Written by Bernard Fernandez
Thursday, 03 May 2012 08:24

It might not be the easiest thing in the world to do, but it is possible to made semi-radical revisions to a fighter's style. A good coach can polish up the defense of a face-first brawler, for instance. Buddy McGirt got himself voted Trainer of the Year by the membership of the Boxing Writers Association of America for doing just that with the late Arturo Gatti, who relatively deep

into his career came to discover the benefit of actually slipping a punch every now and then.

But completely altering a human being's natural personality … well, that's a more daunting challenge. One of the rare boxing examples of such a transformation is George Foreman, who was an unsmiling, remorseless wrecking machine prior to his 1977 upset by Jimmy Young, but, following a 10-year retirement, returned to the ring as a charismatic charmer equally adept at pitching grills on TV as he was at still knocking out opponents. The change in Big George was so complete, it was almost like watching Sonny Liston morph into Sonny Bono.

Like Foreman, Floyd Mayweather Jr. has a smile – when he chooses to flash it -- that can light up a room like a 200-watt bulb. At 35, he still has the boyish countenance of a grown-up Emmanuel Lewis, the cute kid who starred in the sitcom *Webster* in the 1980s. You can almost imagine Little Floyd climbing onto Alex Karras' lap for a reading of his favorite bedtime story.

But Mayweather's childhood was hardly of the fairy-tale variety. His mother was drug-addicted, and his father, Big Floyd, sold the stuff, conveniently hidden in detergent boxes. The father was convicted of cocaine trafficking in 1993, when Floyd Jr. was 16, and he served four years before being released in 1997. Even when Floyd Sr. did return home, he had virtually no interaction with his son that did not involve the advancement of Little Floyd's boxing career.

Now, with the younger Mayweather (42-0, 26 KOs), widely regarded as the finest pound-for-pound fighter on the planet, set to challenge WBA super welterweight champion Miguel Cotto (37-2, 30 KOs) Saturday night at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, the effects of that dysfunctional family life are there for all to see. Yes, "Money" Mayweather has done his share of good deeds, from paying for the medical expenses of a sick child – a stranger, really – to contributing to Habitat for Humanity, but the better angels of his character are forever in conflict with his inner demons, frequently resulting in the sort of negative publicity that give the impression that he is not just a wannabe thug; at times he really is one.

Regardless of the outcome of his much-anticipated showdown with Cotto, Mayweather is scheduled to serve three months in the Clark County Detention Center in Vegas. He pleaded guilty on Dec. 21 to a reduced domestic battery charge and no-contest to two harassment charges as part of a plea deal that dropped felony and misdemeanor charges that could have sent him to prison for up to 34 years. The case centered on an incident with Josie Harris, mother to three of Mayweather's four children, which began as an argument and escalated to physical violence.

That transgression was one in a laundry list of scrapes Mayweather has gotten into with the law. At various times, he has been ordered to undergo impulse-control counseling and convicted of misdemeanor battery stemming from a fight with two women at a Las Vegas nightclub. In 2010, he was accused of assault with a deadly weapon for trying to force another drive off the road, according to a Las Vegas police incident report.

Mayweather's ring skills are such that he might win nearly every round on boxing judges' scorecards whenever he fights, but, in his everyday life, his success rate with the kind that wear black robes and wield gavels isn't nearly as impressive.

It should be noted, however, that his image as a villain, regardless to the degree to which it is merited, has not damaged Mayweather's earning power. His most recent ring appearance, a fourth-round knockout of Victor Ortiz on Sept. 17, generated 1.25 million pay-per-view buys; the one before that, a wire-to-wire pasting of veteran Shane Mosley, was purchased by 1.4 million homes.

Leonard Ellerbee, CEO of Mayweather Promotions, acknowledged that a lot of people want to see Floyd Jr. lose, presumably because they dislike what he purports to represent, but that they pay to see him fight anyway.

"Floyd is one of the most despised athletes in the world, but he's also the most talented athlete in the entire world," Ellerbee said. "What other athlete do you know who has dominated his sport for 16 years?"

Interestingly, it was eight years ago that a pair of women's hair-care magnates from suburban Philadelphia sought to soften Mayweather's more jagged edges, the better to make him more acceptable to mainstream America. It was an experiment that probably was doomed to fail, but It speaks volumes as to how athletes are packaged and sold for widespread consumption.

After ending a four-year contract with his then-manager, rap mogul James Prince, Mayweather was casting about for someone, anyone, who could make him a superstar attraction in correlation to his talent. He was still being promoted by Top Rank then, but his feeling was that

he'd never be No. 1 in Bob Arum's stable with Oscar De La Hoya was around.

