

Prospect Watch Pt 2: In Hatton's Camp

Written by Raymond Markarian
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Karim "The Hard Hitta" Mayfield says he fights like Mike Tyson. He also has a similar story.

"The Hard Hitta" was discovered by the legendary Bay Area trainer Johnny Mason. Mason was a mentor to Karim Mayfield's current trainer, Ben Batista.

Basically, Johnny Mason was to Cus D'Amato what Ben Batista is to Teddy Atlas. That is the resemblance to Mike Tyson's career.

However, unlike Tyson, Karim Mayfield has had a strong family background.

"I am in boxing to provide for my family," he said. "I have three kids that I love to play with everyday. I have so much energy, sometimes I get them tired. I only want to keep boxing for about 8 to 10 more years. I am not in the sport to become a legend. If I could make a million dollars then I could make a million dollars. But now I take it one fight at a time."

Family values are the essence of Karim Mayfield. He has a strong appreciation for where he comes from. Our conversation about boxing seemed to always return to a reference about another family member that had a lasting effect on him.

"My brother taught me so much about boxing," he said. "I used to rush my opponents like a mad man throwing punches with my head down. He told me that I could control the fight better if I keep my head up and use my strengths wisely."

Karim's greatest strengths are the right uppercut and left hook to the body. If you don't believe him ask Ricky Hatton. Now "The Hard Hitta" is starting to get what every good young prospect should receive: recognition. The Ricky Hatton camp is not the only one Mayfield has on his resume. He also helped Zab Judah prepare for his fight against Carlos Baldomir in January of 2006.

Mayfield knows his boxing history and he figures that he is at the cusp of great things. Most young prospects that became great champs had to pay their dues by working as sparring partners for elite championship level fighters. A young Larry Holmes was famous for abusing Muhammad Ali during sparring sessions and more recently Paul Williams was wrecking havoc in the Antonio Margarito camp before he got his title shot.

Once Larry Holmes and Paul Williams became seasoned they defeated Ali and Margarito respectively to become champions. So does Karim Mayfield think that he can follow the trend and overthrow an undefeated champion like Ricky Hatton?

"I would never say anything bad about Ricky. He treated so me good out there. It just felt good to train with a world champion. If Floyd gives Ricky a target, he is going to rip right through him. Preparing Ricky Hatton for the biggest fight of his career is an honor."

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Karim Mayfield and his trainer Ben Batista arrived in Manchester, England seven weeks into Ricky Hatton's training camp. "I was there helping Ricky train with three other boxers," the fighter said. "We all felt like he was training to beat us up. That guy is like a machine. He just does not get tired." For Karim it felt like a privilege being a contributor to the Hatton camp but he wanted to prove his worthiness: "I went there to benefit. I wanted to see if I could compete with Ricky.

Ricky Hatton spars three times a week: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. When I asked Karim Mayfield to describe his experience in the ring with Ricky Hatton, he gave a vivid visual description on how a fighter feels inside the ring with the English champion.

At times Mayfield stood up and mimicked Mayweather's defensive stance to show me how Ricky Hatton could exploit certain areas. He also posed as Ricky Hatton and threw punches in midair like a shadow boxer to give me a better idea on how Hatton fights inside the ring.

"Hatton has one style. There are no tricks. He is coming straight at you. He hits you everywhere man it does not matter. He will hit you on the elbows, your back, and your shoulders whatever he sees. Hatton does not back up. He comes straight forward like a bull.

"Ricky has a lot of natural strength. Ricky does not throw many jabs. If he does, then it's a quick one just to get inside. He is a killer body puncher. But I felt like I neutralized him while we were sparring. I am naturally strong too and I was throwing punches from many different angles. After a few rounds I felt like I got his rhythm down. I have a unique style and I think it had an affect on him. I was hanging in there. I knew what he was doing every round. But can you stop it? That is the key."

Aside from the training, he said, "Ricky is a cool dude. He is really down to earth. We were laughing and joking most of the time. I have a great amount of respect for him. We were working our asses off. That guy is in tremendous shape."

Mayfield also noticed that his trainer Ben Batista uses completely different tactics than Billy Graham, Ricky Hatton's trainer. "Billy Graham is not much of a strategist," he said. "I did not notice him giving Ricky many pointers in the corner. It is probably because Ricky Hatton fights like a madman. There is not much you can say to a fighter that just comes out to attack non stop."

At this point in his career, Karim Mayfield is similar to a number one draft pick learning his craft while the veteran starting quarterback continues to play over him. In Mayfield's eyes he can compete with anyone, he is just patiently waiting for the opportunity.

"I know I am on the right track in my career after this session with Hatton because I feel like trained with the best," he said. "After about 15 fights I think I could possibly fight for a world title."

Mayfield is a student of life as well as boxing. His teachers come from everywhere and his family is not far from his mind.

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"My father taught me how to be a dad and build structure. My mom and grandma are like angels. My brother taught me to keep my head up and my three children mean the world to me."

Karim was vigilant during his journey in England. Like he said before, he was there to learn and try to compete with the champ. Before we know it, the Super Fight between Ricky Hatton and Floyd Mayweather Jr. will long be over.

But Karim "The Hard Hitta" Mayfield will continue to work. "I stay in the gym everyday," he said. "I am learning more about when to use my jab and how to use the ring to my advantage."

Brother say brother do.

Any comments or Questions email me: Raymond.Markarian@yahoo.com