

# Mikey Garcia Exclusive: Technique & Knockouts

By Caryn A. Tate on January 15, 2018



*"When the opportunity presented itself, I just pulled the trigger." (Esther Lin/Showtime)*

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It's not every day that one gets the chance to talk boxing technique with one of the best fighters in the world. Recently, I had the chance to speak with Mikey Garcia (37-0, 30 KOs), who generously took the time to discuss his craft and how his elite-level skills were developed.

Mikey won his second world title, in his second division, in November 2013 when he faced Roman "Rocky" Martinez at super featherweight for Martinez's WBO belt. It was a tactical fight for the first round and most of the second, with Garcia taking the rounds by landing more clean shots. Late in the second, Mikey was moving in to land his own right hand when he was caught with a short right he didn't see by Martinez. He went down, for the second time in his pro career (it was a night for a lot of "seconds").

Mikey explained how the knockdown happened. "When Rocky Martinez dropped me in the second round, I was coming in looking for my right hand. I was jumping in with a straight one-two, and he just caught me coming in—a short little right hand on the chin put me down. But it was just a flash knockdown. I didn't really see him throw the punch."

The interesting thing about Garcia's mistake which led to the knockdown, though, is that throughout the rest of the bout, Mikey was able to gradually and consistently land his own right hand at will. What's more, he took away Martinez's right hand.

When asked how he made that adjustment, Garcia said, "I started to counter his jab a few times. I forget what round it was, maybe the sixth or seventh—where I felt that if I countered the jab by slipping to my right and coming over with the right hand over the top, I was able to land the right hand and not worry about any other counters on his end.

"And I did, I started to do that. That started to frustrate him a little more. Then he opened up a few more times and I was able to land combinations. That body shot put him down."

That particular bout was a good example of Mikey's exceptional ability to make adjustments, and his noteworthy intelligence. "I have to read my opponent and try different things sometimes before I can actually be successful with any combination or any punch that I choose. But with Rocky, it was the jab that I kind of slipped to my right so I could land that overhand right."

He chuckled. "I still remember that, you know, even though it was a couple years ago, it's still pretty fresh."

In January 2017, Garcia won a world title in his third division when he impressively knocked out then-undefeated WBC lightweight world champion Dejan Zlaticanin. Mikey explained how he set up the stoppage. "We practiced that every day of camp. We felt that because he was the more aggressive fighter, he would be coming in, and I could probably pick him up with the uppercut, take a side step, and as he looked over to find me, I would catch him with that overhand right. In the fight, we timed that sequence of punches after the jab. I was landing the jab, and when the opportunity presented itself, I just pulled the trigger with that right uppercut, side-stepped to my left, and caught him with that overhand right that put him down."

Garcia works with his world-class team—which consists of his brother Robert (a former world champion himself), and his father Eduardo—to work on tactics specific to his opponent for any given fight. "We practice the punch selection in the gym according to my opponents," Mikey said. "Depending on what we see in my opponents, my dad, my brother and I will figure out which punches will work most."

While it's important to plan and try to gain a good understanding of an opponent's habits, Garcia fully understands how important it is to be able to adjust should something change on fight night. "I've still got to be flexible inside of the ring to make adjustments. If we see something else is available or something doesn't work, I've got to be able to make those adjustments inside of the ring. I consider myself a thinking fighter where I can make those adjustments, and I can kind of read my opponent's body language, and read their punch selection before they even throw punches, just by the way they walk, the way they're leaning their body. So I'm very observant of things inside the ring, and that all helps me when I'm fighting and I'm actually choosing what to do in any given moment of a fight."

While observers appreciate Garcia's talent, specifics regarding his technique—like his exemplary footwork, control of distance, and some of the best punch selection in the sport—are often not mentioned. Mikey spoke about those skills and some of the tricks he's picked up over the years.

"It's back to fundamentals," Garcia said. "You know, basic footwork and ring generalship. We do subtle steps or subtle things that for the average person, they won't even be able to tell or

see what I'm doing. But for someone that follows the sport more deeply or is capable of seeing, picking up these little things—they can see I do have good timing and distance management, and good footwork. I do turn my opponents to different sides as I walk around them. But it's so subtle that people don't catch it. But I can use my left hand sometimes as a jab, or I'll hold him back with the left hand as a stiff arm, and maybe push him to the right a little bit as I take a step to the left. But I'm always on guard just in case I see an opening, I'm gonna let go of my right hand, or I'll let go of the right uppercut or something like that.

“And feinting to the right, if they're coming in close, maybe trying to get a body attack at me or something like that—then I might use my right hand and push them off, from the shoulder, push them out of the way and I spin the opposite way.”

Mikey is quick to give credit to his team for not only helping him develop in his craft, but for having the foresight to pit him against older, accomplished fighters when he was a teenager starting out. “I'm able to do that because my dad and my brother have taught me this. Some of the stuff I've picked up over the years with experience with sparring other fighters. I was sparring world champions at the age of 15. It's just stuff you pick up with experience.”

Now, Garcia is the more experienced champion and he's happy to pass on his knowledge to the younger generation of fighters. “I'm teaching that now to the kids here at the gym. We've got kids here who are only two-year pros, but have a lot more experience than anybody else because they've been sparring me, I've been teaching them, and it just helps develop a fighter. That's why I'm able to do that as well, because I had that sparring when I was young. When I was 15, 16, 17, I was sparring world champions, and it definitely makes a difference. You just see it in the ring. It's so subtle that for the average person, they won't even see it. They can't tell, they can't catch it. But ask any of my opponents and they'll tell you. If you talk to my opponents, or talk to my sparring partners. Not just guys that are on our team, but talk to my other sparring partners and they'll tell you the same thing. That it doesn't seem like a lot from the outside, but once you're inside the ring it's a whole different thing with me.”

Since Mikey is enjoying teaching technique to the kids at the gym, I asked if he's ever considered coaching once his boxing career is complete. “Not really,” he said. “I'll leave the coaching to my brother and my nephew Pita. They'll do the coaching. I don't plan on coaching fighters. If anything, maybe just advice here and there or little tips here and there is fine. But a full-time trainer, I just don't see myself doing. I think I have a better chance of being a manager or a promoter, that kind of a title in boxing after my career. Which I almost already am, helping some of the guys here with their fights.”

Tune in to Showtime on Saturday, February 10, when Garcia will face IBF junior welterweight world champion Sergey “Samurai” Lipinets (13–0, 10 KOs). Should he be victorious, this would be 30-year-old Mikey's fourth world title in as many weight classes.

**Mikey Garcia Exclusive: Talks Family, Top Rank, & Current Career Status**

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