

Acelino Freitas Did The Right Thing, The Wrong Way

Written by Steve Kim
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This past weekend Acelino Freitas did the unforgivable in the game of boxing. He quit. After taking his third knockdown from a hard-charging Diego Corrales, Freitas, instead of fighting on in a close contest and defending his WBO lightweight title and unblemished record, decided to call it a day.

Howls of disbelief and disgust have now come down on Freitas, and for good reason. Yes, there's no question that you don't want another ring tragedy, and it's easy for any of us sitting on our couch or behind our keyboard to say just how much bravery a fighter should have. After all, it takes a lot of stones just to go up those steps. But that is the pact that prizefighters make. They know the risks. There have been countless other boxers who have gone on in the face of insurmountable odds. Quitting, is not in their vocabulary.

But the hypocrisy comes on our end - as fans and writers - when we decry and bemoan the effects of fighters who have simply taken too much punishment throughout their careers and become poster children for why boxing should be abolished. So on one hand we are critical of guys who pull the plug the way Freitas did, but then at the same time cringe at the effects this game has on its participants.

When Freitas told referee Michael Ortega that he no longer wanted to continue in a championship fight in which he was ahead on one card, and down by only one and two on the other two, he forever tarnished his reputation.

I absolutely hate what Freitas did. In many respects he unearthed himself as a front runner who could not take what he routinely gave out. This is professional boxing at the highest level - you should expect to be in tough fights. When the going got tough, he got going - out of the fight. But you know what? I think he may have done the right thing. Yes, believe or not, he may have done what was prudent.

In watching that fight, it was clear that Freitas was spent physically. With all the running and jumping around he did early on, he had expended 15 rounds of energy in the first six. He had taken three hard knockdowns - and it has to be said in his defense, he did get up and fight after the first two - and while the scorecards were close, they were widening by the moment, with Corrales scoring three straight knockdowns.

Corrales was like the hunter who finally had his prey squarely in the cross-hairs, just before the third and final knockdown. He had juuuuust missed with some blistering right hands. It was written all over his face - Corrales knew that he had complete control of this fight. And for Freitas it didn't help that Corrales is one of the most lethal punchers in the game.

After getting sent to the canvas the third time, Freitas for the first time decided not to spit out his mouthpiece to gain more time to recover. When he got up he simply waved off the fight and walked to his corner. Sorry, if you have enough sensibility to not toss your gum shield, get up

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and then walk over to your corner, then you can still fight on. Again, I can't really blame Freitas though, things were only going to get worse and Corrales was coming on like gangbusters. But it's the manner in which he executed his exit that really rankles the masses.

Why not just take the ten count? Hey, no one had a problem with Alexis Arguello doing it in his rematch with Aaron Pryor, right? Hey, the guy was out-gunned and didn't want anymore. No problem, it happens. Or just fight the rest of the round and have your corner call it off in between the 10th and 11th rounds.

But the way Freitas did it, it gave the impression that a guy who could - and should - fight on, simply didn't. The way Freitas did it made him look like a quitter, not a guy that was simply beat. Fans can handle a guy who is defeated or simply doesn't have it on that day. But what fans absolutely detest are guys that quit. It's the dirty four letter word in the boxing vocabulary. And no matter how you slice it, there is no honor in that.

Also, by halting the fight the way he did, it took credit away from the strong performance of Corrales, who after getting out-maneuvered in the first half of the fight, slowly but steadily walked down Freitas, stuck to his game plan and then teed off on the Brazilian. The fight had a beautiful ebb-and-flow to it, with plenty of drama. But instead of focusing in on Corrales' strong showing, it's overshadowed by the actions of Freitas.

Ask Sugar Ray Leonard if he feels he's ever gotten the proper credit for his revenge win over Roberto Duran? All anyone ever brings up from that fight are two words: no mas.

But again, I remind you, perhaps Freitas did the right thing. It's his health and safety that's on the line. We don't walk in his shoes. And most likely he won't be regretting this decision one iota when he has all his faculties in order long after he's done boxing.

He did the right thing, the wrong way.