

What Canelo Alvarez Needs To Show Us

Written by Blake Hochberger
Friday, 04 May 2012 10:01



Before I get started here, can we talk about how bad of a matchup this is for Canelo? Of course he's going to win. It's practically a foregone conclusion. But in order to take the next step in his career and prove he's more than just Golden Boy hype, he needs to look great (see: not just 'good') against an old Shane Mosley. While I think the days of calling him "Sugar" are long over,

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Mosley is naturally gifted enough to make Canelo look less than spectacular. After all, he did make Manny Pacquiao look less than impeccable. Mosley has the chin, wits, and experience to at least make it an awkward fight, and if Canelo looks as pedestrian as Chad Dawson did against the Bernard Hopkins last week, his stock drops. Against Hopkins, nobody looks good, so it wasn't all bad for Dawson. But for Canelo on Saturday night, he can't afford that type of fight. It's all about expectations. Because Alvarez is expected to dominate this fight, anything less than domination will fall short of making him look the next big thing in boxing.

If Alvarez were fighting against someone like James Kirkland (which would be awesome in my opinion), it would be expected to be a more dangerous fight. In that case, looking good (but not great) would still look like a strong performance. That simply is not the case for the young Mexican star on Cinco De Mayo against Mosley. It's probably unfair, but it's the way it is.

All that said, in order to look like a true threat to the 154-lb division (and subsequently set up some very compelling fights), he needs to show us the following:

Canelo needs to hurt Mosley

Even if this is a very faded Shane Mosley, he still has a very solid chin. He hasn't been truly hurt in years, and he's faced some solid punchers. If Alvarez can connect with some clean power punches and drop Mosley, that says something. One knockdown validates the kid's power.

Land combinations

Alvarez is a good boxer, but he occasionally looks for one big punch (or two) at a time. Against Alfonso Gomez, he was so supremely confident that he could land one goodnight left hook that he lost most of the first five or six rounds. He needs to use his hand speed and youthful legs to set up 4 and 5-punch combinations this weekend. If he has any real shot at beating the other title-holders around his weight class, he'll need to show some improvement in his combination punching. Given the age differential, the speed discrepancy should be noticeable as early as the first round.

Have good accuracy numbers

There will certainly be a correlation between his combination punching and accuracy, but he needs to be efficient. Shane hasn't been a great defensive fighter for a few years now. His once lightning-quick reflexes left him years ago. Especially if Mosley struggles to get off as he has in last few fights, he should become a punching bag for Canelo. If Alvarez can't land more than 35% of his power punches, it'll be a giant red flag.

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Win almost all of the exchanges in the pocket

Alvarez might have the opportunity to simply tee off on a shot fighter like Pacquiao did against Oscar De La Hoya. But if Shane comes to fight like he says he will, Alvarez should be able to pick him apart. He should be stronger, considerably faster, and have the reflexes to make Shane miss, not the other way around. Mosley has looked very frustrated in recent fights and has really struggled to get off. If we see Alvarez retreating because he's on the losing end of exchanges in the pocket, that's definitely another red flag.

In all candidness, Alvarez needs to do all of those things to live up to the massive expectations that come with the promotion he's gotten. Like I said, I think this was poor matchmaking. Sure, Mosley's name still carries some weight to the average boxing fan, but he's made for some ugly fights lately and Saul Alvarez (and Golden Boy) can't afford to win a snooze-fest.

I'm well aware that Saul Alvarez is still a very young fighter. Looking less than amazing in this fight is not the end of his career by any means, but it will tell us a lot. Is he destined to be a really good fighter or the next great fighter? I personally think he will be a fantastic fighter and champion for many years. He certainly needs to correct some flaws/holes in his game and get better, but what 21-year fighter old doesn't?

Many observers think Julio Cesar Chavez, Jr. is nothing more than hype. He has a chance to prove people wrong if he can get by Andy Lee and make a fight with Sergio Martinez. While I don't think Canelo is ready for that type of challenge regardless of Saturday's outcome, this is his chance to prove he's worth every bit of hype HBO has given him. Not coincidentally, a potential Chavez, Jr-Alvarez fight in the future would do huge business in Mexico.

My prediction: We see a dangerous, hungry Canelo put on the performance of his career en route to a stoppage. We'll see a future middleweight (160-lb) champion of the world stop a future Hall of Famer when the ref has seen enough in the 10th round. I hope that Shane is taking this fight for the right reasons and has his health as his primary interest. If he takes the pounding many (me, too) are expecting, I sure hope it's his last.