

Zab Judah Finally Learns To Lets His Hands Go

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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This past Saturday night Zab Judah won the undisputed welterweight championship of the world by stopping champion Cory Spinks in the ninth round in Spinks' hometown of St. Louis. Judah's impressive victory over Spinks is without a doubt the signature fight of his career.

This was Judah's second shot at Spinks' undisputed title and a rematch of their first fight back in April 2004. Spinks retained the title that night by winning a twelve-round unanimous decision over Judah. In their first meeting Spinks was able to outbox a very passive Judah and had things pretty much his way for the first ten rounds of the bout. In the eleventh round Spinks knocked Judah down. Spinks' knockdown of Judah was exactly what Judah must have needed. In the twelfth round Judah came out fighting more aggressively than he did in the previous eleven rounds against Spinks. Judah hurt Spinks and put him down in the twelfth, but it was too little too late and he left the ring as he entered it - without the title.

In retrospect, the knockdown of Spinks by Judah in the last round of their first meeting looks like it may have been the first round of the rematch. Spinks was hurt by Judah in that last round, which right then and there, as proven by their rematch, may have been when Spinks lost some of his confidence and Judah gained some of his. Judah hurting Spinks at the end of the fight was enough for the seed of doubt to creep into Spinks' mind. The rolls of the two fighters and how they would approach and fight in the rematch would be reversed.

In his first fight against Spinks, Judah fought somewhat tentatively and appeared to this observer to be a little unsure of himself and what he wanted to do. I'll never understand why, since Cory Spinks is not a big puncher who is capable of ending the fight with one punch. The reservation on the part of Judah worked to Spinks' advantage, since he's most comfortable while fighting in spurts, moving and boxing. Judah's lack of aggression during the first eleven rounds was the deciding factor in the fight and the sole reason why he lost. Why Judah fought the way he did against Spinks with the undisputed title on the line was something that led many to start reevaluating Judah as a fighter. However, Judah's physical assertion over Spinks at the end of the first fight provided his confidence with the needed injection that carried him into the rematch.

Judah approached the rematch with Spinks with the mindset that he would fight as the predator with Spinks being his prey. Judah, who is a flashy southpaw boxer, brought the fight to Spinks throughout most of the bout and let his hands go. Pushing the fight and letting his hands go enabled Judah to control and physically dictate the terms of the fight.

Judah's strategic adjustment versus Spinks Saturday night made all the difference in the world. Zab deciding to let his hands go forced Spinks to react to what he was doing, instead of allowing Cory to pick his spots and box. With Judah on the attack as he brought the fight to Spinks, the champion was forced to either run and hold, or fight. And it was obvious that Spinks didn't think he could win fighting Judah. Spinks, however, tried to do a little of both, which enabled Judah to impose himself more physically as the fight went on. The physically stronger

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Judah started to wear Spinks down in the second half of the fight.

Judah caught Spinks with some big punches at the end of the seventh round and dropped the champion, but referee Armando Garcia ruled that Spinks hit the canvas after the bell. Despite the overruling of the knockdown, it didn't erase the fact Spinks was hurt. Judah came out in the eighth round looking to finish Spinks and went on the attack again.

In the ninth round Judah nailed Spinks a devastating left hand that had Spinks just about out on his feet. Judah stayed on top of Spinks, letting his hands go in combinations and dropped Spinks for the first time - officially - in the fight. Spinks beat the count but was seriously hurt and in trouble. Again Judah stalked Spinks and kept firing punches at him, resulting in the fight being stopped at 2:49 of the ninth round.

Since turning pro in 1996, Zab Judah has been touted as being a special fighter capable of possibly achieving greatness in the ring, something he has not done yet. Judah may not be a great fighter yet, but in his rematch with Cory Spinks Saturday night he showed that he is capable of adjusting to his opponent's style. Judah made one strategic adjustment in his fight plan - fighting more aggressively and letting his hands go – which resulted in him scoring what has to be regarded as the biggest win of his career. One simple adjustment turned out to be the difference between Judah having some tough career decisions to make and being the undisputed welterweight champion of the world.

With his stoppage victory over Spinks, Judah raises his record to 33-2 (25) and sits atop a welterweight division that may be the new home for the likes of Oscar De La Hoya, Shane Mosley and Kostya Tszyu in the very near future. If Judah plans on defending the title against those marquee fighters, he better let his hands go and fight with the same sort of urgency he showed against Spinks, or he'll be an ex-champ when the fight is over.