Written by JE Grant
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LOS ANGELES (Staples Center) – In a card dubbed “Double Trouble” that was supposed to showcase the considerable talent of Erik Morales and Manny Pacquiao leading to a major rematch, “trouble” was the operative word. An unlikely star emerged named Zahir Raheem to upset the carefully choreographed spectacle, possibly dashing one rematch, but setting up an interesting mix of new opportunities.

Zahir Raheem, 27-1 (16 KOs), Philadelphia, 133, thoroughly dominated a confused and frustrated boxing superstar Erik Morales, 48-3 (34 KOs), San Ysidro, Calif (via Mexico), 134½, capturing a twelve round decision and more importantly winning a place in the thick of boxing’s elite.

Morales entered his first lightweight fight a huge favorite, not only of the Los Angeles crowd but also of odds makers. This bout was to be a tune-up for Morales in order to launch him to the major league, mega pay-per-view event with Pacquiao.

But Raheem had other ideas. He came into the ring an underachieving former Olympian. In his single loss, against Ricardo Juarez in an IBF featherweight eliminator, he was clearly swept. Known as a skilled campaigner, he was expected to prove a tough competitor but one that would be overwhelmed by the power hitter Morales.

Each round was a showcase for the variety of skills Raheem possessed in great abundance. Throwing sharp left hooks at an out-positioned Morales, Raheem never allowed Morales to set to launch his vaunted power combinations.

When Morales did get off right hands, he was repeatedly met with Raheem counters from every imaginable angle. Although Raheem did not exhibit a great deal of power, he was able to force an off-balance Morales to the ropes on many occasions.

At no time did Morales gather enough steam to control any part of the fight. In rounds eleven and twelve, Raheem seemed content to coast with the belief that he was far ahead in the scoring. Indeed only in round eleven did it appear that Morales landed enough to take a round from the retreating Raheem.

In the final round, Raheem began with more movement but still managed to land the crisper punches as Morales wilted in befuddlement.

Scoring of the bout was 118-110, 116-112, and 115-113 all for Raheem. *The Sweet Science* scored the bout 119-109.

Raheem took home the WBC lightweight “international” title. Of course the meaningless trinket pales in comparison to the greater fortunes and titles that await.

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Manny Pacquiao, 40-3-2 (32 KOs), Philippines, 130, scored a dominating knockout at the end of the sixth round over a willing but limited Hector Velazquez, 42-11-2 (31 KOs), Mexico, 130.

Pacquiao, immensely popular in his homeland, is a dedicated battler always ready for trench warfare and this fight was no exception.

Velazquez came into tonight's bout with a well-documented record of durability and some kick in his punches and indeed in the opening round he was able catch the charging Pac Man as he warmed to the task.

After dropping the first round to a busy and willing Velazquez, Pacquiao turned into a buzz saw throughout the rest of the fight. His blazing hands and superior footwork enabled Pacquiao to pull away as the bout progressed.

In the sixth round, Velazquez showed fatigue and confusion as Pacquiao revved his engines. With about forty seconds left in the round, Pacquiao landed a solid right hook from his southpaw stance. Velazquez wilted and Pacquiao poured it on.

Pacquiao closed the show with a barrage of sharp combinations and Velazquez crumpled to the canvas the last second of the round. He took a count of nine and was clearly unable to continue. The bout was called at 2:59 of the sixth.

Going into the sixth round *The Sweet Science* scored the bout 49-46 Pacquiao.

With the win, Pacquiao gained the nominal, vacant WBC super featherweight "international" title.

The bouts were televised as part of HBO's World Championship Boxing series. Announcer at ringside was Jim Lampley, with color commentary provided by Larry Merchant and Emmanuel Steward.