MASHANTUCKET, Conn. – The Sweet Science scorecard had the fight even after 12 rounds, which might on balance have been a fairer verdict. After all, Acelino Freitas and Zahir Raheem were supposed to be fighting for a world title in the Bingo Hall at Foxwoods, and the truth of the matter is that neither of them deserved to be a champion off Saturday night's work.

Freitas got the nod on a split decision, and with it the WBO lightweight title, but neither performer exactly covered himself with glory.

Freitas spent most of the night whining to referee Steve Smoger (although God knows he had plenty to whine about), while Raheem turned into a 135-pound John Ruiz, attempting to envelop the Brazilian in a bear hug every time he landed a punch, and sometimes when he didn't.

And for a fight devoid of knockdowns, these two guys certainly spent a lot of time on the canvas. Raheem, perhaps in tribute to what was also the NFL's draft day, took Freitas down in both the second and third rounds with deftly-executed open field tackles – and this after he had risked a fine from Paul Tagliabue for the helmet-to-helmet hit he delivered in the opening round. (Following that clash of heads, Freitas started pawing at his forehead and complaining to Smoger.)

The referee cautioned Raheem after the second takedown. The warning didn't make him stop grabbing Freitas, but it did encourage him to stop tackling him for awhile. Then, in the sixth round, Raheem landed a crisp left to Freitas' jaw and became so excited that he grabbed Popo's head between his gloves and flung him to the canvas.

Immediately realizing that he had gone way over the top, Raheem then tried to take a knee himself while Freitas was still on the floor. He was, he later admitted, trying to stave off a disqualification, and when Freitas arose, Raheem reached out with his glove in a gesture of conciliation.

Raheem had also gone down in the fourth, after he and Freitas had tangled feet, and Smoger immediately waved off the knockdown.

Although Raheem was chastened by the referee, he was never punished – at least not by Smoger. Freitas eventually figured out that if the only way he was going to get near his opponent was when he was being held, he might as well make the most of it, and took to banging away at Raheem's midsection in the clinches until the referee arrived to pry them apart.

Smoger may have been the busiest man in the ring on this night, but at least one reputation probably suffered more damage than either Freitas' or Raheem's: Eric Morales'.

Raheem is nominally a slick and crafty boxer, and utilized those skills to handily defeat Morales in their fight last September, and that an opponent who could look so good in that fight could

look so ungainly in this one doesn't say much for Morales. Of course, against Morales he fought in a style best suited to his gifts, whereas his awkward tactics at Foxwoods often played right into Freitas' hands.

Compubox punch stats revealed that Freitas threw 517 punches, but he missed with 399 of them. Raheem had a marginally higher (31 to 23%) connect ratio, but he was out-jabbed (59-47) by the Brazilian.

It was unquestionably a difficult fight to score, so it's difficult to fault any of the judges. Clark Sammartino had Raheem ahead 115-113, but was overruled by Steve Weisfeld and Glenn Feldman, who favored Freitas by respective margins of 115-113 and 116-112. (We had it 114-all.)

"When I heard that first judge's score (Sammartino's) it was crazy," said Freitas. "I didn't know what fight he was looking at."

"I took some good shots, but I got some good ones in, too," said Raheem. "I felt like I hurt him a couple of times."

Despite the closeness of the bout, Raheem wasn't critical of the decision, though he did suggest that it might have been affected by overwhelmingly pro-Freitas crowd.

"This place seems to be overpopulated with Brazlians," said Raheem, just before Freitas, having completed his round of television interviews, made his way to the ring apron and led several of his countrymen in a lively song.

Freitas-Raheem marked the debut of HBO's new 'Boxing After Dark' broadcast team of Fran Charles, Max Kellerman, and Lennox Lewis. Although he traveled to Foxwoods as a spectator, Harold Lederman was on the bench for this one, and was thus spared having to submit a scorecard which would have pissed somebody off, whichever way he'd gone.

Freitas, whose lone career loss came when he was stopped by Diego Corrales at Foxwoods in 2004, improved to 38-1. Raheem, whose only defeat was to Rocky Juarez the same year, is now 27-2.

