

Felix Sturm Feels Pressure to Impress

Written by Joey Knish
Thursday, 13 July 2006 19:00

Felix Sturm boasts an impressive 25-1-0 record as a professional, has only lost in controversial fashion to Oscar De La Hoya, and is the WBC Middleweight champion.

Still, the 27-year-old feels mounting pressure to impress.

Without the natural knockout power to blow opponents away, Sturm battles internally with the desire to produce exciting fights for the fans yet continue producing victories. His best chance at success will always be to box and move smoothly using his speed and combinations to pile up points victories. A fighter has to recognize the tools that he has and then make the most of them; power punching isn't one of those attributes in the case of Sturm.

In his most recent victory in March over Maselino Masoe, Sturm had picked his power punching opponent apart for much of the night and decided to put things on "cruise control" to close out the night. It was a smart move in terms of winning the fight, which was all the Hamburg resident was concerned with, but it didn't go over well with the hometown fans.

Boos were heard inside Color Line Arena, despite Sturm outclassing New Zealand's Masoe on his way to a 117-111, 117-111, 115-113 unanimous decision victory. Masoe came into the bout boasting an alarming 25 knockouts in his 26 victories against just three losses. He was fresh off a two round destruction of the undefeated Evans Ashira, knocking him down three times in less than four minutes of action. Ashira went twelve rounds with Super Middleweight king Joe Calzaghe late last year, making Masoe's destruction of the tough Kenyan even more impressive.

Masoe deserved the respect Sturm showed him as the champion pecked and moved for the last few rounds of the bout to retain his title. Smart? Yes. Entertaining? According to those in attendance, perhaps not.

Now comes a fight with Javier Castillejo, a world-class fighter with 60 wins in 66 fights spanning an 18-year professional fight career. The Spaniard was on the wrong side of decision losses to Oscar De la Hoya and Fernando Vargas, those being the two Castillejo fights most fans stateside would be familiar with. A durable fighter with the will to march on, Castillejo was dropped by De La Hoya late and by Vargas early, but fought on to hear the judges verdict each time. Both of those fights were contested at junior middleweight where "El Lince de Parla" (literally translated as "The Sharp Sighted One from Parla," Parla being the Spanish city where he was born) has fought for the majority of his career.

While Castillejo looks to be a perfect opponent for Sturm, it doesn't look to be any more appealing than the Masoe fight for the fans. Durable as Castillejo is, and with Sturm stopping just 11 opponents in his 25 victories, this looks to be another lopsided decision victory for the home favorite managed by Klaus-Peter Kohl. At least Masoe brought the threat of explosive power – Castillejo certainly does not.

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In his prime I think Castillejo could have given Sturm some trouble, but at 38 years of age with 66 pro fights behind him, I see Javier's best days having gone by. Sturm is a slick boxer with fast hands who puts his combinations together very well behind an educated jab. I expect him to work the jab early, peppering his plodding opponent, and become more aggressive as the fight goes deep by utilizing his stinging right hand and well-placed hooks.

A knockout victory over Castillejo would be very impressive and Sturm may push to turn that trick in attempt to erase the memory of those who booed the closing rounds last time he fought in Color Line Arena. It isn't likely though and a wide points victory on the cards seems an almost certainty as the main event comes to its conclusion.

The best middleweights at the moment include Jermain Taylor, Winky Wright, Arthur Abraham and Felix Sturm. Wright has proven that slick stylists can grab the spotlight and the money that comes with it, although it took him until he was 32 years old to do it. Sturm still has time on his side as he enters his prime fighting years, but the crowd-pleasing style that comes with natural power such as that possessed by Abraham and Taylor isn't an option for Sturm.

Like countryman and retired undefeated super middleweight champion Sven "Phantom" Ottke (34-0-0, 6 KO) before him, Sturm hopes the German fans will see the beauty in his craft... He simply isn't a beast.