

Is Erislandy Lara Getting the Shaft?

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Tuesday, 07 January 2014 14:39



“Erislandy Lara, if you don’t know by now, is the best junior middleweight in the world right now,” Ronnie Shield, Lara’s trainer, told me during Christmas week. “There are a lot of good junior middleweights out there, but from a technical standpoint, no one is going to beat Lara right now.”

Despite the assertion, something many in boxing would agree with, Erislandy Lara (19-1-2, 12 KOs) seems to be getting the shaft. Coming off arguably his best year as a professional prizefighter, Lara is now left wondering why one of the fighters he knocked out last year, Alfredo Angulo, is getting the nod against superstar Canelo Alvarez for a March 2014 bout.

Lara and Angulo met last summer in Carson, California. After it appeared he may get knocked out himself, Lara stopped Angulo suddenly in Round 10 of a rugged and fan-friendly fight, landing a vicious left hand that smashed Angulo’s eye into an enormous hematoma. Lara showed everything in the fight. He easily outboxed Angulo early in the bout before having to pick himself off the floor in Rounds 4 and 9. Angulo landed devastating hooks in the fight, the kind that separate most men from their senses. But Lara took them on the chin and rose to the occasion for the win.

Then in December, Lara fought fellow southpaw slickster Austin Trout in Brooklyn, New York. The two junior middleweights were by-and-large considered to be the two most avoided boxers in the 154-pound division. While Lara’s career has been shutout thus far from big money fights against superstar competition, Trout shined in an easy win over Miguel Cotto in 2012 and came oh-so-close in a decision loss to Canelo Alvarez in 2013.

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The bout with Trout was supposed to be a barnburner, but it wasn't. Lara dominated every minute of every round in what has to be considered his most impressive performance to date. He knocked Trout down to his knees with a lead left hand in Round 11 to put a stamp on his masterpiece, a 12-round unanimous decision win over a man who dominated Cotto and went toe-to-toe with Alvarez.

But Lara, age 30, hasn't seen much fruit from his 2013 efforts so far. Despite being the Transnational Boxing Rankings Board No. 1 contender to Floyd Mayweather's lineal 154-pound championship, there's been nary a mention of Lara as a possible opponent for Mayweather's next bout. In fact, Lara seems to have boxed himself out of the Mayweather sweepstakes altogether. Does any among you foresee Mayweather moving from likely opponent (and multiple knockout loss sufferer) Amir Khan in May to someone as staunch and dangerous as Lara in September?

And Lara *still* can't seem to get Alvarez in the ring. When I visited Lara's camp back in November 2012, Luis DeCubas, Jr., Lara's manager, told me they had been trying to get a fight with Alvarez for years. Years! He said the Alvarez camp knew how dangerous Lara was, and that he expected to have to force the issue in order to land the fight.

But the fight hasn't happened yet, and it appears not to be on its way anytime soon. Instead, Alvarez has selected Angulo for March, likely because he considers a bout with Angulo much more winnable than one with Lara.

Lara is getting the shaft. But, maybe, it's just his lot in life.

Lara was born in 1983 in one of the poorest areas of Guantánamo, Cuba. He never met his father. His mother, Marisol, was an alcoholic. He was raised by his grandmother, Silvia, who died when Lara was just 11 years old.

Lara used boxing to cope and began fighting in Cuba's youth competitions. Before he knew it, he was a teenager moving up the ranks and vying for an Olympic spot on the best boxing team in the world. Lara became captain of the Cuban national team and won a world championship in

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2005.

Lara attempted to defect from Cuba during the 2007 Pan American Games in Brazil. After having a few drinks with teammate Guillermo Rigondeaux, the two decided to make their move to Germany with boxing promoter Ahmet Oner, who had helped Yuriorkis Gamboa and Yan Barthelemy defect from Cuba a short time earlier. The two men were hidden away by Oner until they could be smuggled safely out of the country.

But it never happened.

