

Ricky Hatton, All-American Lad

Written by Michael Woods

Monday, 26 November 2007 19:00

Ten days away, the butterflies haven't invaded Ricky Hatton's belly. Even if they did, would there be any room in there, with the constant influx of Guinness and Indian takeaway?

I kid Ricky Hatton, or "Ricky Fatton," as he has referred to himself, in the self-deprecating fashion that has made him one of the UK's most beloved athletes, in all sports.

No, Hatton has proclaimed himself in the best shape of his life, and ready to show the world, and all those bettors laying down money on Floyd Mayweather, that he has what it takes to hand Floyd his first "L."

He may not have the edge in the feet department, or in handspeed, or hell, even the power department. But Hatton does have an abnormally large heart for a 5-6 pipsqueak of relentlessness, and come Dec. 8, the Brit thinks he will stalk Mayweather 24/7 in their scrap, and pull off the greatest win in British boxing history.

"My confidence is building every day that passes by," he told journalists on a Tuesday conference call. "I have no doubt what the outcome will be. I look forward to shocking the world."

Hatton was so bold as to send a message to Mayweather, who, word is, may be having issues with his brittle hands.

Don't blame Dancing With the Stars, or your brittle hands, if and when I beat you Floyd, he said, because if you win, I won't make any excuses.

The characteristics that put Hatton on everyone's most humble list, in any and all sports, were on display.

Yes, I like my brew.

Yes, I like to devour crap food, enormous amounts of it, when not training.

Yes, I bloat up like Chris Farley in between bouts, Hatton will tell you, without a solitary ounce of pretense.

You have to love Ricky Hatton, even if you think he doesn't have the pop to stun Floyd long enough to land a sequence of finishing blows, and that if he can't do that, he will not be able to take a decision from the best technical fighter in the world.

His talent, paired with his humility and brilliant sense of humor, in fact, makes him my choice as the best athletic representation of All-American values, in any and all sports.

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As an athlete and role model, Hatton is who I'd aspire to be, and the sort I'd like my culture to churn out more of.

Hatton could easily fall into a rote mode, and slag Mayweather mercilessly to hype the PPV numbers. Instead, he took the opportunity to compliment PBF on spending ample time with his kids on the latest installment of HBO's 24/7.

Hatton did note that seeing Floyd sparring with Carlos Baldomir made him lick his lips, but of course, the All-American lad made certain to not diss Baldy ("no disrespect to Carlos") when he mentioned that even an in-shape, prime Baldy couldn't hope to imitate Hatton's footspeed and angle-searching purposefulness.

My dream All-American athlete cannot be so worried about public perception or be so PC that he sanitizes his speech. Sure enough, Hatton's mouth flared up when he talked about his underdog status.

"It suits me fine," he said. "I think a lot of people in Vegas will lose a lot of money. I wouldn't give two s**** if everybody picked Floyd. The last time no one gave me a chance was against Kostya Tszyu, and we made him quit. I think I'm gonna make Floyd quit."

Really? Won't Floyd's flashy hands tattoo you while you blunder forward, a PBF fan might ask.

"I'm more worried about power than speed," he said. "You've got to stop me coming forward."

Floyd's power, he said, isn't Tszyu level, and won't be enough to keep him at bay.

Hatton showed that he hasn't been rattled by Floyd's yapping, and even played down the incident at Hopkins/Taylor when Floyd refused to shake his hand and muttered something about knocking him out. "That's just Floyd," is Hatton's answer to nearly all of Floyd's barbs.

The "Ricky Fatton" tag Floyd has used won't get under his skin, he explains, and Floyd should know why—because he himself made up the cruel moniker. "I don't lose a wink of effing sleep over it," the All-American boxer said.

Many fans who watched Jose Luis Castillo battle Floyd Mayweather in April 2002 thought the Mexican deserved the nod.

In his prime, Hatton said, he doesn't think Castillo was his match in footwork, body punching, power, technical and work-rate departments. "In his prime I edge him in nearly every department, and Castillo nearly beat Floyd," Hatton said.

Oh, in my book, the prototype All-American athlete doesn't resort to false modesty. He has a healthy level of self-confidence, but he delivers his state of mind with seeming like a boastful blowhard. Hatton has it.

Hatton did offer his opinion of Floyd from a psychological perspective.

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“I think he’s an insecure person,” Hatton said, stemming from the “five or six bodyguards who seem to be yes men” who hover around PBF.

Through the course of the months of buildup, Mayweather has unleashed some decent material, meant to get under Hatton’s skin. Hasn’t worked, said the All-American fighter.

“He has to know as he’s looked in my eye,” Hatton said, “that I’m not scared, that I have no fear of him.”

That’s the level of healthy fearlessness I need to see in my prototype All-American athlete.

Hey, England, you mind if I borrow Hatton as my ideal of an All-American sporting role model?