Written by Deon Potgieter
Sunday, 21 November 2004 18:00

Lehlohonolo "Hands of Stone" Ledwaba was reborn on Saturday night in Brakpan, South Africa, putting on one of the finest performances of his career and clinically dissecting and out-boxing the classy Cassius Baloyi over 12-rounds in an IBO junior lightweight world title bout. The evening, which should have been filled with celebration, was instead ruined by the most incompetent judging I have ever seen.

Prior to the reading of the "decision," Baloyi's corner was consoling him, knowing he had lost his title. Cheers at the masterful display put on by the well conditioned and ripped Ledwaba soon turned to boos from everybody at ringside, as the result was awarded to Baloyi by a 4 and two 3-point margins. To say the decision was controversial is like saying Saddam Hussein is a misunderstood humanitarian.

Ledwaba was not robbed in this fight; he was raped by three men who have no business being near a boxing ring. If this is the caliber of judging which the IBO stands by, then I'll gladly help them throw their title belts in a garbage can, because that's the level of respect they earned in this particular fight. It's a travesty that what was a textbook performance and one of the most strategically fought fights seen in many years is now reduced to a negative experience, and yet another black eye for boxing.

Baloyi's trainer/manager Nic Durandt said after the fight, "If you'll all just stop booing, we'll gladly give Ledwaba a rematch." This just fuelled further boos. This was not a close bout and by no means should a rematch be given. There was a clear winner and champion and if the IBO wish to garner any credibility they should step up and reverse the decision, as well as ban the so-called "judges" from scoring future fights.

From the outset Ledwaba, who is in the best condition of his life, maintained his composure and dictated the bout. He attacked Baloyi's body to open up his head and then shot lighting fast uppercuts through the champion's usually ironclad defense. If Baloyi did not have a granite jaw he would have visited the canvas on at least 3 occasions and grimaced from the pain he absorbed from the "Hands of Stone."

Baloyi, who himself fought one of the best fights of his career, did land his razor-sharp jabs and opened a welt above Ledwaba's left eye. He had no answer, however, for Ledwaba's hand speed and movement around the ring, as well as his perfectly timed power punches. Ledwaba held a steady pace throughout the fight, only momentarily stepping off the gas in the 10th and 11th rounds, saving himself for a huge onslaught in the 12th.

In the last round both boxers let rip. Baloyi needed a knockout to win and went all out for it. He landed some well placed blows, but Ledwaba came back with a ferocious attack of his own. That Baloyi remained standing is a miracle in itself. That the decision was given to Baloyi was a sick joke. My advice for Ledwaba would be to forget about the IBO and Baloyi and to resume talks with Manny Pacquiao.

Ledwaba's back and he's spitting fire!