

"PRETTY BOY" CAN ADD SOME POUNDS



Movin' on up: After stopping mandatory challenger Jesus Chavez at the end of the ninth round for his eighth successful title defense at 130 pounds, Mayweather and promoter Bob Arum look toward a future for "Pretty Boy" in the lightweight division and beyond.

PHOTOS BY CHRIS FARINA

By David Mayo

You could draw a zig-zagging line from each bluish bruise, to each little lump, to each subtle scratch on Jesus Chavez' face and body. On the surface, perhaps it simply would underscore how difficult the chore of confronting Floyd Mayweather's speed and savvy is. You get in a fight with a pound-for-pound stud, and you probably come

away with two things: a few hundred thousand bucks, and a face that looks like Chavez' for a few days.

Now peer closer. Are those just bumps and bruises? Or could they be by-products of a road map, a blueprint that someone might employ someday to defeat arguably the world's most well-rounded prize fighter?

That scuff mark? That's from pinning Mayweather near one corner, subtly grab-

bing a rope to keep him there and land a bodyshot, briefly frustrating the champion, who rendered a little lacing in retaliation. That lumpy jaw? That's the price for delivering that high hook to the temple that momentarily left Mayweather cross-eyed in mid-ring, with 20 seconds remaining in the eighth round, even as the hard-pressing Chavez was starting to wilt.

You have to take some to give some. The marks on Chavez' body showed he took plenty. But the cut over Mayweather's right eye, and the puffiness beneath it, and the rope burns on his back, showed Chavez also gave his share.

Chavez didn't have the goods to beat Mayweather. The U.S.-raised Mexican with the compelling story of teenaged robbery evolving into adulthood deportation did not possess the power, speed, or big-fight experience to defeat the accomplished champion. After nine rounds, trainer Ronnie Shields refused to let his fighter absorb any more head-snapping uppercuts, and Mayweather confirmed his plan to move up to lightweight after eight successful WBC super featherweight title defenses.

What Chavez did offer on November 10 in San Francisco was a willingness to press the fight and throw a high volume of punches. Chavez did not always seem to have a clear target in mind. And the bodyshots he took in return—further evidence of the payback for risking an offensive assault against Mayweather—contributed mightily to his demise.

That was the price for trying all-out, something not all Mayweather opponents have done. Through nine rounds, Chavez was competitive, although the fight was slipping away, and he trailed by margins of three, five, and five points. But he tried, and in so doing, gave future Mayweather opponents some things to consider.

Paul Spadafora, the IBF lightweight champion who is high on Mayweather's hit list, figures Chavez just gave him a few extra ideas. Spadafora isn't the high-pres-

... BUT CAN HE TAKE THE POUNDING?



Mayweather ripped into Chavez with a two-handed assault, but although he drilled his challenger with plenty of flush shots, the WBC super featherweight titlist could not put him down. What kind of effect Mayweather's punches will have on heavier opponents remains to be seen.

sure fighter Chavez is. He might not punch as hard as Chavez, even with five extra pounds. But in December 1999, Spadafora outsparring Mayweather for six rounds, when Mayweather was out of shape and just returning to the gym during a publicized rift with his father, HBO, and Top Rank.

"Mayweather is the only reason I'm sticking around at 135," Spadafora said from his home near Pittsburgh. "I got the best of him when we sparred. It was no big deal, except for just knowing you can be in there with him. You see him on TV, you hear how good people say he is—and he's

definitely a great fighter—but once you're in there with a guy, whether you're sparring him or fighting him, you know what he's got, and he knows what you've got. I can't imagine fighting him could be that much different than sparring him."

Chavez' manager, Lou Mesorana of Corpus Christi, Texas, conceded that Mayweather is one of the finest 130-pounders ever. But Mesorana maintained that Chavez also showed the way for bigger opponents in the difficult quest to unseat the 27-0 (20) Mayweather.

"Floyd only has problems with people who try to cause him problems," Mesorana

said. "He likes things his way. As long as things are going his way, he's all right. But when somebody like Chavez, Reggie Sanders in his second pro fight, Emanuel Burton, Carlos Hernandez, puts pressure on him, it seems like he really doesn't like reacting to it. Yes, he's a great fighter, yes, he's got the speed, yes, he wins. But he doesn't like it if you catch him and make him fight."

