

## Fana Ready for Erik Morales

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When Erik "El Terrible" Morales takes on Carlos Hernandez in a WBC - IBF super featherweight unification bout on July 31, he'll be feeling the gaze of a lot of South African fight-fans. If successful, Morales is expected to defend against South African boxer of the year 2002, Mzonke Fana (22-2-9), the current # 1 contender for the WBC crown.

Fana put up a gutsy display last Friday (June 28) in defeating the # 2 rated Randy Suico (21-1 18) of the Philippines in Soweto in an official WBC eliminator. Suico has fantastic punching power and hurt Fana with almost every blow he landed. His style, however, is one dimensional. So the feisty South African, who is shorter and has a shorter reach, was able to outbox the man who counts heavily on his ability to stop his opponents. He dropped Fana in the second round, against the flow of the fight, with a short right uppercut. Fana recovered well however, but was again dropped in the fourth. This time by a right cross.

From the fifth round on, Fana fought behind a well timed left jab which jolted Suico's head back almost at will. Suico, who suffered a cut above his left eye in the second round, was taken aback by Fana's tenacity and found himself on the back-foot on many occasions. The OPBF champion Suico tried in vein to land a decisive blow again, but Fana's side-to-side movements kept him missing.

In the latter rounds Suico's energy was sapped and his blows did not carry the authority they did early on. Going into the last round there was no doubt that Fana was comfortably ahead on the scorecards, but then with one and a half minutes left in the fight, Suico caught his man. He landed five clear blows to Fana's head, which had the WBC international champion in all sorts of trouble. Somehow the valiant boxer, who hails from Cape Town, remained on his feet and lunged back at Suico, clinched and then threw his jab out to keep his attacker at bay.

Suico's bolt was shot and he couldn't land another blow on the continually moving target. In the end the judges rendered a split decision, two in favour of Fana by a 4 and 3 point margin and one to Suico with a 1 point margin. The knockdowns played a major role in keeping Suico in reach on the scorecards.

After the fight Fana declared himself ready to take on Morales, but will unfortunately have to continue playing the waiting game and will probably only get a world title opportunity in November. In the interim he will be kept active by making the fourth defence of his WBC international crown.

A Morales - Fana fight would be an interesting affair one that could be a classic encounter. Given that he has little power, it's unlikely that the South African would beat "El Terrible", but he has a tremendous heart, good hand speed and above average boxing ability. Whether that would be enough against one of the few active boxers in the world of legendary status remains to be seen.