

Taylor/Wright Wasn't A Great Fight

Written by Michael Woods
Sunday, 18 June 2006 19:00

Am I missing something here?

Am I out here on an island of ignorance, stranded with only my stupidity, and lying eyes, for companionship?

Me, I didn't think Taylor/Wright was all that.

The adjectives tossed about by my colleagues, words and phrases like "magnificent," "action-packed from the opening bell until the 12th round ended," "thrilling from start to finish," don't ring true for me.

Excuse my French here, my tender-eared readers, but bullsh**.

The fight was good, not great. Much of the 12-rounds worth of battle featured compelling action. This was a strategic skirmish, but not an all-out war, an ebb and flow of epic proportions, which is what one might surmise by reading some accounts by the Taylor/Wright Keyboard Admiration Society.

There a couple reasons why superlatives shouldn't be handed out like stupid pills in the Department of Homeland Security. For one, Winky Wright playing the sore loser and stalking back to his dressing room for a pout festival after the draw was announced...

This man is 34-years-old, and has racked up sick frequent flyer miles plying his trade at ports far and wide. He knows, or should know by now, that if you don't own the belt and you're fighting virtually in the other guy's hometown, you have to go above and beyond. Plainly, and simply, he didn't.

Did he throw more and land more? Indeed he did. But were the tosses delivered with the rude intent that judges love? Nope.

Were too many of the punches that gave him the edge in the output department jabs? Damn straight. If I want jabs, I'll go see Al Franken and Ann Coulter debate each other. Jabs are all well and good, there's a time and a place for them. Jabs are the hors d'oeuvre, the setup up for the main course. They are not a meal unto themselves.

Wright's explanation for his desultory twelfth was moronic at best. He thought he was ahead, so he went into slacker mode? Excuse me, again, what sport have you been engaging in for 16 years? This is boxing, where the rules meant to insure fairness are fluid and quite malleable. So too are judges' faculties. Judges are not to be trusted. The only wise way to insure a win is by rendering the other man unconscious. This is elemental wisdom, really kindergarten stuff. For a 16-year vet, or his trainer, to have to be clued in to that certainty...C'mon, guys.

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Now, on to the other guy.

You didn't think I'd reserve my polite scorn for Ronald, did you?

Au contraire.

What in God's name was Jermain Taylor doing in the final two rounds, the supposed "championship rounds" that we hold in reverent awe?

Why was he on autopilot when he most needed to have his foot, hell both feet, pressing on the gas pedal?

Why was Taylor, the 27-year-old athlete of yeoman caliber, the newly Kronk-christened pugilist who'd only now begun to tap into a hidden reservoir of skills, not going for broke in the last two rounds?

By the way, there were one or two other rounds where Taylor gave Wright the edge with his lack of output, but the last two rounds in a pick 'em fight? Unfathomable.

OK, I hear one of your Taylor Fan Clubbers' counter arguments. Taylor's eye was closed. Fair enough. But a Hall of Fame talent, or even a fighter just giving a Hall of Famer's effort down the home stretch, would bear down, and with the one good eye homing in, do what he had to do to take those last two rounds.

Like Larry Merchant said, tomorrow he can see with both eyes. At that moment, he was working with one.

On Saturday night, I leaned in and shut out the world as the eleventh round commenced. And as the seconds ticked by, and neither fighter acted with anything resembling urgency, I was mystified.

OK, I said to myself when the eleventh ended. Surely, Birmingham and Steward will not stand for this and will get out the verbal flamethrower in between rounds.

So I leaned in again at the start of the twelfth. And it was the same sad song and silly dance. Where was the urgency? Where was the Herculean outpouring of effort? Why was neither fighter marshalling their remaining drops of stamina, signaling to the judges holding their fate and the viewers expecting an exclamatory close?

I was dumbfounded. My Fight Buddy Dave and I both shook our heads in bewilderment. WTF, we both said. Inexplicable behavior down the stretch, and thus, when the result was announced, it seemed reasonably just. Neither fighter demanded of himself a level of expenditure of effort that justified winning the last two rounds, the championship rounds.

Neither left it all in the ring.

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Neither fighter expended every available molecule of energy, and showed as much by collapsing into his corner when the final bell tolled.

Neither demanded to win. So neither fighter did.

Understand here, that it appears my standards in forming this critique may come off as exceedingly high. That's correct. I expected a "magnificent" effort, an "action-packed" and "thrilling" outing from two of the very best practitioners this sport has to offer circa 2006. What I saw in the last two rounds was quite pedestrian, and I don't pretend that I was not disappointed. I can only suspect, but I'm guessing that the fighters and trainers involved in the fight may look back on the last two rounds especially as we look towards the inevitable rematch, and wish they could redo the last two. I'll bet they would aim for an eleventh and twelfth round a bit more "magnificent," "action-packed," and "thrilling."