



NAAZIM RICHARDSON



Exclusive to the Filipino Reporter

LAS VEGAS — There is a quiet dignity that characterizes Naazim Richardson as he grabs a brief moment of respite at the final media engagement Thursday morning before his charge "Sugar" Shane Mosley faces pound for pound kingpin Manny Pacquiao Saturday night at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

Richardson, a hard-nosed Philadelphia boxing trainer who has quietly emerged as one of the sport's top coaches, has probably entertained every imaginable question possible over the past two months pertaining to Saturday's match.

Still, no matter how inane the inquiries, Richardson maintains his calm zen.

"I've had jobs that are a lot rougher than this," said Richardson, referring to his past occupations in construction and working in shipyards.

"[The reporters] don't mean any harm. They're just here to do their jobs. Some of these guys are just told, 'We need you to go report,' and the dude doesn't know anything about boxing. He just shows up and say, 'Hey, can your guy punch hard?'

"Or the day of the fight, 'Is your guy ready?'

'No, we came for the buffet. We figured they'd give us a free room and a buffet and he'd come anyway, but my guy ain't ready.'

Richardson, donning his ever-present kufi atop his head to signify his Muslim faith, seems to take pleasure in imparting wisdom, however.

His son Rock Allen is also a professional fighter with a record of 15-0 and seven knockouts, with another son named Bear, who is also a promising amateur. It seems that boxing is his life.

It's of little wonder why Richardson has become a coveted interview by the media. His use of similes and illustrations hint at the depth of his boxing intellect, while being able to simplify convoluted boxing strategies to journalists who may have never even wrapped their hands before.

And when, prior to Mosley's 2009 bout with Antonio Margarito, Richardson discovered an illegal implement inside Margarito's hand wraps, Richardson became an instant star within the sport.

Richardson's task on Saturday is not an easy one, yet many feel that if anyone can devise a strategy to topple the sport's most dominant force, it's him.

"I felt like it was a difficult task going in but after I studied Pacquiao and I saw the openings, that's why I'm relaxed now," said Richardson, who trained the Pomona native in Big Bear, California.

"I'm solid that I see a flaw in Pacquiao that we'll be able to exploit consistently to the point where we'll be able to dominate him, but my thing is, will my guy stay with it?"

"My guy is a complex guy and the game plan is so simple that it may not be complex enough for him. When you got a rocket scientist and I'm trying to get this guy to read Dora the Explorer, it'd be hard to hold his attention. But even a rocket scientist, if he has a three year old, Dora is all he needs."

Richardson has trained the 39-year-old former lightweight, welterweight and junior middleweight champion with a record of 46-6-1 (39 KO) for the past three years and has tried to curtail his insatiable desire for combat and get him to rely more on strategy.

Richardson says that, under his father and former trainer Jack Mosley, Shane would get into great shape and simply wing it, using his natural speed and power to overwhelm opponents. And it worked for the most part, bringing Mosley to a 38-0 record which included a win over Oscar de la Hoya.

But as Mosley has aged, his reflexes waned and his stamina became inconsistent, Mosley has faltered against difficult styles of opponents that knew how to deal with his explosiveness.

"As you get older, you gotta implement where you're gonna attack, how you're gonna attack, how we're gonna make changes," said Richardson. "You go in there with a strategy so if anything goes wrong, you have something to go back to. You don't want your fighter always fighting on his heart. You use that as your reserve, that's the backup."

"You go out there with your intellect and if things get funky, you dig down and gotta go to your grit. But you don't wanna start out going to the grit, we're gonna have a game plan."

Even in their biggest victory together - the nine round demolition job of Margarito - Mosley's impulsiveness nearly got the best of him.

"He comes to me in the first round and whispers in my ear saying he's ready to jump on the guy right there. I said, 'Shane, what happened to the game plan?' I tell him Shane, we're gonna get him, but I want to make sure we got him. I don't want to go after him and he gets away, then we have to reset.

"You see a lion creeping up on a zebra and he pounces a little too early, then you have to chase and run around a little and the zebra gets away. Now you have to hunt him all over again.

"You wait until you got his head down in the water, you approach him at an angle where all the dirt is soft around him and he can't get that grip to dig off. It's either here or the water and he can't swim."

In preparing for Pacquiao, who is even years younger than Mosley at 32 and sports a record of 52-3-2 (38 KO), Richardson admits that getting his fighter ready for bouts is not the same as it might have been ten years ago.

Richardson has created a niche in the sport as a trainer of boxing's elder statesman, with his pupil Bernard Hopkins at 44 following in the footsteps of George Foreman and Archie Moore as the poster child for post-prime achievement.

"One of the difficult things that you have with old fighters, especially when they were outstanding when they were young, is their belief. They feel like they gotta believe in themselves. They do, but a lot of times they get disillusioned about what they're still capable of.

"Then you have entourages and people around them telling them, 'Hey you can still do this, you're still the same guy. Listen man, change is the natural progress of life. Everything is gonna change. This is the way God designed for all of us.

"None of us are as fast as we were, it just doesn't happen that way. We may actually be better runners now because we have more experience. We know we don't have to start out as fast, we can time them on that third turn.

"But we're not what we were."

That may be the reason why former light-heavyweight champion Antonio Tarver, who achieved much of his success in his late-30s, is hesitant to endorse Mosley's chances in Saturday's fight.

Tarver, who will be commentating the fight for Showtime pay-per-view, which is available for purchase at \$54.95, wonders aloud if Mosley still has the fire to overcome this tall challenge.

"When you look at Mosley's last two fights, the draw with Sergio Mora. Three years ago that wouldn't have happened," said Tarver. "Mosley has to answer some questions, where is he really at in his career right now? Age is nothing but a number, you can't handicap a fighter because of his age, you have to handicap him by what you see. Has he slowed down a little bit?

"Look at the Floyd Mayweather Jr. fight, where he had one good round and one great round. What happened in those other ten rounds? That is what surprised me the most, because the old Shane Mosley I know, the powerful boxer/counter-puncher, Floyd would have had his hands full all night instead of just the second round. Somewhere you have to start asking yourself, is he still the same ferocious fighter that he used to be?"

Richardson thinks Mosley still is a ferocious fighter. And he thinks Pacquiao agrees with him.

"They see him, that's why everybody fights him so defensive. It wouldn't surprise me if Pacquiao fights him defensive. Matter of fact, I expect Pacquiao fight him defensively, especially early."

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