

Is Canelo Being Oversold?

Written by John Nguyen
Thursday, 16 June 2011 07:46



The tiny fragment of the world's population who can legitimately bear the title of "prodigy" often describe it as both a blessing and a curse.

The benefits are obvious. Whether it is in music, academics, or athletics, being peerless and extraordinarily talented, particularly at a young age, is something most people would kill for. The vast majority of the human race must toil merely to rise above the ranks of mediocrity; to have a natural proclivity for brilliance is something most cannot begin to comprehend.

Often overlooked, however, are the heavy drawbacks of such talent. Unexpected notoriety, suffocating external pressures, and underdeveloped maturity have caused many prodigies to

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fizzle out short of the extremely high expectations placed before them. The reality for most prodigies is that the initial trajectory of their talents is rarely a reliable indicator of where the story will end.

This reality is something that just might apply to Saul “Canelo” Alvarez, the 20-year old phenom to whom the label “prodigy” has often been affixed. Though Alvarez cannot legally consume an alcoholic beverage in the United States, he has already amassed an impressive record of 36-0-1 (26), and has created the type of buzz that already has fight fans watching and Golden Boy Promotions, who promotes Alvarez, drooling. His remarkable poise coupled with his apparent athletic gifts have already produced scene-stealing performances on high-profile pay-per-views, and also netted HBO one of its highest-rated Boxing After Dark telecasts in recent years. All this, along with Alvarez' charisma, good looks, and distinctive red hair, have made him the consensus choice for boxing's Next Big Thing.

With everything going for him, what could possibly go wrong? The answer: plenty.

The boxing landscape is littered with the memories of young fighters who never quite lived up to their fullest potential. Names like Davey Moore, Tony Ayala, Jr., David Reid, and Francisco Bojado come to mind, just to name a few. Cases of unfulfilled potential reveal that great fighters require more than great talent. In most cases, the intangibles prove more important than skills.

Could Canelo Alvarez be the latest name to be demoted from The Next Big Thing to The Last Big Bust? A comparison of Alvarez to another one-time phenom could provide insights into Canelo's prospects for ring greatness. Though the parallels might seem sketchy at first, Alvarez and recent Hall of Fame inductee Mike Tyson hold much in common. Tyson's supernova-like burst of brilliance, short but luminous, could foreshadow Alvarez' ultimate destination in boxing history.

An Unlikely Comparison: “Iron Mike” and “Canelo” Alvarez

Comparing Tyson and Alvarez may seem unusual, especially considering that Tyson's stock at age 20 was exponentially higher than Alvarez' is currently; regardless, there are still striking similarities. Like Alvarez, Tyson exploded on the boxing scene as an incredible young specimen, possessing incredible physical gifts and fighting instincts exceedingly rare in fighters, particularly in such a young man. Tearing through a feeble heavyweight division, Tyson's strengths were made apparent in disturbingly violent fashion: his undeniable punching power was delivered by often-overlooked handspeed and underrated footwork, all fueled by his warrior's mentality. There were murmurs within the sport that Tyson, boxing's youngest ever heavyweight champion, could possibly go on to become the greatest heavyweight in history.

While Tyson's mystique grew, there were indicators during his title reign which indicated his unobstructed run to greatness might not go according to plan. Hindsight clearly proves that Tyson had the physical makeup for greatness, but did not possess the maturity or discipline to complete the package of a truly great fighter. Believing so firmly in the potency of his talents, Tyson refused to acknowledge his vulnerabilities. He counted entirely on his fists to pulverize his opponents into powder that he lost sight of his weaknesses, namely his lack of height and

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range as well as his dependency on elusiveness to create openings to land. This was illustrated even prior to his monumental upset loss to James "Buster" Douglas. Tyson's youthful arrogance made him perhaps the biggest believer in his invincibility. Tyson's refusal to compensate for his shortcomings defined most of his career and kept him from realizing the vast potential he had within his grasp.

What, if anything, does this mean for Canelo Alvarez?

Put bluntly, he demonstrates the same disregard for his shortcomings that Tyson did. Though he possesses impressive instincts and athleticism for such a young man, Alvarez seems to believe that his aggression and heavy hands will solve all his problems. Alvarez, as a result, shows an unwillingness to broaden his skill set. His level of competition is improving, but he still exhibits a marked lack of head movement and defensive awareness, especially considering that his unspectacular handspeed makes him fairly easy to beat to the punch. He revealed himself to be a ready target in his previous bout against Matthew Hatton, who, thankfully for Alvarez, possesses featherweight power in a welterweight's body. And though Alvarez' match with Carlos Baldomir is best remembered for his highlight-reel knockout of an anvil-chinned opponent, the fight action showed Alvarez taking unnecessary chances with a fighter against whom he possessed every possible advantage. Prior to that, the Alvarez Express was almost derailed against the wholly pedestrian Jose Cotto, who had Alvarez in serious trouble early in the fight.

Chalk it up to being a developing fighter, attribute it to gaining on-the-job experience, but the hard reality is that Canelo Alvarez may top out as a fighter sooner rather than later. His hands, while heavy, are far from the most lethal at 154 pounds, and are also fairly average in terms of speed. His penchant for brawling and apparent aversion to defensive prowess show no signs of changing anytime soon. The kryptonite for Canelo Alvarez is already clear: place him in the ring against a fighter with relatively quick hands, a good jab, decent wheels, and solid pop on his punches, and Alvarez will be in for a long night. Truthfully, it seems like this type of fighter will likely stymie Alvarez throughout his career, just as the same type of fighter always confounded Mike Tyson: tall fighters with good chins who could back Tyson up, maintain distance with a jab, and who, most importantly, were not afraid of him.

