

Corrales-Castillo II – Revenge or Replay?

Written by Joey Knish
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Thinking back at the best bouts of the year-to-date, I couldn't help but reflect on the May meeting between Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo. In case you missed it, shame on you. For those who did witness it, the bout was an epic battle. And now looking ahead to their scheduled rematch in October just makes one giddy with anticipation.

After ten rounds of brawling, "Chico" Corrales won by stunning stoppage in the tenth round after having been knocked down not once, but twice in that very same round. While there was some debate at the time over whether the fight should have stopped when it was, watching it a second or third time (or a fourth as I just did), it is clear that referee Tony Weeks did an outstanding job of overseeing the fight. Castillo was taking power shots from the heavy-handed Corrales and had stopped firing back, his hands dangerously and defenselessly low.

At the time of the stoppage, Corrales was ahead on two cards, 87-84 and 86-85, while the third favored Jose Luis Castillo 87-84. A case could be made that the fight was dead even, as beauty is often in the eye of the beholder. And, until this moment, there still was no clear cut victor, other than the fans.

One point I'd like to make note of as we look ahead to the second meeting between these two warriors is this: the role of referee Weeks cannot be understated in making the first fight as good as it was. Weeks was great.

It is not often that one can accurately comment on the officiating of a fight and heap praise on the third man in the ring. This fight was different. Weeks was tactful in breaking up the fighters the few times that he did, but spent much of the night telling the two combatants "manos libre." "Manos libre" is Spanish for "hands free" and meant that if your hands were free you should be using them. And so they did.

Another ref could easily have intervened much more than the veteran Tony Weeks did, and the fight could have turned out differently. If forced to break in the clinches, the bout may have become more of a boxing match than the thrilling slugfest it was. A boxing match would have favored Diego Corrales more than Castillo, as Jose Luis is known for his great work on the inside and solid body work. In theory, the lanky Corrales would have had to work behind his jab and follow with solid right hands behind them while the Mexicali, Mexico native Castillo tried to work his way inside.

Instead, Corrales, of Sacramento, California, chose to fight Castillo's fight and welcomed the challenge of winning a war, which he did. But he was able to do that in part due to Weeks allowing the men to fight in close quarters and work their way out of the clinches. The fighters both made the fight great and Weeks was instrumental in allowing that to happen.

Looking ahead to October later this year we can only hope that the rematch comes remotely close to their spring classic. The third man in the ring may have a say in that, but with the

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Castillo camp not accepting the stoppage as warranted, we can assume that Weeks won't be the man.

An interesting point to ponder is exactly how Diego Corrales approaches this next fight. In the first bout he allowed the fight to be waged in close where Castillo is most comfortable. Against Joel Casamayor in 2003 Corrales lost the fight, as he fought much of the bout inside and in pursuit; in the rematch the following year he made it a much easier fight by working off his jab and dominating with his height and reach. Any fight with Jose Luis Castillo is never easy, but the rematch – potentially – could be less taxing on Corrales compared to the first bout.

Whether trainer Joe Goossen asks "Chico" to fight on the outside is one thing, whether Corrales actually does it is another. In the fateful tenth round of the first match when Diego went down the first time, he went to the corner to have his mouthpiece – which he had intentionally spit out – put back in. Goossen told his fighter that he better get inside on Castillo. The idea is that if you get inside on an opponent you accomplish two things: (1) you can get close enough to hold and buy some time to collect yourself, and (2) you also avoid being at the end of your opponent's punches where they carry the most force and do the most damage. After the second knockdown, with Corrales losing his mouthpiece a second time (and a point to go with it), Goossen added some profanity as he implored Corrales to get inside.

The fight continued as it had been fought before – in close – and "Chico" caught the oncoming Jose Luis with heavy shots as Castillo looked to land the final blow ... but ended up on the wrong end of it. Castillo looked to be out on his feet and in serious trouble before Weeks stepped in to put an end to one of the best rounds in recent memory, and left us wanting more.

On October 8th later this year we get our "more" as Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo do it one more time. Corrales claims he wanted to prove to the world what he was made of and that he could win a war. He did. With the WBC and WBO titles on the line once more, along with the right to be called the best lightweight in the world, we'll see if "Chico" can maintain his hold on that claim.

It won't be easy, but it might be great.