Written by Michael Woods
Wednesday, 31 August 2011 14:37

Floyd Mayweather is the most compelling character in boxing today. But his foe for his September 17 bout, Victor Ortiz, has emerged as quite a fascinating character in his own right.

I'm spellbound as I process Ortiz while he talks about his life, his prospects for upsetting Mayweather, and his disdain for the media, which he says consistently veers negative, because they--we--sit around and feel sorry for ourselves.

On a Wednesday conference call to hype the Sept. 17 clash with the 41-0 Mayweather, the 29-2-2 Ortiz came off as a complex figure, as he exhibited flashes of rebellion, anger, serenity, and gratitude in a span of 50 minutes. In that way, he's not unlike Mayweather, who will jump from a mood of boyish enthusiasm to braggy-rapper boasty in the span of a minute. Some might shake their head at the apparent inconsistency of it all, but I see the drama there; you

don't know what either man might say next, and that commands your attention.

I wrote a column (http://www.thesweetscience.com/news/articles/12869-an-apology-to-victor-ortizwoods) eight weeks ago in which I apologized to Ortiz for our tendency to harp on the negative. We do as a group go overboard in our critiques at times, and sometimes oversimplify things, or make erroneous deductions without possessing all or enough of the facts. In a column I posted yesterday (http://www.thesweetscience.com/news/articles-frontpage/13164-if-the-mayweathers-played-up-that-beef-for-the-cameras-give-em-an-oscarwoods), about the first installment of 24/7, I talked about how Ortiz is a winner, is someone to be celebrated merely for getting into the arena, after his mom and then his dad bolted, and left behind the Ortiz kids to fend for themselves. I hope I made clear that the fact that he didn't succumb to self pity, to the lure of the streets, of easy methods of distraction and self-medication, as many of us do, is to be applauded.

I think Ortiz must've missed these items, because he seems intent on setting up a "me vs them" deal, pitting himself against the media, who he dismissed on the call as people who "don't have a life." Hey, a little turnabout is good medicine for us; we use that sword, sometimes we're going to get sliced by it. But I will note here--on the call wasn't the time or place to engage in that debate--that the media gets the word out on the sport, helps fans stay interested in the sweet science, and to smear us all as "get a lifers" doesn't elevate Victor much at all.

Ortiz has so much to be proud of, he doesn't need to stoop to throw a low blow at perceived nattering nabobs. "A guy like me wasn't supposed to have beaten the odds like that, not according to the statistics," he said. "That's why I decided to make my own statistics." Amen on that note.

Now, I can't know--just as I can't know what truly kicks around in Mayweather's head, which is what makes him such an engrossing figure--how much Ortiz is using this "anti media" mindset to get himself fired up. But I suspect he is, and it's not a bad tactic. He was indeed written off after his 'no mas" against Marcos Maidana, and before his tussle with Andre Berto, so he has ample ammo to use to ignite himself to train that much harder to again shock the world, this time against the best boxer on the planet.

Some of that gratitude I mentioned before came through when he talked about getting together with his mother a few months back. She left him when he was seven, but they met a few months back, and Ortiz said the meeting went well. "She's doing well," he said. "I forgave her for everything. She asked me to forgive her. I decided I would before meeting her."

Fair or not, because of his no mas moment, and his difficult upbringing, media will focus on Ortiz' behavior, his mindset, check for signs of mental duress. He said on the call he was liking the hype for this fight, that it wasn't distracting him. No, he said he hasn't watched 24/7, but he is pals with the camera crew, and will watch the show after he upsets Mayweather.

Ortiz said he isn't hoping that Floyd has gotten a bit long in the tooth, and isn't crisp after a lengthy layoff. "I want the best Floyd Mayweather that is out there," he said. He did take a poke

at Mayweather's talent, saying he never looked at Floyd as a great, like he did Oscar, Mosley, Hopkins and a prime Zab Judah.

He took a shot at the media for playing up difficulties he had making 140 pounds; he said this was not so. Writer Robert Morales, getting points for making his point without being contentious, pointed out that the media's focus on that subject may have been as a result of Freddie Roach's comments about how Ortiz stayed at 140 pounds too long. And then Ortiz switched gears, showing the quippy side of himself. When asked for a prediction, he said, "I'm not Muhammad Ali, come on now."

As he did when he was in NYC for a press conference, Ortiz time and again used the phrase "I don't know" or "I don't really care." You sense that he is working hard to make sense of it all, this fight, fame, family, love, minute by minute, and that answers aren't easily deciphered.

Join the club, friend.

Ortiz' promoter Oscar De la Hoya, fresh out of rehab for substance abuse, can likely identify. He's knocking on the door of 40, and has had to re-calibrate his views on existence, after too many years of numbing himself with substances. On this call, Oscar said he looks up to Ortiz. "I didn't live what Victor lived," he said. "I can honestly say Victor is my hero."

"I've learned how not to care about anything," Ortiz said, in the context of analysts and critics opinions. Well, like it or not, Ortiz has made us keyboard tappers care. And even if he does like to think of us as get a lifers, some of us will still, I suspect, be rooting for this kid who should be a statistic, a jailbird, an OD victim, whatever, on September 17.

NOTE: I'm debuting a blog on ESPNNewYork.com next week. It'll be mostly boxing, some MMA, focused on the NYC area. Fire me story ideas, pitches, things you'd like to see on there to FightBlogNYC@gmail.com.

Comment on this article

Condor says:

Agreed Mike. Nicely done. And no doubt, Ortiz is big-time noteworthy and entering that circle of trust as an event-maker. He's got history -good and bad- and he's on top of his game right now and HUNGRY. VO is a fighter. This one's good.

brownsugar says:

Wow Vic is sure making the right kind of noises... I'm almost starting to Believe!!!!, Mayweather could handle those hyper guys at 130, 135, and 140, easily on his athleticism and awarness

level alone... but now he's got a hyperversion of DLH, a guy who throws hooks and uppercuts ad infinitum that's Krytonite to a guy who uses his superb skill like a snake charmer, my friend and sometimes semi nemisis Radam G might be onto something.. could this be the fall of the house that Mayweather built?