

Malignaggi-Diaz II: More Rerun Than Rematch

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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To the surprise of hardly anyone who knew what they were watching during their first meeting, the rematch this past weekend between junior welterweights Paulie Malignaggi 27-3 (5) and Juan Diaz 35-3 (17) turned out to be much more of a re-run than a rematch. When they met four months ago Diaz was awarded a controversial 12-round unanimous decision in his home town of Houston. This time the bout took place in Chicago and there was no disputing the decision rendered by the judges. All three scored the fight 116-111 in favor of Malignaggi, (I had it 116-113 Malignaggi or 7-4-1 in rounds).

As for the fight that transpired in the ring; Malignaggi was the same fighter we saw back in August and Diaz was less than he was then. This time the fight was even easier on Malignaggi and that's not because of any adjustments or changes that he made. No, it was more due to the fact that Diaz was less aggressive and seemed almost willing to submit that he couldn't match Malignaggi's hand speed and therefore fought more measured. What a mistake that turned out to be.

It was abundantly clear from the mid point of the first round on that Malignaggi came away from their first fight certain that he could handle Diaz, where as Juan definitely harbored some doubt and trepidation in his mind as to whether or not he could handle Malignaggi and his style. On top of that he was hindered during the fight because he isn't a big enough puncher to force Malignaggi to break off the exchanges. Which is a terrible position to be in if you fight as the attacker. Imagine Joe Frazier pressing Muhammad Ali or Larry Holmes, but lacking the power to force them to run or hold once he landed his big left-hook, as Diaz couldn't when he did manage to get through and land on Paulie cleanly.

When they last met - at least Diaz pressed Malignaggi and forced him to fight and sometimes hold his ground. The problem was due to him not being able to hurt or slow Malignaggi, a lot of the exchanges were even or won by Malignaggi. However, Diaz by not really going after Malignaggi made the fight easier and less taxing on both fighter which ultimately became a monumental deterrent for Diaz.

Whoever instructed Diaz to stay outside and try to out-jab Malignaggi did him a huge dis-service strategically. There's no way Juan can win the fight fighting that style evidenced by the outcome and ease in which Malignaggi had winning the fight. Instead of imploring Diaz to jab, he should've been instructed to jab and then hook to the body off of his jab to get closer and in position to land his right hand. In the fourth and fifth rounds that's exactly what Diaz did by accident and what do you know; he won both rounds. Yet not once did his trainer, Ronnie Shields instruct him to hook off his jab to the body to set up his right hand?

It's barely beyond boxing 101 that when you're an attacker and you are facing an opponent who can get off better and faster with his jab than you can; you must close the distance and get inside. And one of the most fundamental ways to do that is to hook off of the jab to the opponents body. Because the fighter throwing the hook must step to the opponent. And when

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he does that, the fighter who's facing the incoming left-hook must address it by trying to block it, move or fire back. And all three options aide the attacker and force the "boxer" out of his comfort zone. Sadly, Juan Diaz only used his left-hook to set up his right hand and close the distance between he and Malignaggi a few times during their rematch; and even then it seemed as though it was more by accident than it was a thought-out and planned strategy.

Another flub by the Diaz corner was instructing Juan to just move his head and take the seventh round off after Malignaggi shook him late in the sixth round. Once Malignaggi sensed, and he did, that Diaz had reservation about trading and initiating the exchanges, he fed off of that and mocked Diaz during the later rounds because he felt so completely in control.

When all was said and done, Malignaggi fought the only fight he could in order for him to win. And that's by moving and boxing while getting off with his quicker hands and combination's. Only this time he didn't have to move as much laterally because Diaz was trying to win a jabbing contest instead of putting any real heat on him. So if you didn't care for the fight and weren't as entertained by it as much as you were their first fight, that's Diaz's fault. His job was to go out and not let Malignaggi pick his spots and force him to fight out of urgency instead of complacency and he didn't.

After two fights between Paulie Malignaggi and Juan Diaz, they're officially 1-1. But inside the ring Malignaggi is 2-0 and has won 14 or 15 of the 24 rounds they've fought. And Juan Diaz looks to be a fighter on the decline who's lost confidence and no longer fights with the same zeal applying bell-to-bell pressure as he once did.

Diaz's people made a mistake the minute they let him be shamed into taking a rematch he was unlikely to win. He got a gift win the first time around; it was dumb to tempt fate by trying it again. And look what he's done to himself now: he's no longer in the mix for anything significant. Bad training, bad strategizing, bad management.

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