

Hopkins' De La Hoya KO a Thing of Beauty

Written by Rick Folstad
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It's hard to feel sorry for a guy who just made \$30 million and change, but seeing Oscar De La Hoya with his face down on the canvas, pounding his gloves on the ring floor in disappointment, was like watching Ol' Yeller get shot. It was a sad ending to a pretty good story.

Saturday's middleweight title fight between De La Hoya and Bernard Hopkins didn't flood us with fond memories of Leonard - Hagler. Even boxing commentator Larry Merchant could see it. He didn't tiptoe around the fight but waded into it, swinging haymakers of his own.

"I saw Leonard - Hagler," Merchant said during a lull in the fight.

"And this is not Leonard - Hagler."

Merchant was right. I've seen better fights in nightclub parking lots.

No, it wasn't Leonard - Hagler. It wasn't Gatti-Ward 1 or Ali - Frazier 1 or even Bowe-Holyfield 1. But it didn't have to be. It was two great fighters finally drawing a line in the sand and agreeing to duke it out and find out who the better man was at middleweight, whose career would shine a little brighter from that night on.

Turned out to be Hopkins' night. His shot to De La Hoya's liver in the ninth round was a thing of beauty, and it might have saved De La Hoya from taking a further beating in the final three rounds. How good was the body punch? It's on film and should be sent to the Boxing Hall of Fame and shown every hour.

The fight didn't live up to expectations. It wasn't close, but we'll live with it. And at least there was no whining, no conflicting scorecards, no referee controversy and no one claiming to be hypnotized, drugged or cheated. No one quit early or got seriously cut during the fight or demanded a rematch.

Unbelievably, no one made excuses.

Instead, it was a close, clean, technical (read, "boring") fight that was starting to lean in Hopkins' favor in the middle rounds before he ended it at the 1:38 mark of the ninth.

When it was over, Hopkins was a gracious winner, and De La Hoya took the loss like you were hoping he would take it. Quietly with his head up.

Because we all know now that De La Hoya had a built-in excuse if this fight didn't go right. With 11 stitches in his left palm from a cut he received Wednesday when his hand wraps were being cut off, he could have jumped on the injury and played it to the end.

But he didn't.

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Still, you have to wonder if they were using a machete to cut off Oscar's hand wraps. Three days before the biggest fight of his career, and the scissors slips? Who's working with De La Hoya, the Marx Brothers? Makes you wonder what really happened.

A Controversy?

Like Ol' Yeller, let it rest in peace.