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A capacity crowd in the Orient Theater in East London, South Africa witnessed some of the finest boxing seen in this region in many years on Friday night. Masibulela “Hawk” Makepula put up the smoothest and slickest display of his career to convincingly outbox Rolly Lunas over 12 rounds to claim the WBC International super flyweight title, and Gabula “The Tiger” Vabaza put up a solid performance in clinching the WBA intercontinental title with the dismantling of Roger Galicia, despite an early scare.

While Lunas was admittedly no where near the league of the Hawk, he did put on a gutsy performance and the fight was consistently entertaining throughout the 12 rounds. Neither fighter ever backed down and both threw big blows throughout. Makepula, who looked like a well-oiled machine from the opening bell, put on an exhibition of how to correctly use combinations and alter your attack while throwing every type of punch a boxer could have in his arsenal. He rocked Lunas on many occasions, attacking the body and the head, breaking through Luna’s defenses with quick jabs and pile driving uppercuts. A lesser fighter than Luna would have been stopped as early as the 5th round.

Makepula looked a world champion. His only weakness in the fight was allowing Lunas to score with crisp right hooks to his head - so much so that a small cut appeared on the shaven-headed warrior’s right temple. Lunas landed two consecutive rights to the temple at the end of round 5 which troubled Hawk, and had the round continued it would have been interesting to see what would have transpired. That was the only time Makepula was in trouble and he remained in control of the bout after that.

The crowd in attendance often rose to their fight as the two boxers went toe to toe, with Makepula almost always coming out on top. Even though Makepula was the more dangerous fighter, Lunas still looked capable of scoring a knockout right up until the closing bell. Both of these boxers deserve a wider audience. The super flyweight division better watch out: because The Hawk is back and he’s better than ever.

In the main event of the evening, Gabula “The Tiger” Vabaza could not look more like a Tommy Hearns clone had he not gotten plastic surgery. He had the same stare in his eyes, the same ring movements, and he carried his fists the same way as Detroit’s “Hitman.” Vabaza’s flashy straight jab was textbook Hearns. He may not be as fast as the legend, but Vabaza looks as though he’s going places. From the opening round Vabaza knew he could control the fight. This confidence led to him dropping his guard, however, and Roger Galicia caught him with a sensational uppercut square on the jaw in the second round. This was a huge wake-up call for Vabaza - who looked more alarmed than hurt - when he climbed up off the canvas.

From there on out Vabaza chose to keep out of reach of the hard-hitting Galicia and to pepper him from a distance, only coming in close to throw his combinations. The fact that Galicia was able to drop “The Tiger” so early on put him under the misconception that all he need do is look for that one big punch. When most boxers adopt this strategy they end up losing. But Vabaza

also displayed fantastic boxing skills and varied his attack from the body to the head. This fight too was a pleasure to watch. In the end there could be no doubt of the winner. Expect to hear more of this talented fighter in the near future.

Witnessing the performances put on by both Makepula and Vabaza - seeing boxers who actually have skills and use them to the fullest in front of a capacity crowd - warmed my heart. The art of boxing is alive and well in South Africa. On the strength of these performances my optimism for the future is returning. Makepula and Vabaza are promoted by Branco Milenkovic, who also handles Mzonke Fana, who will be challenging Marco Antonio Barrera for the WBC junior lightweight world title in April.

This was the first bill put on by the new partnership of Milenkovic and former 3-time world champion Baby Jake Matlala, and to be honest I think it was the best by Branco Productions to date. Milenkovic, voted the promoter of the year two years ago at the SA Boxing Awards, is presently the most active promoter in the country, with Rodney Berman's Golden Gloves, who held that honor for close on 25 years, seemingly having run is course.

In other South African boxing action, former IBO and WBU cruiserweight world champion Sebastian Rothman out-boxed South African heavyweight champion Anton Nel over 10 rounds in a non-title affair in Brakpan on Thursday night. With a lack of quality heavyweights in the country at the moment, this was, unfortunately, one of the only good matches that could be made in the division.