Paulie Malignaggi is known for many things: his defensive wizardry in the ring, an adeptness at pre-fight trash-talking, a cream-cheese thick New Yawk accent. Humility isn't on the list, though.

So it was more than a bit surprising to hear the mouthy one tell TSS how his confidence today, going into Saturday's showdown with Ricky Hatton in Las Vegas, can't compare to his confidence going into his 2006 bout with Miguel Cotto.

This is a calmer confidence," he tells TSS in a Thursday afternoon phoner. "This is a more real confidence. That was my first big event. Now, I know what to expect."

Basically, Malignaggi of June 2006 was certain he'd perform well against Cotto, but there was a tiny sliver of uncertainty dancing in his head. Not doubt, but a tiny morsel of reservation.

Today, he's 27. He's tasted loss, absorbed it, dealt with it, made amends with it.

Loss is a most useful thing, when dealt with correctly. It can tell you what you need to do to step it up, reach that next level.

If.

If you listen carefully, and don't BS yourself, and blame others when in fact your own deficiencies caused the less than optimal result. TSS thinks Malignaggi has in fact learned from the loss, allowed himself to ackowledge his limitations, and that will only help him as he tries to prove that Hatton's reputation hasn't been earned the hard way.

Of course, Malignaggi hasn't lost his healthy level of optimism going into the Saturday showdown, which will leave the winner as the acknowledged No. 1 in the 140 pound class. "My confidence level is probably a ten," he says. "I've had proper training, and that can only lead to good things."

This is the biggest event in his career, he tells TSS, bigger than the Cotto scrap. Why? "If I beat Cotto, I wasn't the number one junior welter. If I win this, I'm number one in most peoples' minds."

Malignaggi (25-1) says that it isn't that he's trained harder for the Hatton (44-1) fight than the Cotto fight. More like, he's trained smarter. Going into the Cotto fight, he listened to this one, and that one, and didn't trust himself, trust his skills, his style of fighting. Now, he knows what he is, and what he isn't. He turns 28 on Sunday, and is more settled in who he is as a man and as a fighter. He will fight Hatton on his terms, at his pace, using his style. He will not waste energy on showmanship, and hairstyles, and such.

His stint in Vegas as opposed to training in NY or at Buddy McGirt's gym in Florida should be a

net plus for Malignaggi. He explains that the sparring he was getting in NY and New Jersey was solid, but with New York becoming a town for the super rich, a lot of gyms are now filled with white collar boxers. Not many boxers in there could push him, make him reach deep down, maybe show him a wrinkle that he hadn't seen. Plus, staying in Henderson, there isn't as much of a tug of friends, and hangers on, so he's been able to stay focused on the business at hand, Hatton.

The New Yorker thinks he'll be able to tame the Hitman, not because the Brit has slipped, but because he was never all that to begin with.

"His best wins are against dinosaurs," Malignaggi says. "Tszyu, Castillo, they were old men. I'm a hungry, elite athlete in my prime. I'm not so apt to take a shot and say, 'Hey, I made my money.' No, I don't think Hatton has slipped. I don't think he was ever that good to begin with."

Malignaggi hasn't wowed critics in his last two wins, against Herman Ngoudjo on Jan. 5th, and Lovey Ndou on May 24. He won the IBF junior welter crown conclusively against Ndou in June 2007, but he's ripe for a stellar showing, exhibiting his ring generalship, his pluck, his pesky flurries.

He is asked why he hasn't been at the top of his game lately, and again, some humility and some self awareness that comes from maturity emerge. "I tried too hard in those fights," he says. Expectations were high, and Paulie admits he tightened up some. "Since I won the title, people expected so much, there was almost a letdown. I'm a fluid boxer, and if I'm trying too hard, get too tight, it doesn't help me. I wasn't used to that weird burden. This fight, I'll be back to where I was."

Now, people are again focusing on that lack of pop, the so-so showings in his last two outings, Hatton's showier resume. Malignaggi couldn't be happier. "Now people are doubting me again," he says. "I prefer this position. Not too many people thought I'd get too far. I've always been doubted, my whole career, except those last two fights. It's back to normal for me, being doubted again."