Andre Ward and Andy Kolle brought near-identical records (8-0 and 9-0, respectively) to their meeting in the co-feature of Art Pellulo's card, but any similarity ended there. Ward, the 2004 Olympic gold medalist, was vastly superiority in speed, and used it to keep Kolle on the defensive for virtually the entire six rounds the scheduled 8-rounder lasted.

Kolle spent so much time trying to get away from Ward's nonstop barrage that he wasn't able to mount any semblance of an attack.

"It was a tough night," said Kolle's manager-trainer Chuck Horton.

"He was just quick," said Kolle. "He's got fast hands and I couldn't get off."

Kolle's one chance to get into the fight got away in the first round when referee Johnny Callas disallowed an apparent knockdown. Ward was in the process of tripping over his own two feet when Kolle landed a couple of admittedly ineffectual punches. Ward got hit and Ward went down and it should have been ruled a knockdown.

Given the one-sided nature of everything that happened subsequently, it might seem nitpicking to dispute the ruling, but it did represent a three-point swing, and whatever momentum Kolle might have picked up at that point was lost forever.

The only other time a fighter hit the deck came in what proved to be the final round, when Ward landed a left-right combination and promptly fell over backward.

Ward, who otherwise dominated from start to finish, said he had viewed tape of Kolle and wasn't surprised that he was able to consistently beat him to the draw.

"He had decent speed, but I knew mine was better," said Ward. "He's a tough cookie. Physically it wasn't a problem, but I knew I'd have to be mentally prepared for him."

Ward had outlanded Kolle 153-59, including a whopping 50-8 advantage in jabs when the ringside physician rescued the Minnesotan by indicating to Callas that he had had enough. (Kolle was unable to close his eye, and the doctor feared a fractured orbit bone.)

Kolle remonstrated, violently shaking his head in disagreement with the stoppage, but he could hardly disagree with the outcome.

No sooner had the bout was halted, Ward walked across the ring and draped his gloves around Kolle's neck and hugged his vanquished foe.

The opening act of the evening saw welterweight Vincent Arroyo of Amherst, NY remain undefeated at 5-0 with a unanimous decision over John Lipscomb (2-2-1) of Cleveland, with all three judges scoring it a 40-36 shutout for the winner.

Brazilian junior welter Carmelito DeJesus (4-0), one of two Freitas countrymen fighting on the Foxwoods undercard, was awarded a TKO when his American opponent, Darrell Crenshaw (1-5-1), quit on his stool after being pummeled for two rounds.

The third Brazilian on the card, welterweight Luciano Silva (7-1), also prevailed, posting a unanimous decision over Deon Nash (5-2) of Kutcher, La. Silva, who bled from a cut to his left eye for the final two rounds, led 58-56 on the cards of all three ringside judges, Feldman, Sammartino, and Steve Epstein.

Outweighed by more than 50 pounds, Zack Page did his best to make a fight of it before succumbing to unbeaten Tennessean Alonzo Butler in their heavyweight bout. Page, when he was able to stay on his feet, managed to catch Butler by surprise several times, but was floored in the second (a big right hand) and early in the fifth (a flash knockdown from a left hook) even before Butler landed the left-right combination that ended the bout. Page hit the deck with

seconds left in the round, and was still on all fours when referee Joe LoPino waved it off. Butler improved to 20-0-2, with Page dropping to 10-7.

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BOXING AFTER DARK
FOXWOODS RESORT CASINO
MASHANTUCKET, CONN.
APRIL 29, 2006

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Acelino Freitas, 135, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil dec. Zahir Raheem, 135, Phiiadelphia (12) (Wins WBO title)

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Alonzo Butler, 255, Chatanooga, Tenn. TKO'd Zack Page, 202, Warren, Ohio (5)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Andre Ward, 160, Oakland, Calif. TKO'd Andy Kolle, 159, Fergus Falls, Minn. (6)

WELTERWEIGHTS: Vincent Arroyo, 144, Amherst, NY dec. John Lipscomb, 143, Cleveland, Ohio (4)

Luciano Silva, 141, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil dec. Deon Nash, 139, Kutcher, La. (6)

JUNIOR WELTERS: Carmelito DeJesus, 140, Salvador de Bahia, Brazil TKO'd Darrell Crenshaw, 139, Philadelphia (2)