

MORE MORETTI: TR MM Talks Foreman, Rios, Donaire

Written by The Sweet Science
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Yuri Foreman (left) celebrated after he beat David Santos for the crown, but he didn't party like Charlie Sheen on Halloween. (Hogan Photos) Yuri Foreman has stuffed a lot of living into the last few years. He won the WBA junior middleweight title from Daniel Santos on Nov. 14, 2009, and soaked in the sun of that victory, of being able to know in his gut he deserved it when pals referred to him as "champ."

Inevitably, after the sun came clouds.

He tried to defend his title against Miguel Cotto on June 5, 2010, and his right knee gave away underneath him as Cotto bore in on the Brooklyn resident. His will, his desire didn't crumble, but fighting one one leg wasn't going to cut it against Cotto. The Puerto Rican swooped in for the finish on the rabbinical student, who fought on even after his trainer threw in the towel, but was overruled by the referee.

That TKO9 loss paled, however, if we're talking body blows that suck the wind out of you, to the night Foreman got word that his co-manager, New York restaurateur Murray Wilson, died of a heart attack. The two were tight, to say the least. Foreman doesn't see his dad, who lives in Israel, all that much. Wilson, age 72, filled a void, and taught him the ropes in life. The loss on Oct. 13, 2010 took his breath away, worse than a Cotto hook to the solar plexus.

But there was some solace to be taken, as Wilson had been overjoyed when he welcomed Foreman's son, Lev Micah, into the world that August.

Lev had helped lift the clouds formed when the Belarus-born Israelite Foreman had surgery to repair his ACL and remove torn cartilage in that knee, his pushoff knee, in June 2010.

Foreman will test that knee when he meets Pawel Wolak, an old pal, on the March 12 Miguel Cotto-Ricardo Mayorga undercard. And after that bout, there will either be more sun, because Foreman will have quickly re-inserted himself into the upper tier mix at 154, or more clouds, because his previous mobility hadn't been restored by the surgery, and the buzzsaw Wolak had capitalized.

It should be a decent style matchup between the 28-1 Foreman and the 28-1 Wolak, a crafty pugilist against a straightforward banger who will let you know he had garlic for dinner because he's in your face from second one onwards.

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I watched Foreman work out today, at Kingsway Gym in Manhattan. His knee looked fine from what I could tell, and he had Pedro Saiz dripping sweat as he held the pads for Foreman.

Top Rank's Carl Moretti was present, and talked to TSS about the stakes in this undercard scrap.

He agreed with TSS that Foreman should be favored, if his knee has rebounded. Moretti lauded Foreman merely for soldiering on through such a busy span. "All within two years, all this stuff happened to him," he said. "Who else went through that in that time? Now, if Foreman wins, he doesn't get a Cotto rematch yet. Cotto probably does Margarito first. But a win means another shot at glory. If Wolak wins, there's a new face in a pretty good division. His style would attract champions and networks, and even guys at 147 to come up. He walks to you, and he's never in a bad fight."

In this age, with lawyers and lawsuits muddying the mix, and certain promoters choosing not to do business with each other, as they hurl verbal mudpies at each other (cough Arum and De La Hoya), it makes the most sense to talk potential matchups not by first assessing style, but rather who can work with who. Therefore, a match with Foreman, if he wins, against Cornelius Bundrage, the IBF 154 pound champ, makes sense. That's because he's handled by Don King, and we all know how nicely those two are co-existing in the sandbox these days. (Hey, if anyone out there can kindly confirm that Bundrage is alive, that'd be swell. He hasn't fought since he beat Cory Spinks for the strap last August.)

Moretti admitted that no one will truly know what Foreman might have lost in the surgery til fight night. "You don't know until the fight starts, and ends," he said. "You have to wonder, what's going on in his head? Is he questioning it? If he has mobility, he should beat Wolak."

Moretti kindly allowed me to pepper him with some other queries. He told me that he didn't pick Christy Martin's foe on the Cotto undercard, "she picked it." Martin, who turns 42 in June, and was shot and stabbed by her very estranged husband in November, will rematch with Dakota Stone (9-7-5), who she beat by majority decision in September 2009 the last time she fought. The implication is: Martin's comeback might be over before it really got cooking.

