

Bravo, PBF

Written by Michael Woods
Sunday, 09 December 2007 19:00

The Brit had a lot of people believing that he could topple PBF from his P4P throne.

And through the first six or so rounds on Saturday evening in Las Vegas, it didn't seem wildly implausible that Hatton's rough and tumble style could do the job that 37 other men couldn't do.

But then his stamina lagged slightly, and PBF went into another gear, a gear that nobody else in the game possesses. He had sized up his foe, saw what he brought to the table, and dug into the task of putting another 'O' in his row.

And then he did something that his detractors, and there are legions of them, and I have been a most vocal one at times, have faulted him for. He looked to close the show, in decisive fashion, with the exclamation point that removes the possibility of buffooning judges. He dropped a sweeping left hook to the Brit's chin, sending him to the anti-Wonderland, and hopped on Hatton with a climactic flurry that had referee Joe Cortez (who earned his purse, separating the clingy twosome every 20 seconds) halting the one-sided assault.

Then, PBF did his best work of the night, in my opinion. He acted not like Youtube Floyd, Rapper Wannabee Floyd, Money Mania Floyd.

He acted like a gentleman, like a class act, like a role model for a kid from a broken home situation like he muddled through.

He went over to Hatton consoled him, told him he was still a champ in his eyes. He was similarly humble talking to old foe Larry Merchant post-fight, and made certain to laud Hatton for being a consummate pro. He could've talked smack, say I told you so, dissed the naysayers whose hopefulness, whose distaste for the Money Mayweather persona, triumphed over stats and facts, when they gave Hatton a chance at dethroning P4P PBF.

He didn't, and he behaved in a manner that fight fans, all fight fans, not just Floyd Fanatics, can embrace.

Bravo, PBF.

Bottom line, this superfight was far more satisfying for me than the May 5 PBF/Oscar tangle. It was \$55 fairly well spent, and as long as this model exists, that's basically all I can ask for, as a fan.

REWATCHING, WITH TIVO

With the benefit of the trusty TiVO, I saw that Floyd's backward stumble in the first possible came as a result of a foot-tangle, most likely, not from the force of Hatton's short right/leaping left hook combo platter. Thus, while I thought that juncture may have tipped the round to Ricky, in retrospect, PBF probably grabbed it with an edge in telling blows.

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In the second, to me another close round, during my re-watch, I saw that Floyd was slipping some shots that I thought had landed more cleanly on first watch. It is possible that on first watch, I was overly impressed with Hatton's hand speed, and aggressiveness, and was overly inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.

In the third, the first time around I was inclined to call it a draw, as both men were engaged in too many armbars for my liking. But it turns out PBF landed several clean straight rights, enough to take the round, IMO. On first watch, I had it 2-1 Hatton, like Lederman... now, with TiVo, I had PBF up, 3-0. Sorry, Hatton-ites.

I first noticed a slight deterioration in Hatton late in the fourth, during my re-watch. He was eating too many hard rights, and he began to plunge and lunge forward, and PBF landed a vicious right-left-right trio that had Hatton backtracking. If you study Floyd's fights, I do believe the fourth round is when he typically has finished up his scouting work, and gets down to nitty-gritty bidness. Same thing here.

The fifth was mostly mucho mauling, you could've given it to Hatton without much of a fuss. I say yes, because this was when Floyd's forearm foolishness picked up pace. 4-1, PBF, on my card now.

Now, the sixth, the point deduction round. TiVo shows Ricky hitting PBF behind the head, shoving PBF toward the ropes and then clubbing him as his head was in between the top two rungs, with his back to Hatton. Cortez yanked Hatton away as Freddie Blassie whacked PBF with his cane...I mean, as Floyd extricated himself, and then the ref took a point away from Hatton. This looked like the point where Hatton became frustrated with his inability to land clean on one of the fight games' all-time best defenders, and he let it overwhelm him.

He indicated to Cortez that PBF had turned his back, and then a bit later complained about the forearm situation. Instead of attending to what he could control, he began to fixate on, and blame, an outside source. There weren't too many clean blows evidenced, but those that were, were mainly Floyd's. 10-8, PBF. But it was tight, could've gone to Hatton, as Merchant had it. Lederman had it 3-2-1 Hatton now, and gave the sixth to the Brit, for a 57-56 Hatton card.

The Brits were still rockin' to start the seventh, doing the Wonderland chant. Their buzzes never wear off, it seems. The round was just about all chin to chin infighting, and almost no power punches thrown...until the 10 second mark, when Floyd landed a snappy left hook-right hand hand follow that gave the judges the nod to give him the round. THAT'S a lesson in stealing a round, y'all. 6-1 PBF to my eyes.

