

Nonito Donaire Remains An Enigma

Written by Lee Wylie

Wednesday, 11 July 2012 12:08



TSS Universe, who do you like in Donaire vs. Rigondeaux? Correct us if we're wrong, but we think a majority now see Rigo winning that, a different appraisal from a year ago. (Chris Farina-Top Rank)

Is the glass half empty? Or is it half full? Once again, there's an aura of disappointment after a Nonito Donaire fight. But why does this continue to be so?

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The Filipino Flash remains an enigma. This time last year, many were convinced that Donaire was going to be the next pound for pound superstar of boxing. Three subpar showings later against Omar Narvaez, Miguel Vazquez Jr and now, Jeffrey Mathebula, and suddenly everyone is not so certain about Donaire's heir apparent credentials.

So we must ask ourselves: Have we all been a little guilty of overrating Nonito?

There's a fine line between frustration and disappointment. After watching Donaire's performance on Saturday night, my immediate feeling was that of frustration. I felt I SHOULD have been blown away by Donaire's performance. After all, when he's on it, Nonito possesses the all-round capabilities to become that rare breed of special fighter. But he can also infuriate.

On one hand, I see a fighter with extraordinary fighting abilities -his timing, footwork, weight transference when punching, athleticism and undervalued technical skills {his ability to parry and counter with the back hand is a lost art among current fighters} are of the highest order. Can we think of a better shot in boxing that encapsulates both the savagery and artistry of the sweet science as Donaire's counter left hook does? That stunning knockout of Fernando Montiel remains vivid in my mind.

On the other hand, I see a fighter who loads up too much with the left hand and who can sometimes become a tad predictable. How can a fighter with so much talent completely neglect the set up of his offense? A little patience and body work would also serve Donaire well in there.

Nevertheless, feeling frustrated with Donaire because we did not see more spark should not be confused with labelling his performance disappointing. Expectations are very high with Nonito. So much so, that unless we see a knockout, his fights are deemed almost as a failure. His Filipino counterpart has now gone five fights without a stoppage. Are Pacquiao's performances met with the same kind of hostility?

Overall, I thought Nonito put on a good display against a taller, rangier, awkward fighter. I can't recall Donaire ever having to give up as much height and length as he did on Saturday. With this in mind then, Donaire showed that he can mix things up if the situation arises -Donaire showed tremendous versatility as he walked his man down behind a high guard. Once inside, Donaire also showed that he can shorten up his punches in close which is in itself a skill that is often taken for granted. Let's not forget, Donaire almost had his opponent, who had never been stopped before I might add, out at the end of the fourth round -the headlines then would have read very differently on Sunday morning.

Having said that, Donaire did show a little vulnerability. I found it alarming how easy it was for Mathebula to land clean on Nonito at times with straight punches. Donaire's feet do most of the moving from the outside, but when he's in punching range, looking to land his vaunted left, defense seems to take a back seat as there's not much in the way of upper body or head movement at this range. Against the heavier punchers at 122 pounds, this could prove detrimental.

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Lessons from the master

During his 135 pound prime, Roberto Duran was simply too much physical specimen for the vast majority of his opponents. At lightweight, Duran was a devastating puncher, whose animalistic demeanor often blinded his technical subtleties. A quick look at the third Ken Buchanan fight shows just how dominant the young lightweight version of Duran was. Buchanan, one of the finest pure boxers you'll ever see, saw his technique rendered useless against Duran's superior physicalities and aggression. At lightweight, Duran could bully his opponents.

As Duran moved up through the weights, so too did the danger of his opponents. Against bigger men, Duran was no longer able to fight in an ultra aggressive manner. If you take a look at the Duran who fought against Iran Barkley, you will see a complete contrast in his approach from the Buchanan fight. There's more in the way of jabbing, feinting, head movement and patience. Simply put, as he got older, Duran had to call upon the sweet science to aid him against larger prey. No longer the marauding aggressor of old, Duran had to out-technique many of his opponents from welterweight to middleweight.