Saul Alvarez faces his most formidable opponent to date when he squares off against Englishman Ryan Rhodes on Saturday. Though Rhodes may not be the man to fully expose Alvarez' flaws, at the very least, he could shed light on whether the talk of greatness regarding Alvarez is warranted or, more likely, premature, or perhaps even fallacious. For Canelo Alvarez, he may find producing exciting fights and making devoted fans to be easier than navigating the path to ring immortality.

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brownsugar says:

I wouldn't be surprised if Rhodes knocks him out... but he's got the support of the entire country of Mexico behind him... so the money's there... he's appealing, even my granddaughter thought he was cute and sat thru an entire fight (she hates boxing). Yep so the marketability is there. I applaud his willingness to take greater risks than Chavez Jr and believe he's the overall better fighter.... don't know if that's much of a complement. My belief is that they should have kept him on the fringes of the top ten another year or 2 while training with a top talent like Roach, Stewart, or Nacho Berenstain, as it stands now he doesn't have the boxing ability to compete with guys like Dzinziruk, Martinez, Lara, Angulo, Vanes, the pot smoking Austin Trout...or a Windmilling Paul Williams... and a host of others. without that crucial amateur background fighters of his ilk are hamstrung from the first day they start their careers... careful management can keep them afloat but eventually exposure will find him in a not so flattering way. Make no doubt about it... this next fight with Rhodes is no Hatton style cakewalk, he deserves praise for raising the bar.....I'll reserve further judgement until I see whether he has the mettle to rise to the challenge... Otherwise he's fun to watch and fights to entertain. I'm betting half a coconut on Ryan Rhodes and Canelo and predict a very entertaining fight...

mortcola says:

Yes and no. Yes, he is the real deal with respect to fighting attitude and instinct; he is gonna be a fan pleaser....while it lasts. In too many respects, he is like Arturo Gatti, except that we haven't seen how he'll respond when crushingly dropped. We have reason to suspect he has a good chin and doesn't mind being hit. But let's face it - he's a typical crowd pleaser, a good offensive machine, young, simultaneously Latino and Irish looking, takes shots, not afraid to mix it up, and precocious, a kid beating up men. Shelf life won't be very long if he doesn't learn some defense, especially since he's hitting the big time now and not just fighting opponents.

Radam G says:

I'd say YES and YES! I guess it's because of that red hair. For those, who are not in da know, it's usual for a Mexican to be redheaded. WTF! Most people don't know sh** about other peoples. A lot of my Pinoy Nationals, who have blond hair or black skin, find themselves not believed in the States, whenever they proudly and loudly tell some arrogant, know-nothing AmerKano that they are "FULLY FILIPINO!"

Canelo is the hypy-hype [sic] because of Yanky ignorance. But da kid is not that talented or good. He's been fighting C and D fighters, and conducting those optical illusions to fool the naive. It is about time for him to step up and dance with a B fighter -- a straight BUM. He could probably beat most of the B fighters, like when he kayoed Carlos Baldomir. But he will be in deep kimshee whenever he enters that squared jungle to get down with an A fighter. The jury is still out on the Redheaded Latin Robin Hood. That's RIGHT! He's robbin' dat money from those "suckas born every minute." More power to him. It is all about gettin' PAID! Make dat MOOLA while you can, young man. Holla!

Joe says:

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His brethren buy seats and Cinammon puts butts in the seats. He's an exciting fighter (gets hit too much) but he's not exactly fighting top notch opposition. The Bobfather will milk this cashcow as long as he can before he has to really bite down and / or get up off the floor and show us something.

FighterforJC says:

[QUOTE=Joe;7246]His brethren buy seats and Cinammon puts butts in the seats. He's an exciting fighter (gets hit too much) but he's not exactly fighting top notch opposition. The Bobfather will milk this cashcow as long as he can before he has to really bite down and / or get up off the floor and show us something.[/QUOTE]

Genius, Alvarez is with Goldenboy. He's being groomed as the next "monster" that only Mayweather could conquer.

brownsugar says:

this is unrelated... but in regard to future prospects, check out Gennady Golovkin vs Ouma on youtube. I believe the fight was last night(what a throwback of a brawl!!). Golovkin looks like a combination of Tony Ayala and Marvin Hagler in the ring... he must have thrown 150 punches in the 10th round, constant pressure, good punch placement. Can't wait to see this guy against the like of a Pirog or Martinez or French title holder N'Dam N'Jikam who I believe is ordered to fight him next. You'll never hear Martinez's promoter or manager mention any of these guys, but they put him against "Darren Barker" somebody nobody ever heard of. the middleweight division is getting real "Ugly"... real fast. And I mean that in a good way. (Golovkin, N'Jikam, and Pirog have some form of title)

brownsugar says:

Wow... it's official, Alvarez is the goods. He showed patience, and remarkable defense in addition to good body work to reduce Rhodes to the role of sparring partner. Now maybe we can see him face greater challenges like Angulo, Cotto, Martrosyan, Williams and the rest of the world class '54 pounders.