

Billy Irwin: 'The Kid' No More

Written by Joey Knish

Wednesday, 26 January 2005 18:00

Last Friday night Billy "The Kid" Irwin acknowledged he was a "kid" no more and hung up his professional boxing gloves for good. Boxing's Father Time tapped Irwin on the shoulder and retired the fighter with a career mark of 42-6, with 30 victories by way of knockout.

Irwin's defeat to 21-year-old Juan Diaz was proof that the sport belonged to fighters far younger than he, and at 36 years of age he made his last ring entrance. Prior to the bout Irwin stated he would be retiring after the ESPN televised bout. When asked whether that meant he would hang up the gloves even if he won the WBA lightweight title that was at stake, Irwin answered with a matter of fact "yes." Unfortunately, that dilemma is something Irwin never had the opportunity to debate after being stopped for the first time in his career, by the "Baby Bull."

Irwin found boxing's youngest reigning world champion simply too fast and too strong for a man 15 years his elder. Diaz jumped on Irwin from the opening bell and spent great lengths of the bout with Irwin leaning back on the ropes taking shots, catching many on his arms, but with enough making scoring impressions. The constant barrage left Irwin with little room to breathe, let alone mount any offensive attack of his own.

Diaz' nonstop pressure caused Irwin to take a knee in the second round as a means to get some space, stop the onslaught, take some momentum away from Diaz and let himself regroup. Unfortunately none of that transpired, as Diaz was an unrelenting punching machine on this night.

Perhaps the most damaging blow of the night was landed in the third when a Diaz caught Irwin with a thumb to the eye of the Niagara Falls, Ontario native. Irwin immediately clutched at the eye and it would be a problem for the remainder of the night. Each round was a replay of the previous three minutes as WBA champion Diaz pinned the veteran Irwin on the ropes and threw punches in bunches as the eye continued to swell. By the time the bout was stopped at the midway point of the ninth round, the eye was nearly completely shut and Irwin had yet to find an answer to Diaz' speed and youth. While he wasn't in trouble when referee Earl Morton stepped in, neither Irwin nor his corner opposed the stoppage.

It was the end to the career of a consummate pro.

In December of 2000, Irwin became just the second Canadian lightweight to challenge for a world title when he took on slick southpaw Paul Spadafora in Pittsburgh for the IBF belt. Irwin came into that bout on an eleven-fight win streak with each victory coming by knockout. Again, he was the older fighter, but some observers felt his experience would play in his favor. It didn't. Spadafora boxed beautifully, as he had been known to do, and Irwin came up short on the scorecards.

While a major belt eluded Irwin his entire career, he did lay claim to the IBO lightweight title, in addition to the Continental Americas version of the WBC belt, Commonwealth title and

Billy Irwin: 'The Kid' No More

Written by Joey Knish

Wednesday, 26 January 2005 18:00

Canadian lightweight championship. He also represented his country in 1992 at the Olympics in Barcelona but did not finish in the medal rounds.

With a straightforward style and ability to take a big-time shot - the Diaz bout was the first time Irwin had ever been stopped and he was still on his feet when the end came - Irwin's presence always made for entertaining bouts as he was often one punch away from ending things with his power, most notably a lethal left hook. He was a regular at the legendary Blue Horizon and was exactly the type of fighter fans in Philadelphia really came to appreciate. He will be missed.

Irwin's longtime trainer Pat Kelly - who discovered Billy Irwin at 14 years of age when he truly was a "kid" - always told Billy "The Kid" Irwin, "if you lose, you're yesterday's news." Today we pay homage to a tough Canadian kid who was professional, gave everything he had and did so until the very end - because tomorrow he will be yesterday's news.