Looking back at Donaire's flyweight days, it's clear to me that -regardless of what many believe- he is now fighting above his natural weight. Donaire's physique is now reminiscent of Pernell Whitaker's in the mid nineties -fleshier and bigger around the lower half of the body. Nevermind Donaire's height, it's his arms, legs and shoulders we should be paying attention to. It's because of this, that I question how much more weight Donaire will be able to pack onto his already overloaded frame. It is also clear that Donaire's power does not have the same affect on his opponents like it did a few pounds below. As a result, it is my belief that Donaire can no longer overwhelm his opponents the way he used to at those lower weights. Donaire, like Duran had to, must now adjust to the bigger, more dense jungle he finds himself hunting in. Rather than load up with the left hook every single time, Donaire must learn to set his shots up better and utilize the jab more, thus making the left hook less predictable when he opts to throw it. Donaire also needs to concentrate more on his defense and also WHEN to use it. It's obvious that his opponents are no longer going to drop every single time Donaire connects with his left hook or his right uppercut. If he's to dwell within punching range against bigger foe, his defense must tighten up, otherwise he runs the risk of leaving himself open to counters.

Don't get me wrong, emulating Roberto Duran is easier said than done. Duran was a master craftsman who could combine just about every aspect of boxing simultaneously. There haven't been many fighters throughout history who were greater than "Manos de Piedra". One thing is clear though. Duran's greatness is a direct result of his ability to adapt as he moved up in weight. If he's to achieve true greatness, Donaire must learn to do the same.

The Fight

Lets be honest here, any mix of fights between Nonito Donaire, Abner Mares, Toshiaki Nishioka

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and Guillermo Rigondeaux would be captivating to say the least. However, only one of those fights would be truly mouth watering. In recent times, boxing fans have tolerated a lot as they've been deprived of such fights as Juan Manuel Lopez versus Yuriorkis Gamboa and the super fight that never will be, Floyd Mayweather versus Manny Pacquiao. Hopefully, boxing gets it right this time and everyone gets to see THE superfight at 122 pounds between Donaire and Rigondeaux. No disrespect to Jorge Arce, but if the fight with Donaire becomes a reality {which is looking increasingly likely} we can expect to see a high profile mis-match along the lines of Floyd Mayweather's annihilation of the late Arturo Gatti.

I'm not sure who I'd pick between Donaire and Rigondeaux. Both are super athletes with outstanding reflexes and coordination. Truthfully, I think Donaire has more layers to him, even though Rigo's technical ability is of a higher quality. Donaire's footwork -not that we saw much of it on Saturday night- is just that bit better in my opinion. I can also envision Rigondeaux having problems shutting down Donaire's left hand as Rigondeaux, a southpaw, would be carrying his lead hand quite low, possibly leaving himself vulnerable on offense. This is what makes the fight so intriguing. Rigo is like a sniper who can take you out from distance or in close. Likewise, Donaire can ambush from the sides or take you out from mid range. It's a must see fight that either man could win.

I really do think Donaire-Rigondeaux would be this era's version of Ray Leonard-Thomas Hearns or Salvador Sanchez-Wilfredo Gomez.

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

I'm down with the Filipino Flash fighting Rigondeaux to shut up these Pinoy haters, who don't know Jack or Jill about boxing and couldn't climb hill. Rigondeaux is unbusy -- to the point of being lazy. He jumps straight back, he squares up and -- for a professional -- he holds his hands the wrong way. A fighter like the Filipino Flash will see every one of Rigondeaux punches coming in slow-mo time to counter, and counter and counter.

I don't see Donaire-Rigondeaux in the "era's version of Ray Leonard-Thomas Hearns or Salvador Sanchez-Wilfredo Gomez." I see Donaire-Rigondeaux in the era's version of Sugar Ray Robinson-Gene Fulmer with the Filipino Flash putting Rigondeaux OUT with a SRR-like left hook. I can also see Donaire-Rigondeaux in the era's version of Thomas Hearns-Roberto Duran, with the Filipino Flash kayoing Rigondeaux with a Hearns-like overhand right cross. Holla!

