

## **“The Contender” Goes Latin**

Written by David Berlin  
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Leading up to Thursday’s “Latin Warriors” edition of “The Contender,” Alfonso Gomez looked forward to his fight with Jesse Feliciano as “a chance to get out there in the ‘real’ boxing world.” The bright, flashing lights, the supersized posters of the fighters, and the presence of Sugar Ray Leonard at the Aladdin Theatre on the Las Vegas Strip all shouted “TV,” but inside the small boxing ring there was no escaping reality. Actual reality, not reality TV.

Headlining the card was “The Contender” himself, Sergio Mora. In a ten-round middleweight attraction, the Latin Snake put his unblemished record on the line against Archak “Shark Attack” TerMeliksetian. In an easier-than-expected fight, Mora showcased his skills, switching from orthodox to southpaw and displaying a full arsenal of punches en route to a 7th round knockout. His Armenian opponent, despite his twelve knockouts in 15 wins (against only three losses prior to this fight), did not live up to his nickname. He did not attack and, except for a fleeting moment in the 2nd round, did not use his power. Although Mora was not seriously tested, he showed versatility and promise in accomplishing his night’s work.

The fight started slowly, with all posing and no punching for the first two minutes of the bout. As the crowd became restless, Mora responded by landing straight right hands to Archak’s head and taking the first round. In the second, Mora was shocked early by a short left hook to the chin which deposited him on the canvas. It was a clean knockdown, but Mora immediately jumped to his feet and dominated the rest of the round. He landed jabs, right hands and hooks at will, convincing two of the three judges to score the round 10-9, instead of the traditional 10-8 that usually accompanies a trip to the canvas.

The third round was more of the same as Mora remained the busier fighter. Mora started the fourth against the ropes, but even in terrain that should have belonged to Archak, the Latin Snake outworked his opponent. Mora landed a hard right hand after the bell, and although the Armenian shook his head defiantly as a message that Mora could not hurt him, it is not enough in boxing to take punishment well. Unfortunately, that is all that TerMeliksetian did in this fight. Mora took some time off to start the fifth, but ended the round with a barrage of head shots that forced Archak into the corner. Mora worked upstairs and down to take the sixth round, and continued that pattern in the seventh. Clean shots to the head had Archak’s head bouncing, but just as Archak was returning fire, referee Robert Byrd waved off the fight at 2:44 of the round.

The stoppage was premature, as it came at a rare moment when Archak was throwing punches. But there was no questioning who deserved the victory. Except for the second round, Mora won every round on every card. The Latin Snake still hasn’t learned how to lose, and at 18-0 (4 KOs) he is working his way toward becoming an actual contender and not just the made-by-TV kind.

Alfonso Gomez tasted a harsher reality last night. In the eight-round co-feature, Gomez battled Jesse Feliciano for the third time in their short careers. Gomez had won their first encounter, a four-rounder, by split decision. Feliciano avenged that loss with a close but unanimous

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six-round decision. Nothing was resolved in this punishing rubber match as the two warriors fought to a draw.

Feliciano knows one way of fighting, and that is by moving forward and moving his hands. He is a one-dimensional fighter, but that one dimension makes for exciting, action-packed fights. Gomez predicted before the fight that “it’s gonna be a war in there,” and unfortunately for him, he was right. Gomez did best when he avoided the war and used his boxing skills. When Gomez used his legs and his movement, when he established his range, when he found some distance from which to unleash powerful hooks and uppercuts, he succeeded in damaging his opponent and winning rounds. But too often Gomez gave up his advantages and fell into Feliciano’s fight. He allowed Feliciano to close the distance and to stay on his chest, forcing the toe-to-toe battle that gave Feliciano his best chance.

The fight was a difficult one to score, but an easy one to watch. From round one to round eight the action was nonstop, and as if the fighters could not get enough of handing out and taking punishment, the end of each round saw the pace accelerate. One judge had Gomez a winner by a score of 77-75, but the other two called it even at 76-76. Gomez’s record now stands at 14-3-2 (5 KOs) and Feliciano’s at 14-5-3 (8 KOs).

The draw had many calling for a fourth fight, but Teddy Atlas said that the first order of business was getting these fighters checked out medically and giving them a proper rest. This is the “real” boxing world, after all, and Alfonso Gomez and Jesse Feliciano don’t have any TV stuntmen taking their punishment for them. They may be disappointed with the draw, but both men proved themselves to be real Latin warriors.

### OFF TV RESULTS

Ramiro Rivera (3-1, 2 KOs) TKO 3 over Tyson Schweiger (1-2-1)

Jonathan Reid (34-4, 19 KOs) UD6 over Ryan Davis (19-6-2, 8 KOs)

Miguel Espino (11-2-1, 4 KOs) UD6 over Gabriel Hoguein (19-5, 6 KOs)