Ricky Hatton came into the ring at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas on Saturday evening wearing his “Ricky Fatton” fat-suit. Mock me, you may, his message was, but I am neither weight-loss depleted, nor over the hill. You can chuckle with me at this suit, but there won’t be much laughing in the corner of my foe, Paulie Malignaggi, when I show him what I have left.

Indeed, Hatton showed that his heart, and stamina, and strength and speed are present in enough abundance for him to compete at an elite level, as he smacked Malignaggi around for 10-plus rounds, and propelled Maligaggi’s trainer Buddy McGirt to enter the ring at the start of the 11th to prevent more damage to his man. Malignaggi, to his massive dismay evidenced by his angry shove at McGirt after the step-in, was never in the fight, as his tactics played right into Hatton’s strengths. A stick and move style was needed, but the New Yorker could not or would not move often enough to keep Hatton off him.

The end came at 28 seconds elapsed in the 11th, and the anguish and embrassment on Paulie’s face spoke volumes. The cocky kid had talked a helluva game coming in, but Hatton was on a different plane than he on this evening, and there wasn’t even room for debate. Hatton landed 124-516, and Paulie just 91-342 punches in a fight that wasn't a thriller, but had its moments, and will resonate for the emphatic stamp Hatton put on it: I am still here, still strong, and still have some big fights left to take on.

Hatton (44-1 with 31 KOs coming in; age 30) weighed 140 pounds on the dot Friday, and Malignaggi (25-1 with 5 KOs entering; age 28) scaled in at 139 pounds. Hatton’s IBO junior welterweight title, and the TSS 140 pound strap, were up for grabs. Hatton was 152 on fight night and Paulie was 149. The New Yorker enjoyed about five inches of reach advantage. Kenny Bayless was entrusted with overseeing the action. He rightly noted in the staredown that Hatton’s trunks were yanked up high, and a belt shot would be legal.

Malignaggi, in the crowd’s eyes, was the black hat in this one, though the scarcity of boos when his name was announced was surprising. I think Ricky’s fans generally got a kick out of the New Yorker’s brash babbling. His hair, a tight shave, was on the opposite end of the spectrum from his last outing, when he sported weaved in dreds.

In the first, Ricky came forward, banging, and then latched on with a headlock. Paulie got cooking with the jab in the last third of the round. Floyd Mayweather Sr. told Hatton to move his head, and pick off his jab. Buddy McGirt told Paulie he liked his feints and head movement.

In the second, the Yanks started a “USA, USA” chant. They liked Paulie’s jab, and energy. Ricky then slammed Paulie with a right, delivered to the chin after a jab. His legs buckled and he held on, preventing a knockdown. Then Paulie caught Ricky with an uppercut answer. There was blood under Paulie’s left eye. McGirt told Paulie to double up on the jab to disrupt Hatton’s rhythm. I’m guessing that Hatton’s handspeed surprised Paulie in a big way.

In the third, both men landed stiff jabs. The Brit did some nice work inside, around clinches initiated more so by him, and some by Paulie.

In the fourth, Hatton landed a showy jab. Paulie's feet aren't as swift as his hands, and he wasn't able, or inclined, to try and take baby steps to get angles on Hatton. He prefers to stand straight in front of a foe, get in first with jabs, and then slip, and then counter. He's prone to clinching himself, we saw through four.

In the fifth, Ricky came out mauling. Paulie popped some jabs, but we wondered if maybe his filet mignon-tender right had been compromised.

In the sixth, Paulie listened to his corner. He fired jabs, and then moved his feet, forbidding Hatton from stifling him, and getting into a rasslin match with him. Hatton slipped punches nicely here; we did see a bit of Senior's influence at work.

In the seventh, Paulie couldn't force himself to change his strategy; he stood in front of Hatton and got mauled. Hatton nailed him with four lefts, half hook, half jab, and the crowd roared. Hatton's energy was great at this point, and this sent a positive message to the judges. 'I am psyched to be here, I want to win, reward me.' He landed another left in the chops with five seconds left. It was a demoralizing round for Paulie. His body language was mopey.

In the eighth, a Paulie right knocked Hatton back two steps. But too often he found himself tangled up in Manchester blue, and he's no inside specialist. Hatton whacked Paulie with a jab/right uppercut combo that might've taken the round for him. He kept coming forward, sending that message to the judges: I am the aggressor, I'm trying to make this a fight, I deserve to win. Paulie, throwing only 35 punches a round, was not busy enough to convince them otherwise.

