

The Lion King still has a roar

Written by Deon Potgieter
Monday, 12 June 2006 19:00

Mpush "The Lion King" Makambi showed that he's not yet ready to sleep and still has loads of fight left in him with a sensational knockout win over Sandile Ngweze, 8-4 (7KO), in defense of his national middleweight title on Friday night at the Orient Theatre in East London. Makambi, 30-9-3 (19KO), took the fight on short notice and battled to make the weight limit in order to defend his title.

Makambi has been trying to land a fight against national light heavyweight champion Soon Botes and has been bulking up to do so. He was given 24 days notice, with the threat of being stripped of his title if he was unable to defend it. At the time he was 12 kilograms over the limit. Midweek the champion was still 3 kilograms over the limit but managed to bring it down in time to defend his crown.

The challenger's strategy from the start was to smother the champion and pile on the pressure throughout. Makambi landed a few solid shots, but found it difficult to find space to move. In the second round Ngweze kept moving forward showing little respect for the former IBO world champion and paid the price as Makambi staggered him with a right and then dropped him with a left at the bell.

At the start of the 3rd round Makambi was hoping to follow up and pick up where he left off. He got clipped by a short left going in however and the champion was the one trying to slow the pace down and survive the round. The challenger, his nose bleeding freely, kept pressing forward and kept the champion against the ropes. Both men looked as though they were fragile every time the other landed. Makambi complained after the fight that he was feeling drained from having to drop so much weight in such a short time.

The champion came back stronger in the fourth and landed a few crisp combinations on the challenger's jaw, but Ngweze wasn't about to back down and kept moving forward and throwing punches. A bit more experience or diversity in attack by the challenger, as well as better defense could well have seen him do a little better. Full credit to Makambi (39) however, who kept his composure against an all or nothing attack by a fit challenger 9 years his junior. Looking at Makambi's physique though, he puts a lot of younger fighters to shame. Even though he battled to make the weight he has a muscular and well conditioned body and certainly doesn't look like an old fighter.

Makambi had moments at the start of the fifth round where it looked as though he was rejuvenated and ready to turn up the heat, but as soon as he started throwing combinations, the challenger came forward and smothered his attacks by pressing him back into the ropes and keeping exchanges short. The champion, a skillful boxer was definitely being frustrated at not being allowed to get into a rhythm. He generally likes to ease himself into a fight, find a rhythm and wear his opponents out. Ngweze was not about to give him his way and must certainly be commended at forcing the more experienced champion into fighting his fight.

The Lion King still has a roar

Written by Deon Potgieter
Monday, 12 June 2006 19:00

Makambi was looking a little weary as the challenger continued pressing forward and keeping him from letting loose with his blows. As the round progressed however the champion started landing with left and right hooks. The effect was that the challenger started stepping a little further back between his own attacks and that's what the champion was waiting for. When the gap was big enough he let loose with well placed lefts and rights and the challenger was staggered. He kept coming forward and received another solid blow to the jaw. As the champion was about to follow up and go for the kill the bell rang giving the challenger a much needed breather.

At the start of the seventh it was the champion coming forward, but the brave challenger, whose nose bled the entire fight, quickly forced him back against the ropes. A big straight left staggered the challenger and before he could compose himself another big left landed in his bloodied mouth. The challenger stepped back clearly in trouble and the writing was on the wall. Seeing his man staggered Makambi rushed forward and banged a solid right home, followed by another four swinging lefts and rights to the challenger's jaw.

Ngweze, out on his feet staggered back into the corner and Makambi, kept swinging. The referee was a bit slow in stepping in and the champion landed another three blows on his hapless opponent. As the referee got between the fighters waiving it off the towel from the challenger's corner landed on their fighter's shoulder.

A dramatic and devastating finish to an exciting fight, which had fans on their feet... The only negative is that Ngweze was made to endure many big shots throughout the fight and while this fighter showed some good potential as a definite prospect in the division, the amount of punishment he endured in his failed bid to become a champion may come with a price for his future. Only time will tell.

Makambi, who is one of those guys who always had the abilities to do great things but never got the big opportunities, still has a future in the ring and showed some fine form in this fight. There has long been talk of Makambi being matched with former 3 time world champion Dingaan Thobela at super middleweight, but promoters have not been able to make it happen thus far. With Canadian Dave Hilton Jr. being paroled on June 20th, there has been some local interest in staging a Hilton-Thobela rematch. The split decision loss of Thobela's WBC super-middleweight title to Hilton in Canada as well as the fact that Hilton never had the mandatory urine test following the fight has always weighed heavily on SA fight-fans and a grudge return would certainly carry a lot of interest.