Those chomping at the bit to see Top Rank's older "new" star, Nonito Donaire, will be in luck on May 28. He'll be on HBO Boxing After Dark, said Moretti, and no, he doesn't think it'll be against a cadaver. He will stay at 118 for probably two more fights, and Moretti said, "I think 122 is just around the corner."

Moretti was asked if Top Rank would be bringing any cards to the NY area anytime soon, and he said there has been preliminary chatter about Cotto-Margarito at Giants Stadium in July.

The matchmaker also set the record straight on Top Rank's newest new star, Brandon Rios, who showed a majestic set of nuts and guts when he drowned Miguel Acosta on Saturday night, and won a lightweight strap. Word went out after the tussle that Rios broke his right hand, but Moretti said that was not the case. X rays on Sunday showed no breaks, though the paw was swollen. He will be on the mend for an undetermined period, but no, there was no break.

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And then, what might come next for Rios, that loose cannon with the teflon chin? Well, Marco Antonio Barrera, age 37, is still alive and kicking, and desirous of a fourth title. I asked Moretti if he didn't worry a tiny tad about what a young gun like Rios, age 24 7/8, might do to such a vet whose best days came a decade ago. Moretti, to his credit, spent a few seconds contemplating. "I wouldn't be so nervous," he said. "I've seen his last few fights. He's in much better shape than (34-year-old) Erik Morales. But asking him to fight Rios, such a tough guy...It'd be a great fight for Rios, look great on his resume. And it would sell well in California or Las Vegas."

Regardless who he meets next, Rios would likely stay at 135 for the rest of the year, then move up.

I wanted to know who Rios compares to, what level of star Moretti thinks he'll play out to be. Again, the matchmaker paused. He's been in the business 25 years, remember. "It's too early," he said. "What's great about him coming along at this time is TV wants fighters fighting like he does."

Moretti didn't admit that he thought Acosta was putting an old fashioned schooling beatdown on Rios when the kid was getting thrashed with right crosses in the first four rounds of their bout, but he did admit he wanted a return to the days of 15 rounds bouts as he watched Rios get leather shoved down his throat. He had noted during fight week that Acosta was supremely confident, walking around with a smile that suggested he was totally at ease, so he wasn't sure what to expect come fight night.

But he saw what we saw...actually, what we saw last year, when Rios showed the same stellar elements against Anthony Peterson. In order: 1) Desire 2) Chin 3) Power.

"I'm not saying he's not going to lose ever," Moretti continued. "But it will take a helluva fighter, in a helluva fight, to beat Rios."

Rios comes off like one of those guys you might have to hire a keeper for after he wins a title. He admits his wild side. But Moretti thinks that he's gotten his foolishness out of his system already.

Also, Rios hasn't made the sort of money that makes guys go out and spend like the Pentagon, buying up Maseratis site unseen on Ebay, partying like Charlie Sheen on Halloween and generally getting caught up in behavior antithetical to the existence required to be a ring standout. He made \$125,000 for the Acosta fight, so it's not like he can make a pile of his money, and sleep on it and blow off the gym for the rest of his days. But, Moretti added, and by the way this is a reason I enjoy talking to him, because he isn't so rigid with message as to insult my intelligence, such as it is: he isn't sure how Rios will handle stardom: "I think Brandon doesn't even know that."

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ultimoshogun says:

Good to hear Donaire will be back on tv soon! I gotta say, I like the idea of a Rios/Barrera matchup, it'll be just as exciting as a Rios/Marquez matchup...that fight against Khan showed us nothing about Barrera, he was fighting with one eye and there's no way that fight shoulda gone past the first round after the clash of heads...since then he's won two fights. I hope the Cotto/Margarito rematch happens this summer, there's still some unfinished business there with all speculation of the loaded gloves...Margarito needs a win to vindicate himself and Cotto needs it to prove he can beat Margarito on an even playing field.