Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 19 March 2012 07:59

His name is Sergio Martinez and he boasts a stellar career record of 49-2-2 (28). He's clearly at the top of the food chain in the middleweight division and is the universally recognized champion amongst his 160 pound counterparts. This past weekend he was tested against the UK's Matthew Macklin 28-4 (19) for eight rounds before making a few adjustments against his tiring opponent and ultimately prevailed when Macklin's trainer Buddy McGirt wisely didn't allow his fighter to come out for the 12th and final round.

Martinez is a natural fighter and he's one of the best conditioned boxers in the world. However, there seems to be a love fest going on between him and the boxing media that can't be explained. In order to plaster-saint him many things have been said about his style and skill level that just aren't there. But since he's been widely accepted as being so terrific it goes unquestioned.

Another thing that is never pointed out is how thin the middleweight division of today really is. Everyone kills the Klitschkos and the heavyweights, but exactly who in the middleweight division today looks like a current or future world beater? If you follow boxing you know the names and in-abilities of the other middleweight contenders which don't need to be rehashed here.

HBO did their best to build up a one dimensional fighter in order for Martinez to look great after he beat him. He should have completely dominated every minute of the fight against Macklin who is somewhat technically sound but neither fast nor much of a puncher. With all due respect to Matthew Macklin who fought to win until he had nothing left, he is a limited fighter at the world class level. He was no doubt greatly aided by the training and wisdom of his trainer Buddy McGirt.

The fact is, if Martinez lost to any of the highest ranked contenders in line to face him it would be a monumental upset. Yet at 154 I'd pick Floyd Mayweather to beat him. It's a shame that Floyd is so insecure and lacks gumption because he could really get over on the public by fighting and defeating Martinez. But instead we know in order to make the fight Floyd will make ridiculous demands like forcing Sergio to come down to 150 so the fight never happens.

It'll never change with Mayweather. He'll continue for the rest of what's left of his career to fight set-ups where he has every advantage so he can retire undefeated. Sure, he's fighting a declining Miguel Cotto at 154 this coming May, but the fight could've been made six plus years when beating Cotto was considered quite a feat.

In regards to Martinez, what makes him so tough to fight is his southpaw style along with his hand and foot speed. He's certainly no ring genius or technician, although he showed something against Macklin that was impressive and of course will be under-reported which I'll touch on later. Sergio's bread and butter punch is his left lead, a rarity for southpaws. An overwhelming majority of left handed fighters use their right jab to set up their finishing left cross. However, Martinez can instinctively throw his left as a lead set-up or finishing punch.

Throughout the entire careers of Muhammad Ali, Bernard Hopkins and Roy Jones, we saw them consistently disrupt and blunt the aggression of left handed fighters with right leads. Which of course everyone knows if you're good enough to throw it without leaving yourself wide open, it's money against a southpaw. But, how many times did Ali, Hopkins or Jones encounter a lefty that was adept at throwing left leads back at them like Martinez can?

Another thing that Martinez does is give his opponents a lot of herky jerky movement as he draws them to follow and reach for him. When they over-commit and reach to touch them, he counters back, and like Hector Camacho used to do, slides around to their blind side. And this past weekend Matthew Macklin nullified that by just throwing one-twos at Martinez' chest and chin. When Macklin only cut loose with his jab and cross, he froze Martinez, whose instinct was to counter a flurry, only to have Macklin step off after the right landed. This worked beautifully for Mackin and by not fully engaging Martinez he prevented Sergio from really getting some free and open shots at him.

The only problem was Macklin was tiring because the mental pressure of him concentrating on staying with what was working took a lot out of him as a desperate Martinez was looking to raise the rent and turn up the heat. After seven rounds Macklin not only was winning the fight strategically, he was winning it on points as well. Then Martinez's greater experience and natural physical ability kicked in. Sergio, realizing that Macklin wasn't going to chase him all over and miss and allow himself to be countered, began to push the fight by throwing single right jabs at a time that forced Macklin back and caused him to eventually have to open up and try to stabilize the fight. Only he was tiring and easier to hit because once Martinez fought as the attacker, Macklin's instinct to fight back eventually became his undoing. Once Macklin was slowed and incapable of implementing a plan B, Martinez unloaded with everything he had.

