

PROPS To Paul Malignaggi

Written by Michael Woods
Wednesday, 26 March 2014 20:18



Not sure what people enjoy more, the buildup, or the tear-down.

We, the media, are particularly proficient at both.

Lionize, rhapsodize, shower them with accolades and drape them in glory arguably beyond maybe they should enjoy for "merely" possessing skills in the arena of athletics.

And then, when they mis-step, or have displeased us, by displaying excess hubris, or by losing a fight or two, and thus disappointing us, we bring out the barbs. We opine that they have lost their luster, take a shot at their character, lobby them to hang up the gloves. From our safe distance, we tell a guy who is past his prime to walk away, to leave the only vocation he knows, the way he feeds his family. It is probably well intentioned most of the time, but it also a screamingly myopic act. Not to mention, as some sharp wise crackers on social media point out, many of the opiners don't exactly treat their own bodies as sacred vessels, do they?

We too often treat them, the athletes, the fighters, as objects, present to entertain and amuse us, and serve as punching bag when we see fit. Now, I'm not saying rivers of tears should be cried for the celebs who we alternately shower with praise and then caustic judgement. After all, the payoff for success can be considerable, in acclaim, in compensation. But we, the media, and so many of us with a Twitter account, myself included, could be doing a better job at accentuating the positive, and not being so quick to latch on to the sensational angle.

Hey, we are only giving people what they want, we can tell ourselves, and we're not totally deluding ourselves when we use that rationalization. But people like me should more often

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stories like the one I came across yesterday, Tuesday, when I saw ex world champ Paul Malignaggi present a beefy check, \$25,000 to the charity organization, Knockout Obesity, during a press event at Gleason's Gym, in DUMBO.

I told the 33-year-old boxer, who once again lives in NY after a couple years in LA, that I was proud of him, for digging into his pocket. I see a lot of athletes bragging about the dough they make and blow, but, I told Malignaggi (33-5 with 7 KOs), I'd rather see them advertise the funds they're funneling to charitable endeavors. Not to brag, or get a bump in positive press, but because that is leadership. You think maybe one or two other fighters might see this story, and be impressed with Malignaggi's gesture, and follow suit?

The athlete has a fight coming up, April 19 in DC (on a Golden Boy show to air on Showtime), he'll get another crack at a crown, this time an IBF welterweight strap held by Ohioan Shawn Porter. Malignaggi's right eye was a bit puffed and discolored at Gleason's, compliments of a launch from sparring partner Frank Galarza, the Red Hook native who is one of the best prospects in NY, and looking to leap to contender status. The message that eye sent to me was clear: that check Paulie handed over to Dimitrios Verteouris, a restaurant owner ("Nature's Grill") who started Knockout Obesity after getting serious about trimming down from over 300 pounds, is hard-earned cash. Malignaggi has earned that dough, and that makes the gesture that much more meaningful.

"I was born and raised in Brooklyn," said Malignaggi, as his pal Verteouris, and Brooklyn borough president Eric Adams, listened intently. "I have the ability to give back to my community, help make a difference, and Knockout Obesity is a program I believe in. I know it can make a huge difference in the community. Boxing is an optimum, great way to exercise and with diet and nutrition added to the mix, it's a winning program."

Knockout Obesity incorporates boxing into its health and fitness classes geared towards adults and children throughout Brooklyn. Initially a summer pilot program at The Boys' Club of New York (BCNY), Knockout Obesity is now a year-round program in three community centers.

Dr. Wendy Scinta, an expert on adult and childhood obesity, also attended. We chatted about the obesity epidemic, about how so many of us deal with stress with "fork therapy," and how our nation is exporting odious foodstuffs overseas, and spurring a rise in such offshoots as diabetes in other nations.

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"Two thirds of adults are overweight and half of those are obese," said Scinta, author of a new book, "BOUNCE," to the assembled. "One in three children struggle with their weight. We have to take matters into our own hands, one child, one family, and then one community at a time." She told me that the rate of those with diabetes is higher in Brooklyn than anywhere in the nation, which blew me away. I promised to follow her on Twitter, check out her book, and do what I can to spread the good word.

Malignaggi said that he was moved to act by seeing old pal Verteouris change his lifestyle, and stop over indulging in bad-for-you foods. "I saw my friend become a better person," he said, "and I've come to realize that people are always fighting, not just as I do, in a combat sport, but to overcome obstacles in life.

He graciously accepted my props for his donation, and said he knows that people will listen a bit harder to a celeb, sometimes, so he knows he can make a difference, in a positive fashion. On April 19, I like Malignaggi to impose his superior ring generalship on Porter, and win another crown. If he pulls that off, he will be showered in praise. But what he did on Tuesday, making that donation and trying to spread words of positivity in his community, deserves just as much, if not more, praise.

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Domenic says:

Very nice story. Paulie is a class guy and he's a rising star in the booth. Wish him all the best.

Skibbz says:

Most definitely Dom. I hope he keeps his gig going for a while too because he's very honest in there and says it how it is.