Enter Neal Menaged and Lewis Hendler, entrepreneurs who turned the Original Scrunchie, which was first sold in 1989, into a $250 million-a-year empire. Menaged and Hendler wanted to branch off into the boxing business, and they saw Mayweather – with a bit of tweaking – as their express ticket to the top.

"Look at George Foreman and what he has done with his life inside and outside the ring," Menaged said before Mayweather's May 22, 2004, bout with DeMarcus Corley in Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall. "He built that grill thing into a company with $400 million annual sales. Why can't the same thing happen for Floyd? He's talented, he's good-looking, personable. There is no reason he can't become well-known in consumer products away from the ring, which is where our expertise is."

Added Hendler: "Our plan is not to tap into the thug image as a way to build Floyd up. We'd like to see him make the transition to mainstream, rather than pin himself to a particular culture which is fairly limited in terms of marketing potential."

Mayweather's association with Menaged and Hendler proved brief, the split brought about in no small part because the fighter's discomfort with disavowing much of that which had helped make him who and what he was.

And if somebody out there doesn't like that, Mayweather said, that's not his problem. He knows he can't be all things to all people, so he might as well feel comfortable in his own skin.

"Everybody has his own opinion of me," Mayweather noted. "It's, like, Catch-22. I'm damned if I do something, damned if I don't. So I got to be who I am.

"When I go into an arena and the fans cheer, that's a great thing. And if they boo, that's a great thing because they are letting me know that I am relevant.

“If they make no noise at all, I would have a problem with that. But regardless if they cheer or boo, they know who I am. They’re paying attention to me.”

Please feel free to follow TSS on Twitter here .

Comment on this article

deepwater says:

floyd is ready to die with rat-fink 50 cent but is scared to fight a lil asian guy. grown men acting like women getting excited about jewlry and coach bags.50 cent cant even walk around queens ny because he is a filthy rat that would get plugged in the proper way. he helped rat on mcgriff who ran the supreme team drug crew. ask 50 about the supreme team and watch him run away. a rat is always a rat

OneTonMan says:

Hey, this is THE BATTLE OF THE BALD!!!!!!!

ANONY says:

Hi guys... It's been a while since I have posted here but the occasion calls for it. i wonder why the comments doesn't show up after the article like it used to be... EM, I hope you're doing great!!!! just testing before my own word-rampage about this fight. EM... remember two or three years ago when everybody was carzy about this fight to be made? well... we finally have it!!!!!!!! Saturdat will be a great night of boxing and Cotto will wi... how? I'll explain after i found out how this works. REGARDS!!!!

ultimoshogun says:

Good to see you back in the fold Anony, you've been MIA for awhile now. the Roast has been keeping a lookout for stragglers from the old TSS but I think he finally gave up.

the Roast says:

Yep, i did give up. Threw in the towel, but then Mercante jr. threw it out and made me continue. In other news, Andrew Ganigan died today. He KOed Sean O'Grady to earn a shot at Alexis Argeullo back in the early '80s. Knocked Alexis down in the 1st before getting KOed in the 5th. Wild brawl shown on a Saturday afternoon on CBS back in the good old days. R.I.P. Hawaiian Punch. *takes bottle from Ultimo for a memorial shot*

brownsugar says:

[B]Floyd has many facets,.. he's the same one-size-fits-all-guy, but he's socially and economically fluent on many levels... he's the Entrepenure, the Ringmaster, the Pugilistic Priest,.. the Insecure Child, the Villian, the Megalomaniac, the RingGeneral, the most Hated,.. the Icon, the Instigator, the Philanthropist, the Brow-beating Comedian, the Promoter, and most of all one of the most technically sound boxers in the business.[/B]

[B]Never saw Mayweather so consoling to his foe, So respectful.. as if he feels sorry about what's he's going to do to Cotto,.. or could this be the face of doubt (I doubt it)[/B]

[B]Or is it Honest respect,... is it Floyd Knowing what a well trained, physically attuned, mentally and spiritually optimized Cotto is capable of.[/B]

[B]Cotto was never expected to outbox Mosely,.. even bicycling backwards when the need arose... Proves he can adjust on the fly and insert his technique into a fight the way a locksmith can open doors he doesn't own keys for.[/B]

[B]Cotto's demolition of Margarito showed that Cotto can get back on the Bicycle,.. Ride the Bull who gored him,... and face his worst terror with the right preparation. [/B]

