

Who's Better, Hatton Or Calzaghe?

Written by Ronan Keenan

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Even a superlative performance from Ricky Hatton on Saturday may not be enough for him to topple the exceptional Floyd Mayweather, yet it should see the Englishman earn recognition as one of the premier fighters on the planet.

If such a scenario transpires, 2007 would nonetheless represent a stellar year for Hatton and one of the best of any modern-day British fighter. His twelve-month résumé would make impressive reading: travelled to the US to out-point the previously unbeaten Juan Urango; blasted out Jose Luis Castillo in what was supposed to be a pick 'em contest; and competed in a true megafight with one of the greatest fighters of the last decade.

Such accomplishments are doubly significant given the ignominious reputation UK fighters have for fighting overseas. Even so, Hatton may still lack acknowledgement as the top active fighter in Britain.

Joe Calzaghe can lay claim to that title after his stirring victory over the undefeated titlist Mikkel Kessler last month, even though the Welshman has never fought in the US.

It has been a long time since Britain has produced two leading fighters. Lennox Lewis and Naseem Hamed were both big draws Stateside, but both struggled for respect and the "Prince" failed dismally against the only elite fighter he faced in Marco Antonio Barrera.

Hatton's credibility within the boxing community is undoubtedly sturdier than Hamed's ever was, but how does it rank with Calzaghe's?

"Both fighters have quite similar career profiles when you think about it," reckons Ian McNeilly of BritishBoxing.net. "Calzaghe is the only Brit ever to have held all four belts from the major sanctioning bodies and this counts for something. Then again, Hatton is a genuine two-weight world champion and, just as Calzaghe is 'the man' at 168, Hatton was at 140.

"If Hatton beats Mayweather on Saturday, one could argue he would be the best boxer, pound-for-pound, in the sport. If he loses, the mystical '0' in the loss column disappears and Calzaghe would have to be rated more highly."

Hatton has already defeated Calzaghe in the race for Boxer of the Year honors from the British Boxing Board of Control, but that distinction only considered results up to August 31. The fighters will be competing against each other again on Sunday when they will contest the prestigious BBC Sports Personality of the Year award. The accolade goes to the sportsperson who receives the most votes from the public and Formula 1 racing driver Lewis Hamilton is the currently the oddsmakers' favourite to triumph. But Calzaghe and Hatton are expected to battle it out for second place in what promises to be a tight race.

It's testament to both men's achievements that the public would hold them both in such high

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esteem, but the debate rages as to who is the better fighter.

"I would rate Hatton above Calzaghe," argues Boxing Monthly Editor Glyn Leach. "He is a two-weight champion and he has not been afraid to travel overseas in search of titles. The "world" in world champion means a lot to me."

But not everyone agrees.

"I would rate Calzaghe and Hatton dead level, could not split them," says Graham Houston of Fightwriter.com. "Saturday night's fight will make the difference."

Yet even though both fighters are vying for recognition as their island's best, there are no traces of animosity. Calzaghe knows that a victory for Hatton on December 8 would take some of the attention off his own achievements, but the prospect of seeing his countryman partake in such a superfight stirs his nationalistic pride.

"It will be a great end to the year if Ricky can go out there and do the business," says the super-middleweight champion. "The whole of Britain will be behind him. I will be there cheering him on and I know that he can do it."