The two languished for three weeks, fugitives in a strange land. Cuba worked diligently with Brazilian authorities to search for the missing boxers. Lara and Rigondeaux decided to turn themselves in. Upon their return to Cuba, the two were branded traitors and placed on indefinite suspension. The men were then confined to their homes and not allowed to fight.

“It was a pointless existence,” Lara said of the matter. His country was giving him the shaft.

Four months later, Lara again made contact with Oner. Lara set off alone with 20 strangers on a smugglers ship. The six-hour trip from Cuba to Mexico took 17 hours, and the smugglers made sure to grab 10 times more for Lara’s passage once they learned he was a championship boxer. Lara was getting the shaft again, but it was worth it.

“It was a very difficult decision to leave Cuba which is why it took me so long to leave, but I did it for the right reasons,” said Lara. “I did it to better my life and better my family’s life and that is what I’ve done. I came here to work hard and fight and obviously my ultimate goal is to move my family in Cuba over here to the United States.”

Lara has four children. Two of his children remain in Cuba with his mother, who he keeps in contact with and hopes to have come live with him in the United States. His other two children and wife are with him in Katy, Texas, a suburb of Houston, where Lara now lives and trains. Lara met his wife, Yudi, during his two-year, two-fight stint in Germany under the management of Oner. After parting ways with Oner and signing with DeCubas in 2008, Lara moved to Miami

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for a while, but ultimately wanted to move to Katy so he could focus on his work with Shields as well as live in a more family-friendly environment. Lara also signed with Al Haymon in 2012.

“Being on the sea, not knowing whether you are going to live or die—whether I’d make it or not,” he said. “I’m grateful to God I was able to pass that stage of my life and now that is why I work so hard in this country to make the most out of my life. I believe that God put every human being on this planet for a reason.”

Let’s hope that reason isn’t Lara getting the shaft. Despite all he’s been through to get here, despite rising through the ranks and proving himself an elite contender, Lara still doesn’t seem to be getting the fights he deserves.

Is it his style? Shields doesn’t think so.

“If you really know boxing, then you will love Erislandy Lara,” said Shields. “If you don’t know anything about boxing, then you will not love him because the kid knows how to fight. He knows what to do inside of that ring. That’s all that’s important.”

But what about television?

“The networks love it,” said Shields. “Showtime really likes him. That’s why you see him on Showtime all the time. What people need to do is really study boxing. When you study boxing, you know it’s not about two guys going in the ring and slugging it out...that’s not what boxing is about.”

Shields said the Cuban style, something much maligned by some in the boxing media today, is the epitome of the sweet science.

“The Cubans really know what the sweet science is,” said Shields. “Some people say it’s the sweet science, but they don’t fight like it’s the sweet science. Boxing is a hit-and-don’t-get-hit

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sport. The Cubans have perfected that. A lot of people see these guys go toe-to-toe, blood-and-guts...but those guys' careers don't last long. But the Cuban style, they can fight 15-20 years if they wanted to...the Cubans are boxer-punchers. They know how to hurt you. But at the same time, they're not getting beat up. After boxing, they are able to go a live a normal life. Half the other guys out there are not able to do that."

Despite not seeming get the fights he's earned, Shields said he still expects big things to happen for Lara in 2014.

"I expect Lara to fight for a world title in March. Definitely, it's going to happen in March."

And so we wait. Will Lara continue to get the shaft? Or will 2014 be the year he finally gets the fights he deserves?

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kelseym says:

Actually, the second angle and slowmo does show there is a light jab in front of it. Missed it! My bad!

The Shadow says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;42110]A BIG MONEY SHAFT, The Shadow! It is prizefighting. Dancing with Canelo is finding a half of pot at the end of the rainbow. Fighting Molina is finding chicken change in the straws of the scarecrow. Hehehehehe! Holla![/QUOTE]

He'll get Canelo eventually. Why would CANELO fight him now? He's coming off a loss. Let him build some confidence in that fragile psyche of his. They ain't going nowhere.