Chavez did that, and Mayweather's enormous skill carried him through it. The champion hammered the body while Chavez missed with most of his energy-sapping shots. In the mid-rounds,



Although he didn't throw an overabundance of punches, Mayweather was very accurate and connected with pinpoint precision. Even better news for Mayweather was the fact that his fragile hands held up much better than they did against Carlos Hernandez last May.

Mayweather danced and jabbed. In the late rounds, he moved his attack from the rib cage to the jaw line, with a vicious two-handed array of uppercuts that ultimately ended the fight.

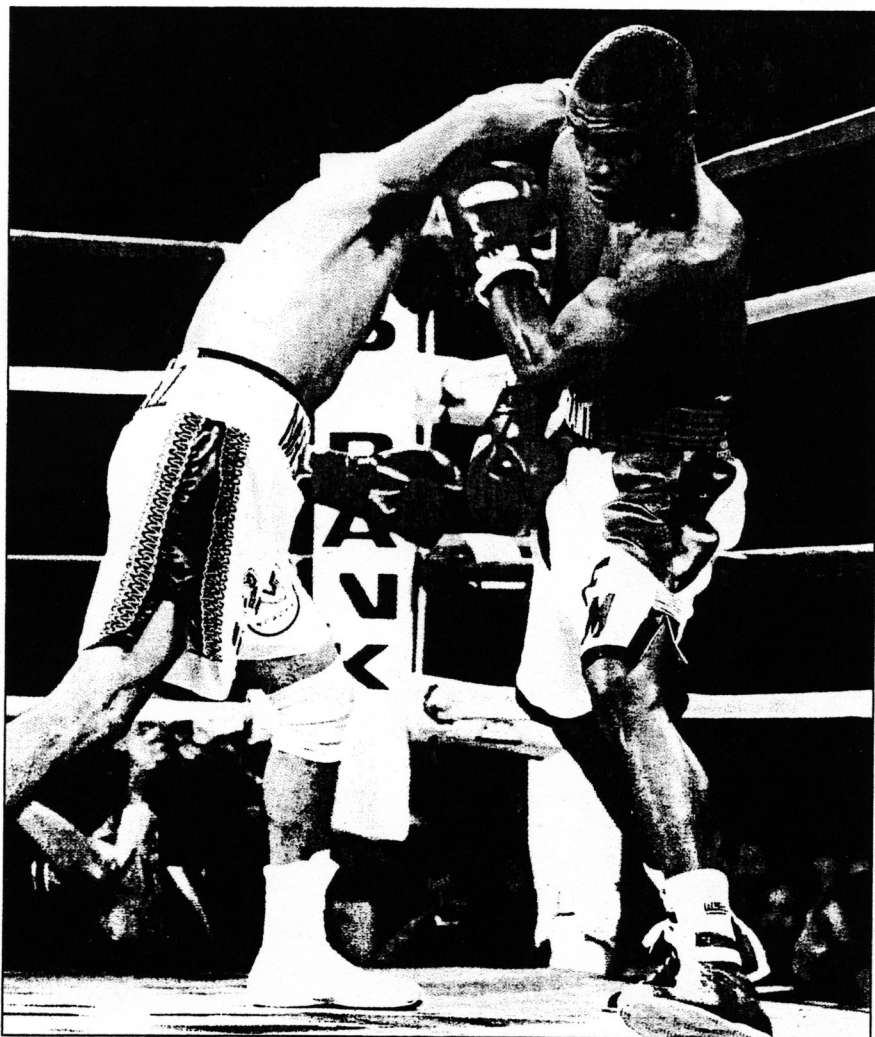
Perhaps in a year or two, Mayweather will have whacked out the top lightweights and proven that the Chavez fight simply demonstrates he can beat any fighter, of any style, at his own game. In Mayweather's way of thinking, all styles are his style. Nothing in his nine 130-pound championship fights proved otherwise, beginning with Genaro Hernandez quitting on his stool in 1998, and ending with Chavez quitting on his stool 37 months later.

"You've got to realize, I do so many little things that people don't see," Mayweather said. "They see a guy throwing a lot of punches, but a lot of those punches don't land because I catch them with my arms and stuff. If you notice, I'm always totally relaxed, taking my time. You've got to relax up there in a big fight. You can't rush. All Jesus did was rush.

