

round clash of heads, followed by a left hook in the second that put him on the seat of his pants. By the end of round two, Malignaggi was wide-eyed, like a child watching a horror movie unfold. He'd sincerely believed that history was on the side of the boxer, not the puncher, but things were off to an ugly start.

Malignaggi had already absorbed a lot of punishment by the beginning of round five, but he seemed to have solved his nerves and was warming to the task. He started firing off sweet combinations, doing enough to win the fifth and sixth on all three official scorecards. But Cotto won the seventh round big, sending the Brooklynite back to his corner looking like a tired, beaten fighter. Malignaggi's handlers and the ring physician huddled around him like a pit crew. Somehow, Malignaggi came out for the eighth and ninth like a new fighter, throwing combinations that had Cotto backing up and rethinking things. The crowd went into delirium when Malignaggi caught Cotto off-balance with a right and knocked him sideways. A chant of "Paulie! Paulie!" went up; Cottos' *seguidores* were momentarily silenced.

Cotto wasn't hurt, but prior to the 10th he made the sign of the cross and kissed his glove, an indication that this fight wasn't the walk-over many had expected. Malignaggi, meanwhile, was sporting an ominous swelling on the right side of his face, which turned out to be a cracked cheekbone. During the days before the fight, Malignaggi had expressed his appreciation for Arturo Gatti's stone-age toughness. "Sooner or later, all fighters get buzzed," said Malignaggi. "When it happens to me, people will see what I've got inside."

As Malignaggi, 138½, used his popgun offense to disturb Cotto's bludgeoning rhythm, we were reminded of the slick light heavyweight champion, Willie Pastrano, who once visited the grave of a

# Make Room For Duddy

*If Kevin Kelley represents New York boxing's past, and Miguel Cotto and Paulie Malignaggi its present, Ireland's John Duddy could very well be New York boxing's bright and shiny future. Judging by the massive crowd response at Madison Square Garden when he entered the ring to face Chicago middleweight Freddy Cuevas, Duddy is growing as a commercial force. Irish pubs around the city were decorated with postcards advertising the fight, as if Duddy were in the main event, with Cotto-Malignaggi featured in small print underneath a large photo of the boyish-looking banger from Ireland.*

*Duddy, 158, boxed fairly well against Cuevas, though he did get tagged by a number of right hands. It may have seemed that Cuevas was landing more frequently, but Duddy has become adept at twisting and turning his body to roll away from punches. And anytime Cuevas, 25-9-1 (17), did land something, Duddy came back to hammer home much harder blows of his own. Cuevas, bloodied in the nose and mouth, slumped on his stool after the seventh, and referee Arthur Mercante Jr. stopped the fight on the advisement of Cuevas' corner.*

*Duddy's camp worked a shrewd deal for their man, turning down a \$75,000 purse by offering to fight for a guaranteed \$10,000, plus 50 percent of whatever ticket sales they generated. Duddy ended up with \$135,000.*

*"I didn't come out as ferociously as I usually do," said Duddy, 17-0 (15). "I was in second gear most of the time. It was by no means a perfect performance, but I enjoyed myself."*

*While Duddy spoke to Irish reporters at ringside, Cuevas, a 36-year-old journeyman who has spent the last few years as a steppingstone for young middleweight prospects, stood in the ring and blew kisses to the crowd. His nose was bent like a piece of old plumbing, but he seemed to be in good spirits.*

—D.S.



Fan favorite Duddy fires a right at Cuevas