[B]Cotto's trainer has be drilling him with the correct footwork to offset Mayweathers traps and set him up for counter left hooks and body shots.[/B]

[B]it's a well known fact that Mayweathers left hook is not what it used to be...[/B]
[B]he leaves himself vunerable every time he attemps a counter with it.[/B]

[B]Cotto is more than a live dog,... he's a cunning wolf. [/B]

[B]This fight will go to the War-Zone by the 6th round. [/B]

[B]Money will absorb the type of punishment he's avoided for most of his career,.. but he'll rally back and dish out the pain in equal portions. Can Cotto Hold?[/B]

[B]dispite the grand jocular respect on display,.. this fight will escalate from a gentlemanly discourse into a savage war with both fighters laying it on the line...[/B]

[B]I'm hoping, and believing Mayweather will survive... by a threads breadth... and emerge the more durable athlete... and acsend to his thown as one of the best ever.. with a gueling KO win after the 11th round. (with the judges up in the air about the result[/B]) I forsee drama redemption and accolades for both contestants.

brownsugar says:

SouthPaul, Anony, Ali, ShoulderRoll Defense,.. Ultimo, Roast, RG,... Real Talk,.. DaveB, Woodsy, Mortcola, Mr Lee, SaltLover, Riverside,. Deepwater, Gibola, Matthew, Dino,...Fe'Roz... DP69..... whew,.. I'm out of breath... and everyone I failed to mention on the TSS,(because of ULtimos Jack Daniels Shots) .. enjoy the fight and your weekend... peace.

Radam G says:

Where you at, Bobby C? Check in! Throw those bottles in the trash bin. Stay off the Pinoy homemade coconut wine, it will have your arse standing in an AA line. Come back, Shane, come back -- I mean Bobby C! Hehehehehe! Holla!

ultimoshogun says:

That post was outta the ball park brownsugar! I agree, tomorrow's doubleheader is gonna deliver some high drama.

the Roast says:

Yes, Robert Curtis, ATG, come back to us! Also missing of late, Condor. All hands on deck!

ANONY says:

Yes I'm back with an agenda!!!!!! OK guys... in order to rank back in TSS and get my picture posted in my profile (EM please...), I need to make a big entrance. And what better than giving you all my friends here in "TSS universe" (phrase coined by Radam G in 2008 - a little TSS history) the EXACT breakdown of the fight so you can do you bets confidently since ANONY will give you his window to the future. Oh well, of couse I can hear some of you say... "hey anony, crazy rican, have you seen the odds for this fight?"... YES, of course, but you know what... everybody has been counting off Cotto and call him shot since his first loss to that cheating M... Margarito and bla, bla, bla... but truly... can anyone see beyond their own "fantasy media impose writing"??? My fellow puertorican star has always fight against the odds and never back downed. Always willing to prove himself against he best and this mentallity and BRAIN power is his best asset. I remember a bloddy Cotto against Clottey, a wobbling Cotto agaisnt Mosley, a messed Cotto against Pacquiao, a dizzy Cotto agaisnt Judah, etc.... but always the common variable is Miguel's hand raised in victory. If you write off Margacheato's loss you got a guy in Cotto who has only loss to the REAL P4P king today in Pacquiao. And some will say... "yeah, and he lost and got battered by Pacman" ... true BUT... Miguel was fighting without an experience corner, his uncle just crashed a block to his car, his wife caught him cheating with an employee, etc. I mean.... that are quite variables that can screw a megafight. BUT I'm not making excuses, the record is clear and Miguel has only lost once. Now the point is that all of you and the media frenzy bandwagon are writting off Miguel from winning while if you think twice, you maybe seeing the only for pound with the biggest assets of all ---- HIS HEART. His heart and training will give us the victory BEFORE THE 5TH round. Now go on and make your bets.... it will happen this way. Now there is a catch, I doubt (because I know my boxing well enough) Miguel can win if this go past the 5th and mayweather get comfortable. He can dominate if he adjust. That's Floyd's biggest asset, to adjust. Oh well, the great thing is that we finnaly get to see this fight made and that sound like justice to all of us hardcore boxing fans around the world. Remember Miguel will win and I'm due monday with the photos from his FIRST WELCOMING PARADE (a'la Tito Trinidad). He doesn't like to be welcome in the airport but this time people won't be able to resist the pride when he wins and will be there to receive him. Like I said, I'll post my photos and EM can use them if he likes. Well, it's nice to be back

here. To the old crowd I say hello!!!!!!!!! and to those I don't know... well you better cheer for Cotto!!!!!!!!!!!