During the last two rounds Martinez was hurting Macklin with lead left hands despite his shoulders not being lined up with his fist, hips, legs and feet. In fact, the way Martinez was launching some of those left leads and hurting Macklin is something that you'd admonish an amateur fighting novice for doing. Yet Sergio is such a natural fighter he can even excel when he's technically wrong or out of position. And as everyone reading this knows that cannot be taught or learned.

The most impressive thing Martinez did this past weekend was adjust and become more aggressive behind his right hand when the bout was slipping away. Usually fighters are embarrassed when they get hit by the opponents power hand when thrown as a lead. What that

often does is make the fighter being hit with it (Macklin) fight with more urgency as if to say you can't do that with me. Only Macklin didn't fall for it and that caused Martinez to resort to something else. Remember, fighters are not watching the fight as it's happening through a camera from ringside. Things look a lot different to the fighter that the opponent is or isn't doing when he's in front of him. In that regard Martinez gets all the props in the world by changing up and taking the fight to Macklin.

Sure, it can be said that he had to pick it up in a fight he was losing, but how many fighters actually do that? Also, the left leads stopped and the right jab became the dominant punch. The left was basically only used as a finishing punch and as we saw it was the follow up lefts that dropped Macklin twice in the 11th round.

Is Sergio Martinez a great fighter and technician? Not in my eyes. Is he a hall of famer if he were to never fight again, not to me. What he is is a natural fighter who's always in great condition who is stronger and more mentally tough than he gets credit for being. I say he's more difficult to fight because of his instincts and style than he is a spectacular fighter. He's gifted and in great condition which happen to go a long way today.

And no way is he the third best pound for pound fighter in professional boxing. That is as long as Floyd Mayweather, Manny Pacquiao, Andre Ward, Nonito Donaire and Juan Manuel Marquez are still active.

Comment on this article

mortcola says:

As usual, great, insights F-Lo. I've said it for years, and never was it more clear than against Macklin: Martinez is all about athleticism, endurance, and intelligence. He is not a technically sound fighter, and, like Roy Jones, once he loses his reflexes (if he stays around that long, and I think he's too bright for that), he will be a sitting duck. Like Jones, he makes it on extraordinary athleticism, but he lacks the defensive instincts and anticipation of Jones, and is quite easy to hit when he's not out-gunning the other guy. Now, maybe a guy gets HOF status on the basis of how he uses what he's got - maybe he would deserve it on that basis. But, as good an effort as

Macklin made, as as much character and cool as he brought to the task, no HOF-er should have ever been beaten over 8 rounds by the limited tools Macklin brought. Sergio is a great athlete and a class act. But he is not the PFP demigod the boxing publicity machine wants to make him.

michaelabii says:

Great article and some sound points Frank but I beg to differ when you say that SM does not belong in the current P4P rankings. Great fighters adjust and win and that is what SM does best. Sure, he does have technical flaws but what he does well certainly makes up for those technical deficiencies. Macklin is technically sound and was fighting a sound and disclipined fight and may I also add that his hand speed is not quite as slow as people make it out to be. Fighters like macklin and Cotto have the ability to change up thier hand speed just like Tarver did against Jones and Cotto did against Mosley. SMs conditioning at 37 matches Mayweathers and his ability to stay active and strong into the later rounds would give any of the current P4Pders fits. Donaire is good but is still in my opinion a work in progress who relies too much on his punching power. SM breaks opponents down and he has actually improved in bounds and leaps since the 1st Paul Williams fight. Right now as a middleweight he would have beaten a prime Carlos Monzon his famous countryman whom he will undoubtedly be compared with down the line. There - I said it. !

deepwater says:

martinez is no p4p fighter at all.not yet. sweet lou dibella tricked you on that one. he just wants to line up sergios ducks for a superfight ,and cashout into the sunset. martinez is very good. good knockout of long tall paul. nice beatdown on the drunk pavlik. he can not be mentioned with mayweather or pac though.

