Written by Ron Borges
Friday, 04 May 2012 21:48

LAS VEGAS – Shane Mosley sat uncomfortably at a podium inside the MGM Grand last week, age etched across his flattened nose and tired looking face. What made him uncomfortable was not sitting there, for he was well used to the kind of attention he was receiving. What he was not used to was the reason for it.

On many occasions the three-time world champion has been the focus of a big Las Vegas fight card. He had the lights shining brightly on him the two times he defeated Oscar De La Hoya. He had them when he beat down Fernando Vargas and beat up Antonio Margarito. They reflected off his features even on nights when he was defeated but now that has happened too often and so the focus has changed. The lights have dimmed.

As he sat in silence a few short feet away from undefeated young Mexican phenom Saul "Canelo'' Alvarez, Mosley heard himself categorized in a way he did not recognize. Although now 40 years old and having not won a fight in nearly 3 ½ years, Shane Mosley still thinks of himself as "Sugar.'' In his mind he is still the rapidly moving lightweight, welterweight and junior middleweight champion of the past. In the bleariness of his mind's eye he remains the man who beat The Man, the young fighter who twice outfought the Golden Boy, Oscar De La Hoya.

Of course, the first of those wins came 12 years ago and the second nearly nine and now De La Hoya stands behind him in civilian clothes, a full-time promoter since retiring nearly four years ago himself.

Mosley is not in a financial position to do the same despite the millions he once made. He was the financial and emotional victim of an ugly divorce that cost him even his world championship belts and a lifestyle not profligate but perhaps more than he could sustain. So now he sits wearing a cock-eyed smile as Alvarez's cocky young manager, Jose Chapo Reynoso, assaults him with words he thought he'd never hear.

"Shane Mosley is going to be the door Canelo is going to walk through into the big leagues,'' Reynoso crowed several days before the peach-fuzzed, 21-year-old Alvarez will risk both his undefeated record and his WBC light middleweight (154 pound) title by facing Mosley in the semi-main event before Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and Miguel Cotto meet at the MGM Grand Garden Arena Saturday night.

This is what it has come to for Mosley. He is not only no longer the main event, he is not even the A side of the semi main event. He is now what then fading former champions like James Leija and John John Molina were to him 14 years ago. He is a stepping stone.

Mosley (46-7, 37 KO) never would have envisioned this day would come back when he was all upside. He was well on his way to becoming one of boxing's biggest names 12 years ago and to get there he had to beat up faded stars like Leija and Molina, who were then 32, 33 years old. Now he's 40 and Saul Alvarez looks at him as little more than a whetstone, a fighter brought in to help him hone his skills and sharpen his reputation.

Alvarez (39-0-1, 29 KO) is already a star of significance in Mexico, perhaps that fighting country's most popular active boxer. He possesses the kind of punching power that stirs up interest and the Mayan warrior's obsession with engagement against all odds. He is in Las Vegas then not merely to win. He is here for the same reason many people come to Las Vegas. He has come here to become a star. If he does it must come at the expense of Mosley, who hasn't won a fight since January 24, 2009 and is 2-3-1 in his last six outings and 0-2-1 in his last three.

He is, in other words, a shadow not Sugar any more. Yet as he sits discussing this with a small group of familiar faces after the press conference ends, Mosley insists, "I don't want to sound like a broken record: 'I'm ready, I'm ready, I'm ready.' But I am ready.

"He wanted to test himself to see if he's among the elite fighters. He's a great young fighter but he probably shouldn't be in the ring with me.''

Perhaps Mosley is right about that because the jury remains out for guys like Alvarez until they make miserable the nights of people like Mosley. It is how it is done in this cruel sport, the young destroy the old.

As Leija and Molina once said before Mosley battered them, now Mosley says the same words. He talks of the value of experience over youth and insists his speed remains superior to what Alvarez's people think.

He talks, too, of excuses for defeat, speaking of injuries and how his problems outside the ring deflected his focus and his training and cost him dearly against Margarito and Pacquiao.

Mosley insists, too, that critics who have labeled him a hollowed out version of what he once was are not his motivation. His motivation is he said, “To fight the type of fight I know I can fight.’’

He believes he hasn’t done that since 2009 but others are convinced he fought the only way he can against top competition at 40, which is to say not good enough to win and barely good enough to avoid embarrassment.

“I think Canelo wins but what makes Shane dangerous in this fight is he was embarrassed by the way he’s looked the last few fights,’’ one long-time southern California boxing figure said, not wanting to put his name on his words out of respect for Mosley. “Shane can still punch and that makes him dangerous. Not dangerous enough if Alvarez doesn’t get stupid or cocky but dangerous.’’

That kind of danger is not the kind Mosley once was known for. He was never before seen as a guy with “a puncher’s chance.’’ That was left for the kind of people he regularly beat up. Now he is on the other side of the equation. He’s on the dark side, where it is difficult to see clearly.

“They said he’s going to walk through a door, well there’ll be a big toll to pay,’’ Mosley said. “He’ll have to pay a hefty price in the ring to walk through it. I’m not even thinking about a decision. I’m 21-0 vs. Mexican fighters. He’s going to be No. 22.’’

Mosley insisted he would stop Alvarez, his experience and skills luring him into some dangerous trap from which only unconsciousness could free him. He may really believe that or maybe not but one thing he did admit was how odd it seemed to be facing someone the same age as his son.

“I do feel a little bad about that,’’ he joked. “But I’m not going to hand him a victory. I was him when I fought James Leija and John John Molina. I had to prove it to them. He’ll have to prove it to me.’’

Most of the boxing world expects Saul Alvarez will do that, just as a young Shane Mosley once

did at the expense of his elders so many years ago. Although Mosley was not ready to concede that without some harsh convincing from Alvarez, the larger point was clear to him: win or lose he's on the wrong end of boxing now

"We all have to go through this,'' Mosley said. "When Canelo is 35 36 they'll have another 21 year old guy and he'll be his stepping stone. That's boxing.''

Saturday night that's very likely what Shane Mosley will be – a door who once was a star.

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the Roast says:

As deepwater has said time and time again, follow the money. The deck is stacked in favor of Canelo. He is the next Golden Boy, or, the next fight for Floyd if the Pac fight can't be made. This fight will end by premature stoppage in favor of Alvarez. As soon as the kid lands a big punch or a hard combo, the ref will jump in, Shane will make a fuss and say WTF, but in the end Alvarez will be the first fighter to stop future Hall of Famer Sugar Shane Mosley. I hope I'm wrong. I'll be rooting for Shane to pull the upset but we all know how things go in boxing.

amayseng says:

it all depends if shane has learned to fight differently ala hopkins. he needs to pace himself, set traps, control distance and activity and score with ring generalship and pot shots...

how horrible is it that shane fought wars and earned belts and a friicken judge awards his ex wife the belts he took physical abuse to win. i cannot get over that one.

an important note is that gomez won 3/6 rounds against alvarez before the premature stoppage..shane has quick hands and good power but he will need his mind and to follow the gameplan to win this fight..

being out and inactive a year does not help a 40 year old, however facing floyd and pac with their speed should help him..