

Chavez vs. Randall: The Judges Get One Right

Written by Pat Putnam

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Julio Cesar Chavez was always a favorite of mine, a no-nonsense warrior unencumbered by clemency, an assassin who looked with disdain upon pickpockets, a man who always knew when it was time to put down the hammer and pick up a drink. He was a Don King fighter, which is not always a bad thing. He was a friend of Jose Sulaiman; that, too, was not a bad thing. With benefactors like that in his corner, Chavez knew always that the three guys being led into the arena by guide dogs were the judges. Most often, Chavez did not need any help, but King and Sulaiman are cautious souls. But then there was the time when the Mexican fighter and the American promoter had a falling out over money, and King called his pudgy buddy in Mexico City and . . .

LAS VEGAS, January 1994----Julio Cesar Chavez, en route to becoming Mexico's favorite whine, lost another fight, this time in Las Vegas, and this time, finally, two of the three judges scored it right. As promoter Don King said as he climbed past his battered champion to get into the ring at the MGM Grand Hotel to hear how the officials had scored last Saturday night's WBC super welterweight title fight: "Not this time, Julio."

"Screw you, Don King," countered Chavez, just missing old Frightened Hair with a sweeping backhand. Across the way, referee Richard Steele, who had penalized Chavez twice for low blows, and 32 year old Frankie Randall, who had floored the frustrated champion in the 11th round, watched the falling out with curious stares.

"We have a split decision," said ring announcer Jimmy Lennon.

"Oh, Lord," groaned a front row spectator. "Pernell Whitaker beat Chavez eight out of 12 rounds and he at least got a mandatory draw. I guess poor Frankie isn't even going to get that."

But time and justice (and a temporary falling out with King) had finally caught up with the 31 year old unbeaten superstar from Culiacan, Mexico, although Abraham Chavarria, one of the three judges and a Mexican, tried valiantly to lift Chavez's record to 90 0 1. But unlike the WBC bandit judges who robbed Whitaker in San Antonio last September, Chavarria was left this time to swing alone.

Chavarria scored it for Chavez, 114 113. But then, that came as no surprise. Just before the fight started, the Mexican judge leaned forward in his seat, caught Chavez's eye, and gave him a thumbs up signal. For Chavarria, it was not a matter of judging who had won, but of Chavez by how many.

Fortunately, judges Chuck Giampa of Nevada (116 111) and Angel Luis Guzman of Puerto Rico (114 113), who scored it for Randall, paid more attention to the actual fight, which was a

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successive series of violent waves broken only by the two points Chavez lost for low blows and the crisp right hand Randall used to drop the champion for a five count in the 11th round.

Chavez's greatest strength has always been his incredible will; his attacks are relentless, ceasing only when the other man, his own will wrecked, surrenders. But as had Whitaker, Randall rode out the fury of each storm, and then counter attacked with a fury surely as equal, and at times even more violent. From the third round on, during the rare moments of peace, Chavez would stare at Randall, seemingly bemused, as though asking: "Hey, buddy, don't you know who I am? You aren't supposed to do this to me."

But Chavez has become used to dining on people like Jaime Balboa and Jorge Melian and Othoniel Lopez; fifty of his 89 victims went to the wall in Mexico. It is suspected that a substantial number of the 89 arrived at their fights in the cab they drove for a living. Most of the other losers came during Chavez's reign as a lightweight, where he was savagely superb. But now he fights at 140 pounds, and the years and the wars have sent in the cruel accountants, and his body is slowly making payments.

"And don't forget me," said Whitaker from his home in Norfolk Sunday as he prepared to watch the Super Bowl. A non boxing fan, the WBC welterweight champion had skipped the SET pay per view fight telecast. "But I'm not surprised. I took a lot out of Chavez. I think Randall should at least credit me with an assist."

A gifted athlete in his own right, Randall has been fighting since he was nine. From his start as a 69 pounder, he won 220 or 236 amateur fights, was a five time Golden Glove champion and a six time junior Olympic champion. Since he began fighting for a paycheck, he won 48 of 51 fights with one draw. Two of his victories came over former world champions, Fred Pendleton and Edwin Rosario, two others over top contenders Sammy Fuentes and Rodolfo Aguilar. "I like what I do and I think I am very good at it," he says simply.

On a 17 victory streak going in as a 15 1 underdog against Chavez, his rising star had been briefly interrupted by a prison term in 1989 and 1990. "As a favor for a friend I got him some cocaine," he says. "It was a one time deal but I got caught in the middle of a sting and I paid for it. I regret it but I've lived through it and I've shown I'm not that kind of person."

While his will was failing to break Randall, or to even make him bend, Chavez was also having problems with his hooks landing well below the belt line. He is notorious for hitting low, a crime usually unpunished, but this time Steele said he would have none of it. After repeated warnings, the referee took a point away in the seventh round.

Another point was deducted in the 11th round. This one proved too costly for Chavez to overcome. That was the round that Randall met one of the champion's assaults with a perfect right hand to the chin and dropped him. It was the first time Chavez had ever been knocked off his feet.

Up at the count of five, the champion took the mandatory count of eight. With less than 15 seconds remaining in the round, he rode out Randall's last furious burst. On one card,

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Guzman's, the low blow and knockdown added up to a 10 7 round for Randall; on the other two it was 10 8. The three-point swing made the difference in Guzman's final scoring and swung the split decision over to Randall.

"Richard Steele is a dirty bleep," Chavez screamed in Spanish after the decision was announced. "The low blow in the 11th round never even landed. I had been hitting him with those shots all night. I've very upset with Steele. He's a bleeper. I'm going to take him to the commission."

Upset by Chavez's tirade, Steele would say only: "Look at the tapes of the fight. I believe you will see all of the low blows."

Chavez charged that the officials—at least the two who voted against him—were unduly swayed by the knockdown. "It was only one fall. Sugar Ray Leonard fell down. Muhammad Ali fell down. And they still won. How can you lose a fight because of one fall? It is not right. I respect Randall but he only won three rounds. I won and I am still the champion. I demand a rematch immediately." And on and on, in Spanish, of course.

Never one to pass up a lucrative promotion, King had the Chavez Randall rematch made a half hour after the first fight was over. King already had a Chavez Meldrick Taylor rematch signed for May 7 at the MGM Grand. As he is fond of saying, King once more went where the wild goose flew; he simply crossed out Taylor's name, wrote in Randall's. Sorry, Meldrick. Figures to be negotiated, of course.

Told the news, Chavez managed a wry smile. There was a cut on the bridge of his nose; Randall's fists had made his face look like five miles of Mexican roads. Then the crybaby took the \$1.2 million he had earned and went home to Culican, where his relatives, friends and neighbors were bellied up to the bar waiting for him to buy.

Officially his record is now 89 ONE 1. Sometimes the judges get one right.