BHarper85 says:

Well-written, insightful article. I also agree that Martinez is not the number 3 P4P fighter in the world. His last 2 fights, to me, have proven that he isn't as dominant as so many people think he is. He didn't look great against Darren Barker, a lesser fighter than Matthew Macklin, and looked even less dominant vs. Macklin. The Barker fight was seen largely as an aberration by most, and rightfully so since everyone has off nights, and I think Martinez deserved the benefit of the doubt. But now that his last 2 fights have shown him struggling to defeat 2 fighters he should've completely dominated, I don't think you can consider him a top 5 P4P anymore, let alone number 3. I also think Donaire is a little too high on the list. I think their spectacular KOs of Williams and Montiel may have had boosted them a little higher than they should've been. Like Lotierzo, I think May, Pac, Ward, and JMM are better.

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protector to ride up halfway up his back, in the front it was over his navel too protecting him from legit body shots.

Second, Martinez fights to the level of his oppistion. That's just his style.

Third, Martinez‘s style is such that he sometimes uses the first few rounds to figure out his opponent and then adjusts accordingly. Tonight the adjustment came late, but it came and the result reinforced Sergio’s lofty pound-for-pound status.

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Radam G says:

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[U]KO'd[/U] a guy with a 'iron' chin in a rematch. [U]Adjusting[/U] mid-fight after a full training camp of game planning for a brawler fighting in close,(looking at Macklin previous fight). And from what I see,more [U]technically sound[/U] than Pacquiao by staying on balance with his shot. (more often than not).

So. If Pacman is up there, than Marvilla is as well. In my book he's the best southpaw in the world.

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MisterLee says:

I feel Martinez, like Donaire, fights to the level of his competition. Donaire didn't look stellar agst hernan marquez, a few of the smaller guys, wladmir s, but when it was time to fight Montiel he

was a BEASSST! Martinez fights a little bit better than Donaire in mandatories, but I guarantee when Martinez fights a world beater he will beat the world out of him! I put him in top 5 or top 8 p4p fight now. I think pple are underestimating his skills and over estimating his athleticism or its role in his success. First, he's 37... how well did RJJ adapt when he was 37, how well will Pacquiao adapt when he's 37? Those are athletes who rely primarily on their athleticism. Mosley is one of the few in mind that adjusted in his decline despite being a physical whiz when he was younger. Martinez is slick, is pretty good defensively (he blocked a lot of right hands by putting up his guard in the last second), he slips a lot of punches, he uses his foot work to avoid punches and to set up punches. He is very intelligent in the ring, and tricky. I say he's difficult for ANYONE even Floyd Jr. at 154 or 160. I wouldn't pick anyone in those two weight classes now or the past 3-5 years that could beat him. Jermaine Taylor? Winky Wright? Plus he has such as a large size advantage over Floyd while being almost as quick, slick, and a decent boxer while Floyd is used to fighting brawlers, pressure fighters, and boxer punchers... when was the last time he fought a boxer or counterpuncher that didn't come up from the featherweight division? Holler! Shoutout to the Roast! Also, Frank Z, ni zai nar?

MisterLee says:

Agst top competition: cintron, paul williams (twice), and pavlik, Martinez was the goods. IMO he dominated almost round of most of those fights except for the mid rounds that go to pavlik. Also, you have to give credit to Martinez for changing his style in the middle of his career to account for judging errors, hometown decisions, and the difficulty for someone who counter punches and doesn't speak English to win in America. He CLEARLY dominated Cintron, but the judges gave him a DRAW. Also, after the Paul Williams "loss", he vowed to close the show and fight in a more aggressive style in the future in order to leave no doubt in the judges' minds, and THINK championship rounds Martinez - Pavlik... simply turned up the gear, plus producing KO's this late in his career when he was going for them earlier in his career so that he could be a more exciting fighter and win more fans. BIG PROPS for Martinez and Bhop for changing their styles so late in their career for a more crowd-pleasing one. Pc!

MisterLee says:

I feel HBO is CONVINCED Martinez gets by on mistakes, bad balance, and athleticism... I can't believe they compare him to Roy Jones, when RJJ did EVERYTHING wrong and was so gifted, but Martinez is actually GOOD, unorthodox, yes, but GOOD! Not just b/c he has great endurance and is quick. Who's with me? Who's with me? And BTW- I'm not really respecting much of what HBO says or thinks lately or any more unless it's Emmanuel Steward or George Foreman.

MisterLee says:

Maravilla has GREAT footwork, great anticipation for punches coming at him, and great timing.