"27-0, with 20 knockouts, and they say there's not any punching power there. Something's there. Hey, not all my shots are hard. I don't try to throw every shot hard. I try to take my time, stay focused, and get the job done right. Don't rush. Land the small shots. I knew Jesus was going to be coming. He calls himself 'The

Matador,' but he fights more like a bull. I knew he couldn't outbox me, so the only thing he could do was come straight ahead. So I was just going to take my time, let him punch himself out, and potshot him. Every time he cocked, I threw the short shots, and eventually I wore him down. That was my whole game plan."

Very few top lightweights mimic Chavez' high-pressure style, although Mayweather quickly could run into two who do. First, he is likely to fight WBC titleholder Jose Luis Castillo, the 135-pound champion nearest Chavez in style. If Mayweather wins that fight, he would inherit an immediate mandatory defense against Steve Johnston, who is in no way a pressure fighter. But beating Johnston could elevate current WBC number-two Juan Lazcano into the next mandatory, and Lazcano offers both pressure and a will-



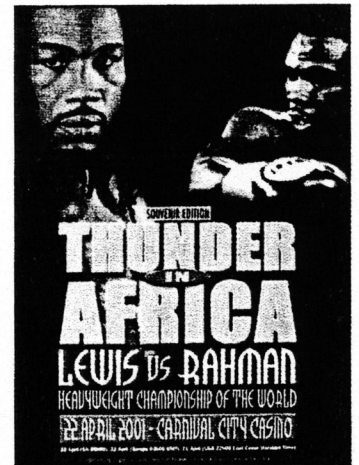
The hard-charging Chavez put more pressure on Mayweather than any previous pro adversary, but Pretty Boy utilized a slippery defense to avoid most, though certainly not all, of his blows.



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Chavez gave it everything he had for as long as he could, but trainer Ronnie Shields kept him on his stool at the end of the ninth round to spare the brave warrior further punishment.

ingness to engage in warfare of all sorts, legal and otherwise.

Mayweather's first opponent at 135 probably comes down to negotiations and availability. That means Castillo, who, like Mayweather, is promoted by Top Rank.

"We're concentrating on the fight against Castillo, because Castillo is more reasonable than Spadafora," Bob Arum said. "I talked with Mike Acri [Spadafora's promoter], and the number he was asking for is ludicrous, and was rejected out of hand by HBO. Even if Acri came down on his demands to make the Spadafora fight, it's still easier to make the Castillo fight. And the Spadafora fight comes with the burden of having to fight Angel Manfredy next, because he's the mandatory IBF challenger. Who the hell wants to see that again?"

Mayweather's 1998 two-round blowout of Manfredy was his only 130-pound title fight that didn't span at least seven full rounds.

Kery Davis confirmed that he considered the Spadafora camp's request too high. But HBO's vice president of programming also suggested everything is open to negotiation, including possibly matching Mayweather with new WBA champion Raul Balbi of Argentina.

"The Spadafora fight will happen eventually, because the public demand will make it happen," Davis said. "It may not happen at 135, though. Spadafora already has problems making 135, so it may happen at 140. There's no reason to rush a fight like that."

While Spadafora is a lesser attraction, the asking price never is cheap for risking a title belt against someone of Mayweather's ability.

"I've always believed the fight with Mayweather will be bigger and more competitive than people think," Acri said. "Spadafora boxed with him before, handled him, and made him quit, although the other guy was out of shape at the time. And I think Spadafora himself is confident enough in the challenge."

The buildup to Mayweather's 130-pound swansong featured plenty of twists, including his pronouncement that he would skip lightweight entirely if offered a shot at undisputed junior welterweight champion Kostya Tszyu. That, too, could be an interesting negotiation, and not just because of the HBO-Showtime conflicts.

"I would have to get more money than him," Mayweather said.

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Floyd Mayweather

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The once-beaten Tszyu spent almost three full years collecting the 140-pound titles.

"But I'm the attraction. I'm the draw," Mayweather replied.

Mayweather-Chavez landed in San Francisco for several reasons. Originally scheduled for October 6 in Las Vegas, the fight was postponed after Mayweather underwent emergency surgery to remove his wisdom teeth in August. By the time Arum sought to reschedule, the terrorist attacks had sent Las Vegas into a swoon. HBO, meanwhile, appeared booked tight through 2001, until Prince Naseem Hamed vacated the November 10 date.