TotoyBato says:

Donaire is a super talent and will do what is required to win and be entertaining. Donaire will box, counter, punish the body and bludgeon the heck out of the relatively untested Rigondeaux.

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Rigondeaux just looked spectacular against pedestrian opponents.

Radam G says:

So well posted, TotoyBato. Ditto that! Holla!

32westave says:

If he wants to be another filipino hero like Pacquiao ,Nonito has to oblige what we fans want to see a unification of titles and should be the lineage title too and fight Rigondeuax .There should be no problem they have the same TOPRANK promoter.Mrs Donaire should make this request to Bob Arum and make it for the fans and sportwriters Rigon and the Flash.

ali says:

Donaire should fight Arce first and Rigondeuax should try to fight Mares or Vasquez jr somebody the public atleast kind of knows and have the fights on the same card Right now nobody really knows who Rigondeuax is if he performs well on a Donaire undercard then thy could sell the fight

maypac says:

Nonito should fight Rigondeaux first, I'm sure it will be a great fight. I don't see any problem for Arum making it happen being both fighter are in his corral. Donaire vs Rigondeaux match will be a true test for both.

Just like the author, after watching Donaire's performance on Saturday night, my only frustration was Donaire did not apply any body punches.

maypac says:

BTW, did anybody noticed who that person behind Nonito Donaire while he was walking? That was no other than Danny Inosanto, who taught Bruce Lee the use of Nun-chucks and Arnis.

TotoyBato says:

How 'bout Mathebula for Rigo. Now that's a yardstick to measure up... a really long yardstick.

Shoulder Roll Defense says:

I like Donaire and think he has more "skills" than Pac Man. However, I have analyzed him and Rigo and have come to the conclusion that Rigo would probably KO him. Donaire makes a lot of mistakes and can be easy to hit. Rigondeaux is a counter puncher with power in both hands and his defense is impeccable. His main weakness is that he doesn't jab, but neither does Donaire, which is due to both men being primarily counter punchers. Arum needs to stop playing around and make the fight happen. Arum is the Al Davis of boxing, he needs to go

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because he is handicapping the sport.

Matthew says:

While I think Donaire-Rigondeaux would be a good fight, I think Donaire-Mares might be even better. Rigondeaux is more of a counter puncher, while Mares is more naturally a pressure fighter, thus saving Donaire of the trouble of having to be the aggressor, as he would against Rigondeaux. To me, Donaire is extremely athletic and talented, but is nowhere close to being a complete fighter. For every spectacular knockout he has registered (Darchinyan, Montiel), we also have rather pedestrian decisions (like his last three fights). His jab has been non-existent and his defense below average (anyone else see how many clean straight punches he took last Saturday?). Maybe we are being a little too hard on him, but that's only because our expectations of him are high due to his talent. He has room for improvement.

counterman says:

As the saying goes, it's easier to said than done. Donaire and Rigondeaux are arguably one of the best fighters in the 122 pounds division. Both have superb talents and amazing ring skills and power. no one can rightfully predict that one fighter can leave the ring with the upper hand unless both men will going to square off inside the ring. But i do have one thing for sure, its one hell of a fight!

brownsugar says:

being placed in the nebulous P4P category can take it's toll on anybody. Expectations get raised. Results don't always match the hype. the fickle fans scream for blood and yell " I told ya he was a hoax" when dissapointment sets in.

But do I believe that if Donaire fights within himself he'll beat 90% of the competition at 122lbs, Those odds grown smaller every time he leaps into another weight class. It drops to 75% at 126lbs and 60% at 130lbs.

The other 10% is hot on this trail and has promised to follow Donaire to 126 if need be...

Not often do you see a P4P fighter getting chased from weight class to weight class. Rigo must be literally be starving for recognition.