Radam G says:

Sergio should be "knocking people out in exciting" jive. He is fighting marshmellows and

hyped-up chumps -- a drunk and a long-tall empty can. Da sucka couldn't wear the jockstrap of an elite, complete pro. I heard that jockstrap comment from one of the ATGs. Hehehehe! Holla!

deepwater says:

A hot dog vendor could of knocked out drunk kelly pavlik. a cab driver could of starched long tall paul who only got by because he was 6-2 fighting 5-8 guys. come on. sm is good. not great. no where near p4p. sweet lou is crying how he isnt even a real midlleweight because ward would decapitate him. give me a break. put your man crushes on sm away.its annoying

mortcola says:

[QUOTE=MisterLee;14711]I feel HBO is CONVINCED Martinez gets by on mistakes, bad balance, and athleticism... I can't believe they compare him to Roy Jones, when RJJ did EVERYTHING wrong and was so gifted, but Martinez is actually GOOD, unorthodox, yes, but GOOD! Not just b/c he has great endurance and is quick. Who's with me? Who's with me? And BTW- I'm not really respecting much of what HBO says or thinks lately or any more unless it's Emmanuel Steward or George Foreman.[/QUOTE]

The HBO crew is very, very annoying. Sergio is very, very good, insofar as his athleticism and intelligence help him pull out fights in which he's struggling, but I don't quite see the P4P status. Exciting in the way he has come back in certain fights, one-upping Pavlik after Kelly had his number in the mid-rounds. But, unlike Jones, who seldom ever took a clean shot for several years, Sergio is easily set-up and counterpunched, gotten out of his rhythm, by guys with limited tools. He is exciting because of his weaknesses and his strengths, and I will always watch him fight, but I think he is over-rated when the criteria are those applied to P4P master boxers and overwhelming sluggers. If he fights and clearly beats someone at his weight at the top of his game, I will promote him a notch.

Radam G says:

C'mon, SCLA Ali, anybody who says adverse syet about Da Manny always make "some good points" in your opinion. But that jive-turkey _____ do not create character or cojones for Money May. Da Manny would whoop his arse, and you KNOOOOOOOW dat, BBBBBBBABBBBBBBEEEEEEE! Yo' a$$ is bamboozled and hoodwrinked by the "shoulder roll," because you have not seen the easy antidope to the Philly-crab/shell superfight hyped-up style.

If Money May shows up on your door step, you would ___ _____ _____ ___ him. If you know what I mean. Just like a baby sucking his mother _____.

Reality distortion and actuality make believe really calm the beast. That jive really gives you haters really a giant release. Get on your spit. Because on Da Manny and even Money May, Sergio Martinez would do s***! His bytch arse oughta go challenge Bute, Froch, Ward, the Dirrell brother or even cream-puff Jemaine Taylor. Holla!

Radam G says:

OOPS! I musta' fo'got! If Long-Tall Paul "Soft Chin" Williams has an "iron chin," it must be full of rust. Wow! Some of the things that posters try to sneak in their reality distortion field. Maybe I'm in the Twlight Zone or something! I'd sure love to know who was the "iron-chinned" pugilist that Sergio Martinez KAYOED? Was that the same dude that got knocked down by Kemit Cintron and threw him outta dat square jungle? Holla!

Radam G says:

BTW the SCLA Ali, GOAT Muhammad Ali was "techincally unsound." But did it stop his arse kicking and being the greatest heavyweight of all times and in the top list of being the fastest handed-and-footed fighter EVER? When your arse becomes an old man, SCLA Ali, you probably still be hating on Da Manny, who will be in that list with GOAT Ali, Willie Pep, Sugar Ray Robinson, Sugar Ray Leonard, Sugar Ramos, Sweet Pea Whitaker, Hector "Macho Time" Camacho, Money May...and the list goes on. Look it up for yourself. Holla!

mortcola says:

Awesome post, Fe'Roz. You summed it up like a pro: "Not the stuff of top P4P in my book. Fighting to the level of your competition is one thing but fighting B- competition and struggling to adjust is altogether another....If Floyd has the balls or the confidence in himself that me and so many boxing fans have in him, he would take him now and forever make his piece of history". Admirable guy, Martinez, and a good closer, and maybe the end justifies the means. But, no, not when you're judging P4P.