

Hatton Stops Tszyu in Stunner

Written by Jake Donovan
Saturday, 04 June 2005 19:00

Many said that a **Ricky Hatton** win over **Kostya Tszyu** on June 4, 2005 could only happen once in a blue moon. Hatton's ring entrance provided the blue moon, and Ricky provided the rest in the ring, as his swarming style and never ending work rate forced the long-reigning champion to retire on his stool after eleven completed rounds. His efforts earned him the IBF junior welterweight division, silencing millions of doubters in the process

Hatton promised a "subtle swarm" in the weeks leading up to the fight, which began at 2AM Manchester time, enabling the stateside fans to catch the action live on SHOWTIME. He stayed true to his word, landing shots from the outside and staying pinned to Tszyu's chest to prevent the champ from getting off. While Tszyu had his share of success in several rounds, Hatton's tactic for the most part worked. As the fight wore on, Hatton was the fresher and busier fighter. Tszyu was more accurate with his counter shots, but was forced to work much harder than he ever has in his thirteen-year career.

The early going suggested an ugly fight, with a lot of clinching going on in the opening round. Hatton was successful with his left hook early, but also mixed in a little too much roughhousing for referee Dave Parris' liking. Parris warned Hatton early for hitting behind the head, as a rabbit punch landed for Hatton in one of many clinches.

After dealing with two rounds of Hatton's smothering attack, Tszyu began to gauge his right hand in round three. Hatton continued to swarm, but was landing less as Tszyu found success with counter shots. Tszyu began working the body, looking to slow down the challenger nine years his junior. It didn't work, as Hatton went right back to his high-octane rate in the fourth. Tszyu's best moments were met with counter shots to the body, and looping rights which set up double left hooks downstairs and upstairs. After being warned for hitting on the break, Tszyu was caught with a short right hand by Hatton toward the end of the fourth. For the first time in his career, Kostya was down on the cards at the end of four rounds, and he began sensing that perhaps it just wouldn't be his night.

"I was hurt early, and tired and exhausted as the fight went on," revealed an ever-humble Tszyu at fight's end. "I had a great training camp, and was in the best shape of my life. But something was wrong."

Not to the sold-out crowd of 22,000. They cheered every move made by their hometown hero, and booed anything associated with Tszyu. They even booed the Australian National Anthem in the lone classless act of the evening. They otherwise remained civil throughout, and erupted at the start and end of every round.

Ricky gave them plenty of reason to cheer in the fifth round, his best of the evening to that point. In a bit of role reversal, Hatton was timing Tszyu's shots and landing counters of his own throughout the round. He also enjoyed much success with a leaping left hook from the outside, which allowed him to work his way back inside. Such was Hatton's game plan throughout, as he

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had no desire to become yet another Tszyu victim.

“Kostya has knocked out plenty of people who have given him the space to get off,” said Hatton, revealing what he was studying for months, and as late as the minutes before he began his walk to the ring. “Sharmba Mitchell, the great Zab Judah – they gave him just enough space to get wasted. My plan for months was to not allow him to get off, and I executed.”

That he did, but not before being forced to survive a Tszyu rally midway through. As Hatton showed signs of fatigue for the first time, Tszyu was dialing in with his right hand. Hatton still charged forward as he did all night, but was getting sloppy and missing far more than was the case earlier in the fight. Tszyu appeared to turn the tide big time toward round’s end. A big right hand landed for the champ, as did a debilitating body shot that crumpled Hatton to the canvas. The referee waved off the knockdown, ruling the shot a low blow. Replays showed that the shot was borderline and could be called either way. Regardless, Tszyu appeared to be very much back in the fight after seven completed rounds. He was ahead on two of the three unofficial ringside scorers selected by US-based network SHOWTIME, who carried the broadcast on this side of the Atlantic.

