-view will telecast the WBA title fight called "Fast and Furious."

How can a small island like Puerto Rico put out such great fighters in professional boxing?

"It's a cultural thing," said boxing promoter Bennie Georgino who's seen a multitude of prizefighters evolve into stardom. "They love boxing."

From that island have come a list of pugilists beginning in the Depression when Sixto Escobar captured the first world title. Then came one of the greatest lightweights to ever lace a glove in Carlos Ortiz and the superb light heavyweight Jose Torres during the 1960s. After that, the dam burst and Boricuas have emerged as a force in the boxing world.

Cotto is the newest to arrive and has slowly emerged from the murky waters of professional boxing to become a force in the welterweight division. The fighter is dripping with talent.

It was seven years ago during the 2000 Olympics held in Australia that Top Rank Promotions spotted Cotto among the many amateur stars and felt he was the true golden nugget of the group.

Todd Duboef, president of Top Rank, liked what he saw in Cotto though the Puerto Rican boxer immediately lost during the Olympic games.

"Todd always liked Cotto and believed he would be the greatest fighter to ever come out of Puerto Rico," said Arum, adding that Cotto was beaten by Mohamed Abdulaev in the Olympics and enacted revenge five years later with a brutal knockout as a pro. "He was totally convinced of his talent."

After five years of watching Cotto rummage through the junior welterweight division and now look even stronger as a welterweight, Arum is completely convinced his fighter will be

considered among the other great Puerto Rican boxers.

“No question about it,” said Arum. “If he beats Sugar Shane Mosley he should be considered among the greatest Puerto Rican fighters.”

Better than Tito?

Whenever a comparison is made between Felix Trinidad and Cotto, a look of irritation crosses the WBA champion’s face.

“I’m not the next Trinidad,” Cotto, 27, says almost tiredly. “I’m Miguel Cotto.”

There’s not a more humble person than Cotto. But humble doesn’t mean he can’t fight. Inside the ring he morphs into a wrecking machine and all opponents should beware.

“Everybody knows Cotto has one of the best left hands in the business,” said Mosley, 36, a student of the sport and one of the more astute analyst in boxing. “And he likes to go to the body.”

Cotto never brags, boasts or belittles any opponent. It’s not his style.

“It will be an honor to face the great Shane Mosley,” is about as nasty as Cotto can offer.

Road to Sugar

It’s true that the Puerto Rican boxer hit road bumps along the way. It wasn’t always easy for Cotto.

Most of his detractors point to the problems Cotto had against DeMarcus “Chop Chop” Corley and Ricardo Torres, but forget about the convincing victories over Kelson Pinto, Mohamad Abdulaev and Paul Malignaggi.

Even those victories didn’t seem to raise the public’s consciousness of Cotto. Then stepped in New York’s Zab Judah. That proved to be the launching pad the Puerto Rican boxer needed.

“I think Zab Judah is more dangerous than Shane Mosley,” said Cotto, who cited that fighter’s southpaw stance and combination of speed and power as worrisome Judah weapons. “Shane Mosley is not faster than Judah.”

A converted southpaw, Cotto tucks in his chin tight and always moves forward with a high defensive guard and head movement. His mission is to hurt opponents in the ring and nothing else with those left hooks that look like a scythe cutting down wheat.

“My goal is always the same to go to the body,” said Cotto with as much simplicity and straight-forwardness as his boxing style. “I know Shane Mosley can take a punch. We’ll see.”

Judah was able to withstand almost 11 rounds of Cotto's relentless and unmerciful attack. But even the former junior welterweight and welterweight champion had his limit. Now it's Mosley's turn.

Fight of the year written all over

Mosley comes from Pomona, a former farm area that changed from a sleepy country town in the 1950s into a suburban extension of Los Angeles with all its congestion and city elements including the rise of boxing.

The city grew from less than 20,000 to a bustling 155,000 people that have produced several world champions including Albert Davila, Richie Sandoval, Mike Weaver and now Shane Mosley.

Mosley is considered the best of all.

"Shane has always been a great fighter even when we were kids," said Oscar De La Hoya who first faced the Pomona-based boxer when he was nine and Mosley 10. "He's always had that speed and desire."

Desire is something that Mosley possesses in abundance.

"I guarantee that Sugar Shane Mosley is going to win, no contest," said Fernando Vargas who was beaten twice by Mosley. "I have nothing but respect for Shane."

Even others who have not faced Mosley feel the former Pound for Pound king (circa 2000) is a notch above Cotto.

"The first time Shane hits Cotto he's going to knock him out," said current Pound for Pound king Floyd Mayweather. "Shane has too much experience."

Regardless of who wins it should be exciting.

"This fight has Fight of the Year written all over it," said Tony Walker, HBO's pay-per-view coordinator who's seen hundreds of title fights.

Cotto seeks to become one of a train-length of former world champions from Puerto Rico who have stamped their names with greatness like Escobar, Ortiz, Torres, Wilfredo Gomez, Wilfredo Benitez, and Trinidad.

"Shane Mosley has been a great champion for a long time," says Cotto with nary a tint of sarcasm. "Now it's my time."