

## Baloyi wins in defeat

Written by Deon Potgieter

Saturday, 03 September 2005 19:00

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Isaac “Angel” Hlatswayo lost more than he gained in winning the IBO lightweight world title at Carnival City in Brakpan on Wednesday night. While some are blowing his trumpet very loudly following the points win over Cassius “The Hitman” Baloyi, after his performance I’m questioning whether this guy has not been prematurely overrated – by me.

Before I embellish, here’s a brief rundown of the bout billed as the “Fight of the Decade.”

Round one: Hlatswayo is filled with ferocity and tries to put every ounce of his strength into each punch he throws. Baloyi stands tall and looks unintimidated by the bigger man, while Hlatswayo looks tense, lacks fluidity and starts out of a crouching style which negates his size advantage. Crowd and apparently judges are impressed by the aggressive attitude of the Angel. I scored the round even.

Round two: Hlatswayo again comes out pumped and looking to enforce his authority with sheer power. Baloyi uses his jab well, but gets caught with a straight right which has him down. This makes the Angel only the second man ever to drop Baloyi, the other being Steve Robinson when the two clashed for Baloyi’s WBU featherweight crown. I score it Hlatswayo 10-8.

Round three: Even though he was dropped and it was the first time ever he’s fought at lightweight, Baloyi is prepared to mix it with a man known for roughing up his opponents up close. Hlatswayo is caught while off balance and legs wobble, but seemingly no damage done. Clear both boxers are intent on victory and that we could have a war in the making. Baloyi lands more punches although not as hard as Hlatswayo’s. I score it Baloyi 10 -9.

Round four: This was a beautiful example of speed vs. power. Baloyi is slippery as he moves around and makes it hard for Hlatswayo to land. Baloyi waits for Hlatswayo to start throwing his bombs and then beats him to the punch with fast jabs. Baloyi lands more but Hlatswayo’s punches earn more respect. I score it even.

Round five: Hlatswayo bangs two hard lefts to Baloyi’s temple followed by a stiff right to Baloyi’s granite jaw. The Angel has him in trouble on the ropes and then inexplicably lets him push his way out and ease behind his left jab again. Hlatswayo clearly has respect for Baloyi’s blows so perhaps the early exchanges were more telling than anybody thought. Hlatswayo again tags Baloyi with a left hook as he moves away, but the three-time “world champ” comes back for more and the two are mixing it as the bell rings. I score it Hlatswayo 10-9.

Round six: Instead of following up on the previous round’s action, a more subdued Hlatswayo takes his time looking for the opening. Baloyi works well behind his jab and throws some quick combinations which leave Hlatswayo tasting leather and wondering where it comes from. Hlatswayo comes in, but Baloyi refuses to back down and the two mix it madly. As they go for it ferociously against the ropes with their backs to me, I’m spattered by a spray of sweat. They were with their backs against the ropes where I was sitting on a number of occasions, and I can

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only assume that what transpired there made the difference between the way I saw the fight and the way the judges did. I score it Hlatswayo 10-9.

Round seven: Baloyi's right eye starts swelling, but his superior hand speed is again on display. Hlatswayo steps up at the end of the round and rocks Baloyi's head back on the bell. I score it Baloyi 10-9.

Round eight: Baloyi dominates round with his jab and Hlatswayo now fights off the back foot. Hlatswayo again impresses the judges with a surge at the end and again rocks Baloyi at the bell. I score it Baloyi 10 -9.

Round nine: Baloyi's eye is half-closed by the swelling. He continues to move forward and throw jabs while Hlatswayo stays on the back foot and counterpunches with hard blows. I find it interesting that in his previous fight Baloyi was running away from the smaller Lehlo Ledwaba, but was prepared to stand in front of and hunt down the bigger Hlatswayo fearlessly. Hlatswayo lands big blows but Baloyi keeps moving forward and lands more punches. I score it Baloyi 10-9.

Round ten: Hlatswayo comes out of his delirium and attacks Baloyi with a barrage of blows and forces him up against the ropes. Baloyi uses ropes well to avoid his biggest blows however and few land cleanly. Baloyi comes back with his ever-effective lightning-fast jab. Hlatswayo lands a huge right and throws some well-timed combinations that have Baloyi in trouble at the bell. I score it Hlatswayo 10-9.

Round 11: Sensational action as both boxers rally and land good blows. The crowd starts cheering "Isaac, Isaac, Isaac." He gets some solid punches in, but Baloyi keeps coming at him and Hlatswayohe stays on the back foot and counters. Round ends with Baloyi coming on strong and Hlatswayo up against the ropes. I score it Baloyi 10-9.

Round 12: Fight continues on same trend with Baloyi moving forward and darting his blows into Hlatswayo's face. While the Angel still looked strong, his mouth was bloody. He connected with another big right, but Baloyi landed a big left in return. I scored Baloyi 10-9.

Judges scored it: 119 – 108; 117 – 112; 116 -112 all for Hlatswayo.

I scored it 115 -114 for Baloyi. Perhaps I was impressed by the fact that Baloyi landed more blows, but clearly I must have been watching a different fight, or perhaps it's all those times their backs were facing me. In any event, I call it as I see it and I'm not convinced Hlatswayo earned a win here. Then again, I thought Baloyi had lost his two outings against Ledwaba.

In any event, the result aside, there are two things which no one can dispute. First up, I must give props to Baloyi. There was not much more he could have done in this fight. He took the best Hlatswayo had to offer; he continually moved forward and landed more punches. The only factor was that he did not possess the power at lightweight to hurt his opponent. Remember, this man was a former WBU junior feather and featherweight champion and now holds the IBO junior lightweight crown, while Hlatswayo should really be fighting as a junior welterweight.

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Prior to this I thought Baloyi was on the verge of being finished. He showed, however, in this fight, that he truly is a tremendous talent with a huge heart and can still take a good shot. He impressed me a whole lot more than the new champion and I would love to see him against the likes of Barrera and who knows ...

The new IBO lightweight champion needs to examine his situation. He felt it necessary to fight the majority of this fight on the back foot against a smaller man with a punch which didn't seem to worry him too much. Okay, his corner obviously decided to take this strategy when it became evident that Baloyi was much quicker, and when the latter was counterpunching he beat him to the punch every time. Hlatswayo landed with the best he had on a man who was fighting as a lightweight for the very first time, and although he dropped him once in the second round, he couldn't enforce his authority.

Baloyi landed often and with no difficulty. Baloyi came off better on the close exchanges, which is supposed to be Hlatswayo's strong point. While Baloyi is an above average boxer who could still make an impact on the world scene, he is not a lightweight, and if he lands in the ring with the likes of a Mayweather or Ricky Hatton at junior welterweight he'll be stopped.

Hlatswayo is 28 years old. He should be peaking now and clearly isn't. Something's wrong here and it needs to be corrected if this man is to live up to the high expectations placed on him. First step is to dump the IBO title, because it's just going to hold him back, and then get to the States or Europe and receive some intensive training. His handlers have done well to take him as far as they have, but if the good big guy can't demolish the good little guy – it's time to get help before it's too late.

Fight of the night was national super middleweight title bout with Andre Thyse defeating Daniel Bruwer in a blood and guts fight which had everybody on their feet.