In the ninth, Hatton bashed Paulie with left. Paulie clowned, but he'd been hurt. Both men got a break as Hatton's gloves needed re-taping. Upon resumption, it was more of the same. The stronger man imposed his muscles and will on the American, and we wondered if he'd score a stoppage.

In the 10th, Hatton's legs still had bounce. He kept on smacking away. In the 11th, Hatton hammered away with both hands, and then McGirt saw enough. He threw in the towel, and Paulie was clearly angry, and he yelled at the trainer, who showed brains galore.

Hatton said after that "Paulie is a lot tougher than he looks." He also said he reverted to being "the old Ricky Hatton" but that Floyd Sr would remove vestiges of that moving forward. He said he showed more patience than he had before. And what's next? "Bring it on, I'd like to fight the Oscar/Manny winner," he said. "Nobody will ever beat me at junior welterweight but what sort of champion would I be if I just stayed at my normal weight and didn't accept the big challenges? Bring them on, that's what Ricky Hatton's all about." Malignaggi after said that he couldn't get into a rhythm with his jab, and said that he wanted to continue the scrap. "I'm better than being stopped," he said. "It's a knockout on my record and it shouldn't be."

He's a proud kid, and considering he fights with no pop, and one and half good hands, he's got really nothing to be embarassed about. Have a good birthday Sunday Paulie; there's no shame in being stopped.

In the TV opener, 24-year-old James Kirkland (156, 165 on fight night) took out 26-year-old Contender alum Brian Vera (157, 171 on fight night) in the eighth round of a scheduled ten rounder. The fight was contested at the catch-weight of 157 ½ pounds. The Texan Vera was 16-1 entering. Fellow Texan Kirkland was 23-0, with 20 stops. He is rated No. 2 in the WBA, behind champ Daniel Santos and No. 2 Shane Mosley. Kirlkland pressed from the opening bell. He closes the distance quickly, and looked to land a straight left early and often. The lefty Kirkland mixed in a right hook, and left uppercuts as well. Vera ate a couple heavy shots, but hung tough. Vera's hands looked very slow in comparison to the undefeated hitter in the first. Vera went down on a left uppercut at the start of the second, after a right hook softened him. He arose, and a cut on the right side of his head dripped blood. His eyes looked clear, and he grinned. Vera's hands dropped and he got real sloppy after that. He got dropped again at the end of the round, and again Vera smiled. This time a right hook did the damage. "You're in this thing, there's no problem," Vera's corner told him after the second. If, by "in" he meant in line to get stopped for good, soon, then he was spot on, it looked like.

In the third, Vera ate more bombs, and the crowd ahhhhed in appreciation at Vera's fortified whiskers. Still, he hung in and landed a couple slow but straight tosses. Kirlkland's jab is nothing special, though sometimes he pays more attention to aiming it with speed and precision.

Vera still grinned in the fourth, and he landed some sharp rights. Could Vera take Kirkland into deep waters, and yank away his life jacket, as he did to Andy Lee earlier this year? Through five Kirkland landed almost four times as many punches as Vera, but he was still coming out to start rounds, and thus was still in the game. Kirkland dug some to the body in the sixth, a fine idea for Vera, who puffed up so much between weigh-in and fight night. Things slowed some in 6 and 7, as Kirkland's stamina was tested. He probably threw more than he intended early. In the eighth, a short right hook on the top of the head put Vera down for the third time, midway through the round. Vera ate more shots, including a nasty left, and ref Vic Drakulich saw enough. Vera was good to go, but this was a mercy mission. Drak halted it at 1:45. Kirkland was 283-532, while Vera went 64-470 on the night.

The humanitarian might suggest that Vera look into another line of full-time business. He eats too many punches, goes down too much, gets up too much, and has too much pride; his later years could end up sad at this rate.

Heriberto Ruiz (39-7-2) scored an upset UD8 over Filipino prospect/contender Rey Bautista (26-2).

SPEEDBAG Pet peeve rant time. Why do makers of ring robes nearly always make the hood too big, so it falls into the fighters' eyes? Paulie had to yank his hood up a half dozen times as he did his ring walk. There should be no preventable distractions before a big fight and this is a preventable distraction, seamstresses!

---Hatton came in wearing his “Fatton” fat suit. Watchers wondered if maybe the joke would be on him, and his in between bout poundage blowups would finally blow up in his face.

---Wondering. You think sometimes Hatton and Senior both have NO IDEA what the other man is saying, what with accents and all?