

Gonna Make You My Girlfriend

Written by Michael Woods
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This being the holiday season, when we are most mindful of treating our fellow man as we ourselves would like to be treated, I do hope that when Herman Ngoudjo tries to make Paulie Malignaggi his girlfriend in the ring when the two junior welterweights get it on, he'll at least offer Malignaggi dinner and a movie first.

Malignaggi, the 27-year-old Brooklynite who gained the WBC 140 pound belt when he took a UD12 from Lovemore N'dou on June 16 in Connecticut, will defend his strap against a 28-year-old, Cameroon-born Canadian resident, Ngoudjo.

The Canuck has only compiled 17 bouts since turning pro in 2003, but there's no danger that we have a sanctioning body abomination in the making. The fighter, who sports a 16-1 mark (9 KOs) has acquitted himself capably in losing a controversial decision to Jose Luis Castillo in January, and taking a SD12 from Randall Bailey in June. Bailey, now 33, had won seven in a row coming in to the fight with Ngoudjo, while Castillo was 8-1, with the loss to Diego Corrales, in his last nine when he and Herman traded leather.

That said, it is clear that mouthy Malignaggi (23-1, just 5 KOs) will come to Atlantic City with a clear edge in technical chops, and in trash-talking capability.

Malignaggi's promoter Lou Dibella, and Team Ngoudjo (promoter Yvon Michel, trainer Howard Grant) chuckled regularly throughout a Tuesday conference call to hype the first biggie of the 2008 fight calendar.

This coming year could be the breakout year for Malignaggi. He could easily find himself in a sold-out Madison Square Garden, in a room split 50-50 between a roaring crew from Bensonhurst and thereabouts, and an equal number of crazed Hatton-ites, if he gets past Ngoudjo.

Paulie was prime Paulie, mouthwise, as he tortured Ngoudjo for making it personal in his opening statement for the press.

"Herman came out with tough words, but he's not fighting a shot fighter, he's fighting the best junior welterweight in the world. He's fighting the best fighter he ever fought in his life, the best he'll ever step in with."

"I'm gonna use your head like a pinball," he promised Ngoudjo.

"I'm gonna see if you can take it," Ngoudjo answered.

"I'm in it, don't worry about that," the New Yorker spat back. "I'm going to talk to you as I kick your (butt). Round four, five, six, as you're frustrated, as I'm beating the (slop) out of you, remember this conversation.

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Ngoudjo gamely tried to match mouth's with Paulie, to no avail. He kept repeating his promise, "I'm gonna kick your ass," and Malignaggi asked him if he'd brought any other material with him. He had. He went for a little jail-house smack talk, saying he'd make Malignaggi his girlfriend, then upped the ante to wife.

Malignaggi said that he'd been keeping it respectful during interviews in the last month or so, but now it was personal.

"I come motivated, but he added fuel to the fire," he said.

Also adding fuel is the perception, on Malignaggi and Dibella's part, that HBO didn't do the right thing, and hop aboard the New Yorker's first title defense. He'd been on the net when he fought Edner Cherry, and N'dou, so it came as a definite surprise that Dibella and Kery Davis and company didn't continue that relationship. Dibella and Malignaggi both made sure to toss kind words to Showtime boss Ken Hershman for stepping up to the plate. Not sure how Hatton/Malignaggi couldn't be on HBO, but leverage is always handy to have, so Dibella is making the most of it.

Both fighters said training through the holidays won't be tough on them, that they'll keep their eyes on the prize, and not reach for extra helpings of figgy pudding at suppertime.

Malignaggi referred to Ngoudjo as a "stupid ba^*ard" at one point, and said that he worked with "sparring partners better than you."

"I'm the best you've ever fought," Paulie said. Ngoudo stated that Roy Jones was the best, period, and Malignaggi dismissed that comeback, rightly stating that Ngoudjo had never been in the ring with RJJ.

Neither man has one, or even two punch KO power, so this fight figures to be a workout for the punch-counters.

"I know I hit harder than people think I do, and during the fight you can't call timeout, and tell press row, 'This guy hits harder than I thought he would,'" Paulie said.

Fighters, all the time, state that they are looking only at the task at hand, and not peeking around the corner, at what could come next. Paulie said the same thing Tuesday, and insisted he's not dreaming of marring the Hatton Wonderland again, and filling up MSG to face Hatton. I admit I am focusing on that potential matchup.

No offense to Ngoudjo, of course, but Malignaggi/Hatton would be a pleasing build-up, high volume in both trash talk and trading.