PBF landed his most telling, jarring blow to this point a minute in to the eighth. It was a lead right, thrown a second after he jabbed to the gut to get Hitman to drop his hands, and the crowd roared as Hatton's head snapped back violently. PBF landed almost the same left hook that spelled the end for Hatton in the tenth with 42 seconds to go in the eighth and came REALLY close to ending it at this point. PBF is a master at knowing when a foe is ready to go, when he's in that mental mode, and his hands aren't hurting him and he can comfortably set down on his shots. When I run boxing, and fix the points system, I'd score that round 10-8 1/2 PBF, because

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the margin was wider than 10-9, but there was no knockdown. The end is near, it is clear, for Hatton. Cortez saw that, coming to his corner, telling the team that he wouldn't let Hitman eat an excess of wallops.

PBF fought the ninth with a strategy that I think could've worked well if he committed to it the whole way through--he moved, and jabbed, moved and jabbed and Hatton was two steps behind him continually. 8-1 PBF with an extra point for the foul. And, those Hatton-ites were still game, doing the Wonderland chant after the ninth. Their stamina was a step up from Ricky's, even.

The safe fell on Hatton's head at the 1:58 mark of the tenth, with that "Check Left Hook" (or is it spelled Czech?) that Floyd unleashed as he slid to his left, as Hatton readied a left hook that never left the holster. Ricky banged his noggin into the corner post, and was up at eight on Guinness legs.

Floyd rocked another left hook, solid, then another, even more solid, a right to the nose, and Hatton tried to slide right, to safety. Cortez was already smothering Mayweather, as Ricky slid to the mat, dazed and downed, for the first time, by the best in the business. The end, as the ref waved his hands to signify that he wouldn't let Hatton even try to rise again.

And still, the Brits chanted Wonderland.

"I love all the fans that came from the UK, I love all the American fans," PBF then told Merchant, with his right arm draped around Larry. "Ricky Hatton is one tough fighter, he's still a champion in my eyes and I'd love to see him fight again."

"Ricky Hatton is probably one of the toughest competitors I ever faced, he kept coming, I hit him with some big shots, some big body shots, but he kept coming, I see why they call him the Hitman. He's one helluva fighter."

Then, Floyd told Merchant that he came in to this one wanting to step it up, as "a few fights ago, I gave the fans a couple of dull fights, but I wanted to come back with spark and a lot of energy, so that's what we did tonight."

Class act, bravo PBF.

SPEEDBAG I was surprised at some of the venom aimed at Joe Cortez. Lord, he had an unenviable task. Both men were grabbing each other greedily. The ref called time and convened the ruffians at 1:50 of the second, and at :31 of the same round, what else was he to do, I figured. But then I saw PBF whack Ricky on the back of the head, when Hatton's back was turned. And then he broke the two while Hatton's hands were free, which is one of the beefs the pro-Hatton, ant-Cortez crew had. Also, Cortez never did get a handle on Floyd's illegal usage of his forearms, did he? That said, hard task, imperfectly handled, c'est la vie.

---And regarding chopsbusting towards Preacher Graham, I can't say either way. HBO needed a translator to interpret for the non-Brits.

--PBF says he wants to promote now. Cotto and Mosley, he pointed out, are both great champions, but he will take a vacation in the near future. Then he said he's fought the best in the world, has nothing left to prove, and again mentioned the promotional sphere. I say the public is craving a fight with Cotto, and come springtime, PBF will get the itch again. He's amassed 50 mill in these last two fights, but you don't hear the same cheers when win in the gambling arena as you do in front of 20,000 in Vegas. We'll see PBF in the ring, in 2008, is my guess.

--I was very disappointed to hear that Golden Boy yanked a credential from Mike Marley's writer, saying that they didn't like some of the coverage they've gotten on Marley's site. The press is allowed to furnish their opinion, and Oscar is free to disagree with those opinions. But once a promoter starts yanking credentials because they don't like the coverage, we start moving in to dangerous territory, towards censorship. I've not had great like communicating with Golden Boy (phone calls and emails going unreturned) in the past, so I hope they reassess how they want to do business with the press, and improve on that front. Marley is correct, the websites are pulling their weight and then some in promoting the sport. For instance, the NY Times didn't send a writer to this event, and instead used AP copy.

Are there as many trained journalists now covering boxing as before? No. Could some of the writers use some basic training in the principles of solid journalism? Yes. I can see how some people would get irked that so many rumors get reported without being checked, and people without journalism training have the ability to be heard far and wide. It is incumbent on us to report truthfully. But Oscar De La Hoya should publicly take a stand against the credential issue, now. That sort of behavior is beneath him, and his company.

Boxing fans should know that we are moving towards a crucial fork in the road of coverage. Many of the websites, to stay in business, must accept advertising from the promoters. Oscar even owns Ring magazine, the oldest and most respected boxing print publication, and that creates the potential for a severe conflict of interest. These arrangements can affect the ability of reporters to report freely, without fear of retribution, or loss of one's job.

Marley is from the old school; he's a real reporter, whose primary interest is the truth. If you guys want that, and I believe you do, let Golden Boy know.