Plus Angulo really tapped that a** pretty well. So let those two losers -- Angulo and Canelo -- fight in an eliminator

Patience is a virtue and good things come to those who wait. They will probably fight in a

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unification bout of some sort when Lara brings a little more economic muscle to the table. It will happen. He has Haymon.

(By the way, an article that lists someone having signed with Haymon as "getting the shaft" is presenting an oxymoronic thesis. Just sayin'.)

Canelo will not duck, though he'd be wise to for at least two more years. He is too proud to let reason overcome the emotion of machismo.

And once that day comes that Canelo insists, we will have a match.

The Shadow says:

Yes, that little jab blinded him for just a split-second, which made Trout do some kind of James Brown split:

[ATTACH=CONFIG]104[/ATTACH]

[ATTACH=CONFIG]105[/ATTACH]

deepwater2 says:

The Cuban dandy completely outclassed Trout and clipped him at the end to showcase some power. Lara was 1 point away from beating Paul Williams. He has a good fluid style and I enjoy watching him alot. I see him beating Gingerbread man easy. I see him hanging in there with Floyd . I also see why Canelo and his people will not match him against Lara. The Mexicans wont enjoy Canelo getting another boxing lesson, they rather watch Canelo look like a boxer counterpunching a tough guy with a nagging eye injury. Lara is at the top but he will be avoided as much as possible. Styles make fights and Lara has the style to frustrate almost every top boxer around him. Canelo's team will not ever match him against Lara

SouthPawFlo says:

He's facing the Same Problem that Winky Wright Faced, he's too awkward and too skilled for anyone to look good against, yet he's not marketable enough or isn't a big enough draw to land major major fights just yet....

I do think he's the class of the 154lb division (other than Mayweather)

amayseng says:

I agree with Deep, in fact if my memory serves right I had him beating P-will (whom i am a huge fan of/was sadly).

Lara embarrassed Trout who convincingly beat Cotto after Trout lost a close fight to Canelo.

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I see Canelo as being very limited. A decent boxer and a decent puncher with slow feet and POOR stamina.

Angula will give Canelo fits just through workrate alone.

kelseym says:

Lara beat Williams so bad that after they robbed him via decision, the judges were SUSPENDED.

[url]http://espn.go.com/boxing/story/_/id/6767425/paul-williams-erislandy-lara-judges-suspended-new-jersey-state-athletic-control-board

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Kelsey, not only did Lara get the judges suspended, he also ended up taking Paul's management. Now THAT'S gangsta!

Leaving with your opponent's manager > leaving with your opponent's sidepiece.

ESPECIALLY if said manager is Al Haymon. LOL

Carmine Cas says:

I think everyone pretty much hit it on the head. Lara is too good for his own financial good lol. He needs to develop his brand more and he will get the big fights. "Shane is that you?!"

Glass Joe says:

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Agreed. I was surprised at his stamina during the Mayweather fight, and that fight exposed his limitations. Angulo is very tough and will give Alvarez a hard time, esp in the later rounds. I would love to see Lara and Angulo go at it again....Angulo would win the next time!

stormcentre says:

Deepwater2 is right.

Canelo's management wont let him near Lara after Lara showed how (relatively) easy he handled Trout.

Cuban boxing, when done right, epitomises most of the reasons why Floyd is superior; the focus is not too unweighted towards offence.

Notice how Rigo will often stand in front of his opponent and not care whether they are more active or not, let them throw, make them miss and/or be ineffective, and do this enough so that the guy realises he is inferior. If you know defence really well this is not that hard to do (as you're not trying to make the guy pay when he misses).

Psychologically, and particularly because both there is an audience and also because one of the most scary concerns for fighters is not just the loss - but also the worry of being publicly humiliated; the act of letting the opponent "have a go" and showing them that they can't mount an effective offence changes the game psychologically for the opponent.

Because it is embarrassing for any person who practices the art of professional fighting to have someone, successfully, say "show me how you think you can hurt me and I will show you how you cant"; in front of a large crowd.