Arum reserved a hockey rink in Austin, Texas, but Mayweather rejected Chavez' hometown. Brownsville, Texas; West Wendover, Utah; Phoenix, Arizona; a group of hotels in Laughlin, Nevada; and multiple casinos in the Pacific Northwest were consulted.

Ultimately, San Francisco's Peter Howes ran into HBO's Davis during Fernando Vargas' September win over Shibata Flores in Las Vegas, and Davis suggested that Howes—who site-promoted two successful summer shows for ESPN2—call Arum.

They struck a deal, and sold out Bill Graham Civic Auditorium's 7,100 seats in advance, despite the only local attraction being a four-round fighter. Arum and Davis both voiced a desire to return soon to San Francisco, which had not hosted a title fight of the big three sanctioning bodies since Hilario Zapata defended the WBC junior flyweight title with a 15-round decision over Rudy Crawford in 1981.

"It's hard to be retrospective when I'm thinking about the future," the gratified Howes said. "Even though we had an advance sellout, you don't get the full sense of it until you're in here, with everybody screaming, 'Floyd, Floyd,' and, 'Chavez, Chavez.' The energy in here was phenomenal."

Chavez, who turned 29 two days after the fight, gently chided Mayweather in the weeks beforehand. He openly questioned

whether Mayweather's pullout was legitimately because of dental problems, and whether the champion might choose not to reschedule. He frequently called the champion "overrated." And he warned that, "If his brittle hands aren't strong enough to hold me back, then he's in trouble."

Mayweather relocated training camp three weeks before the fight because of those hands, moving from Phoenix to Las Vegas so he could be closer to familiar medical care. He shot back that Chavez would pay for the "overrated" remarks.



Due to their highly publicized sparring session, a match between Mayweather and IBF lightweight titlist Paul Spadafora (pictured) would be a natural. But Arum thinks that "The Pittsburgh Kid" might price himself out of the fight, making a bout with WBC champ Jose Luis Castillo more likely.

Meanwhile, Mayweather's his uncle-trainer, Roger, questioned Chavez' opposition, which was front-loaded with the strongest foes back in 1997, just before Chavez' deportation—Luis Leija, Louie Espinoza, John Brown, Wilfredo Negron, and Troy Dorsey.

On fight night, Mayweather saw the anticipated bull-rushing by Chavez. First, the champion concentrated on the body, which cost him the second round on two scorecards, as he built a foundation. Mayweather danced through a couple of

middle rounds, which cost him the sixth on all three scorecards, but forced Chavez to use his legs. Finally, Mayweather sat down on uppercuts in the eighth and ninth. With a soon-to-be-vacant WBC title and the Joel Casamayor-Acelino Freitas winner on the horizon, Shields told Chavez there would be another day. Chavez agreed.

"He was definitely slowing [me] down," said Chavez, 35-2 (24). "He got my number. He was hitting me with the uppercuts to the body. I could see his punches coming, but basically, I couldn't get out of the way in time. It was the bodyshots.

"I think that probably I'll get another chance in 2002. I don't feel like my stock has gone down at all. I lost to a great champion. I always come to fight. I bring me to the fight game. People don't see nothing but me. I give my 100 percent to it. That was my 100 percent. If people appreciate what they saw, I'm happy."

Mayweather exited with few of the hand problems he experienced during his decision over Carlos Hernandez last May in his hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan. He concluded one of the finest 130-pound reigns in history with nine victories and six knockouts, including masterpieces in his three biggest fights—Genaro Hernandez, Manfredy, and Diego Corrales.

But Mayweather's last defense might give bigger champions mental fodder. Chavez' fight plan was implemented by the same man who halted it. But Shields, who got to know Mayweather first-hand during three weeks of training him for the 1996 U.S. Olympic Trials, thinks the effort his fighter displayed will have an impact on future fight plans long after the bumps and bruises have healed.

"Everybody pressures Floyd, but they didn't know how to pressure him before," Shields said. "When you pressure somebody and don't throw punches at him, he can fight all day long. I think before this fight, Carlos Hernandez did the best job out of everybody, as far as getting close. What he didn't do was throw punches. That's the big difference between that fight and this fight, is my guy threw punches and fought his heart out. That's going to be the key to beating Floyd."

David Mayo covers boxing for the Grand Rapids Press and is a regular contributor to this magazine.