



By Jeff Gross, Allsport

New world: Floyd Mayweather Jr., left, taking aim at Diego Corrales earlier this year, has many options available when he moves up in weight class.

Mayweather weighs choices

After Saturday title defense, champ to try lightweight

By Dan Rafael
USA TODAY

Junior lightweight champ Floyd Mayweather Jr., one of the premier talents in boxing, is about to follow the lead of that famous sitcom couple the Jeffersons.

He's movin' on up.

Mayweather, of course, has one more hurdle to clear before bidding farewell to the 130-pound division that he's owned in his 4-year title reign. He faces mandatory challenger Jesus "El Matador" Chavez on Saturday night in San Francisco (HBO, 10:15 ET).

After that, Mayweather (No. 1 USA TODAY, 26-0, 19 KOs) will move up to lightweight, where several intriguing fights await him.

"This is my last fight at 130. I'm looking forward to going to 135, but I am not looking past Jesus Chavez," Mayweather says. "He's a top contender. He deserves a shot, and I'm giving it to him."

Mayweather, promoter Bob Arum and HBO's Kery Davis already have gone over the game plan for when he gets to 135 pounds.

First up is a likely fight with lightweight champion Jose Luis Castillo, who conveniently also is promoted by Arum. After that there are possible fights with belt holders Paul Spadafora, who has wanted to fight Mayweather for years but needs to

get past Angel Manfredy, and Raul Balbi of Argentina.

A more remote possibility is fighting the winner of January's Acelino Freitas-Joel Casamayor bout, but they are with Showtime.

"There are at least four good fights in the lightweight division for Floyd, the way I look at it," Arum says. "If he does two or three of them, that would take us to a Kostya Tszyu fight sometime in the latter part of next year or the beginning of 2003. A Tszyu fight would be huge."

Tszyu also is a Showtime fighter.

"I realize there is that problem that needs to be worked out, but if I have enough time, I think we can broker a deal between the networks," Arum says.

Junior featherweight titlists Manny Pacquiao (No. 6, 33-2, 24 KOs) and Agapito Sanchez (33-7-1, 20 KOs) meet in a unification fight in HBO's opening bout. It is the first defense for each champion after winning belts on the same June card.

Mayweather already has made seven title defenses, but he'd like his final one to put an exclamation point on his tenure at 130. He plans on winning by knockout.

"He's a good fighter, but he's got a choice," Mayweather says. "He can go out on his back, or he can go out on his face. It's up to him. I'll let him pick."

Chavez (No. 7, 35-1, 24 KOs), who has waited more than 3 years for the title shot because of immigration problems that are resolved, also is confident.

"He's overrated, and he knows he's overrated," Chavez says. "I've fought others with the same kind of speed."

Says Mayweather, "He said I was overrated, so he gets his chance to show that I am overrated."

For Mayweather, an impressive knockout would be the perfect way to end a hot-and-cold year. He opened 2001 with a career-defin-

ing win against rival Diego Corrales, dropping him five times en route to a 10th-round TKO.

Then, with aching hands, he gutted out a decision win vs. Carlos Hernandez in May. He was supposed to fight Chavez in October, but surgery on his wisdom teeth postponed it. Mayweather says he's ready to go.

"I'm feeling a lot more comfortable now because I'm not having problems with my teeth and my hands are 100%," Mayweather says. "I'm in better shape for this fight than the Diego fight."

USA TODAY's Super Six Fighters Ranking

The top boxers pound-for-pound

1. "Sugar" Shane Mosley (38-0, 35 KOs)

Title: WBC welterweight

Hits: After Winky Wright pulled out of January fight, Mosley delayed move to 154 pounds to stay at 147 and finally fight Vernon Forrest in first meaningful bout since beating Oscar De La Hoya.

Misses: No complaints if Forrest fight comes off.

2. Bernard Hopkins (40-2-1, 29 KOs)

Title: Undisputed middleweight

Hits: Backed up talk with overwhelming and historic domination of Felix Trinidad to become first undisputed 160-pound champ since Marvelous Marvin Hagler.

Misses: Has a decision loss to Roy Jones, but that was 8 years and 14 defenses ago.

3. Roy Jones Jr. (45-1, 36 KOs)

Titles: WBC/WBA/IBF light heavyweight

Hits: Likes idea of fighting Hopkins in a rematch that would be a major event.

Misses: Fighting Hopkins won't make anyone forget that he still hasn't fought his only legitimate light heavyweight contender, Dariusz Michalczewski.

4. Floyd Mayweather Jr. (26-0, 19 KOs)

Title: WBC junior lightweight

Hits: If he beats Jesus Chavez on Sat-

urday on HBO, "Pretty Boy" will have cleaned out his division with the exception of Joel Casamayor and Acelino Freitas, who fight for rival Showtime.

Misses: Just needs to tone down the ego a little bit.

5. Marco Antonio Barrera (54-3, 39 KOs)

Title: None

Hits: Sometimes fans get what they wish for. In this case it's that Barrera and Erik Morales finally will fight their long-awaited rematch in March.

Misses: Boxing politics mean the best featherweight in the world has no title belts, which is absurd.

6. Kostya Tszyu (28-1-1, 23 KOs)

Title: Undisputed junior welterweight

Hits: A true professional who unified the 140-pound division for first time since 1968 with a crushing KO of Zab Judah.

Misses: He did get drilled by Vince Phillips, but that was in 1997.

Second six: Oscar De La Hoya, Ricardo Lopez, Felix Trinidad, Naseem Hamed, Dariusz Michalczewski, Tim Austin.

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