Very rarely will an opponent have a plan "B", let alone one that deals with this scenario. Not in the least because it involve him acknowledging that he is inferior which directly conflicts with the sport's indoctrination that participants never give in and always think they're superior.

Now, Canelo has just tasted the above embarrassment at the highest and most public level.

There's no way he wants to experience the same again.

Even if Trout had his moments with Lara, it would have been obvious to Canelo as he watched the Lara V Trout fight from Lara's superior skills and, of course, the Cuban amateur boxing program that produced Lara; that Saul doesn't have the same technical foundation, and he knows those skills are very hard to learn once you're a professional fighter; regardless of how counterintuitive that may be/sound.

And this gets back (a bit) to why, IMHO, MMA has - to some extent - increased in popularity to the point where it can compete with boxing. Because the full extent of all the skills and brilliant dynamics that boxing can behold is far too often not on display.

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Whether or not that has anything to do with another (other than Floyd's complete set of boxing skill) reason why Canelo lost to Floyd or not I don't know; but Golden Boy, I think, rushed Canelo along a little too quick. They were a little too eager to have a mega-star in my opinion. Same thing happened with Ortiz.

And when you rush guys along too quickly, whether or not they have the skills of Rigo or not; they can often drown. As boxing has some very deep waters and there are no accurate demarcation points you can trust.

Fact of the matter is though, when you're priority is to quickly develop a champion that can compete with your promotional competitors, say like Top Rank; then the focus is not on whether the fighter's skills, team, experience and foundation can cope. And to that end there is simply no substitute for technical knowledge and also the amateur program the both Rigo and Lara is a product of.

Similarly, the comparison between how well a fighter may cope with being rushed along and successfully shaped into a champion that can compete with GBP's promotional competitors, is like chalk and cheese when you compare the fighters in question and more importantly their technical foundation and the amateur program that produced them.

One will handle being moved along quickly and with little regard to the style of his opponent better; one may not. One will therefore end up being a high risk for little reward fighter (until he gets a belt) and one will not. A promoter, with options on other fighters, will usually make more money out of the latter and be able to control them easier when they're a champion also.

Therefore, in many cases and even aside from the Prima Donna complex that goes with them; there is often little to gain, other than having the most technically brilliant fighter, for a promoter in having a guy as brilliant as Rigo. Particularly when another lesser fighter whom can be easily cashed in and controlled, may well do. Particularly also, when the majority of boxing fans would prefer a Gatti style fighter to a Rigo.

stormcentre says:

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Radam G says:

Good and great fighters always have a plan, plus B to Z, Strom. And they don't give a d@mn about the crowd, thus cannot be embarrassed by one.

Once a fighter start worrying about what a crowd thinks and wants, he's a has been or was once a fringe top gun.

Cubans are great fighters because of the art being in the zone and whuppin' arse, not in the arena of crowd pleasing. Holla!

the Roast says:

No management team with half a brain would let their fighter get anywhere near Lara. A tough durable slick lefty with some pop? Hell no.

Carmine Cas says:

Great point Storm, and to further elaborate, it seems that Cuban fighters are also trained to disregard the crowd all together. The issue at hand is that Cuban fighters are not necessarily "crowd pleasing" so they will catch flack and face more adversity in attaining the bigger fights. The solution to this would be to match them with Angulos, Santa Cruz', Gatti's etc, who will bring the action to the fight and showcase the abilities and vulnerabilities of their talented opposition.

On the other hand the Canelos and Ortiz' of the world are rushed to stardom and flop. Promoters are blinded by the short term gain that they do not see the long term gain of properly developing their fighters gradually.

stormcentre says:

Thanks CC

I am not sure that the promoters always care about longevity that much. I think they care about

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themselves having the longevity to consistently promote the number 1 and/or most marketable fighter.

Which, of course, is different to investing in the fighter's individual longevity.

Most really good Cuban fighters have come up through the ranks fighting in square rings with a pretty vocal local crowd.

So they should be relatively familiar with crowds.

Perhaps not to the size that the marquee fights are at in the top USA and European promotions.

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