Hatton regained his form in the eighth, and save for a few Tszyu moments here and there, the 26-year-old seemed to take over for good. Hatton’s subtle swarm began to get the best of Tszyu, who pushed the challenger to the ground at one point in the eighth round. Kostya rallied back in the ninth in looking to keep up with his younger foe. His greatest success was to the body, though a series of shots late in the round strayed low. Referee Dave Parris warned Tszyu for the infraction before action resumed. Showing he was not to be intimidated, Hatton responded with a vicious left hook well below the belt. The shot forced Tszyu to his knees, and drew a warning from Parris, who threatened to take a point for the next foul. After a brief meeting in center ring, action resumed and Hatton landed a right just before the bell.

Tszyu started out strong to start the tenth, but consecutive leaping left hooks would turn things back in Ricky’s favor. Proving many critics wrong, Hatton actually became stronger – and the effective aggressor – as the fight wore on. Along with Hatton’s nonstop work rate, Tszyu was also forced to contend with a mouse under his left eye and apparent fatigue setting in. Tszyu was still scoring with his counter right, but now Hatton was responding with forceful combos in driving the champ to the ropes throughout the frame. As was the case in nearly every round, Hatton finished strong, again landing a right to end the round.

After eating a right hand to start the eleventh, Hatton charged forward and landed right hands of his own. Tszyu was forced to the ropes, and was running out of answers. Hatton’s speed and body work were far too much for Tszyu’s counters, as he seemed to put the icing on the cake with the fight heading into the final round as far as the cards were concerned. His corner would not allow him to coast, though.

“You can’t stop now, Ricky! BOX, BOX, BOX!”

Hatton never had the chance to carry out the instructions. While his corner was looking to end strong, a dejected Tszyu sat in the opposite corner as lead trainer Johnny Lewis shouted over

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his assistant, "You gotta stop it. No more ... no more ... no more."

Referee Dave Parris respected Lewis' wishes and waved the bout off prior to the start of the twelfth and final round. Hatton leaped off of his stool, before falling to the canvas flat on his back to the delight of the crowd. After celebrating with his parents at ringside, the winner and new champion grabbed the ring mic and thanked his fans for years of undying support.

"I always said I was number one," exclaimed a thrilled yet humbled Hatton. "You the fans deserve this as much as me. There is only one word I can use for your support: legendary."

The word could also describe Hatton's performance, as he far exceeded nearly everyone's expectations. So brilliant were his efforts throughout, that he held a commanding lead on the cards at the time of the stoppage. Judge Don Ackerman had it 107-102, while Manuel Malitxalar had it two rounds closer at 105-104. Judge Alfred Asaro had it 106-103, same as *TheSweetScience*. Such was the second time in a decade Asaro participated in a huge upset in the UK; he served as third man for the brutally tragic war between Nigel Benn and Gerald McClellan in their February 1995 encounter in London.

It was the first time that Hatton fought in a fight of this magnitude. He never questioned his chances of pulling it off; all he wanted was the chance to do so.

"I'm just so humbled by what I achieved tonight. I knew I was ready for this step up," insisted Hatton afterward. "I knew I was ready for this level. I'm only 26 and am starting to peak. It was the perfect time to catch him."

He caught him at the right time, as Tszyu left the door open for a possible retirement.

"Right now, it's just emotions, so I don't want to answer," said Tszyu when Showtime's Al Bernstein posed the question. "I want to go home, rest, and then come back with a cool mind and answer that question. Tonight, I had no answers for Hatton. I thought I was three or four points behind at the end. Johnny (Lewis) suggested I stop the fight, and asked me if I wanted to continue. I offered no response, and he made the decision for me. I didn't complain afterward, and won't. (Hatton) worked very hard for this; he deserved the win. I offered my help to him for the future. I want to help the good guys."

He can start with himself. If Tszyu does in fact retire, he can go out knowing his place in boxing history. He ranks as one of the greatest junior welterweights of all time. Some consider him the greatest; all consider him to be one of the classiest acts in the sport of boxing. Hatton also exuded class and took the time to honor Tszyu as a legend.

"If I can be half the champion that Kostya Tszyu was," Hatton said, "then I will have a great career."

It began tonight, with one of the greatest moments in British boxing history.

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As has been the case all year, another great boxing moment was brought to you by SHOWTIME, along with Sky TV. The show was promoted by Frank Warren's Sports Network and Vlad Warton's Millennium Events.