

Baldomir Destroys Gatti in A.C.

Written by George Kimball
Saturday, 22 July 2006 19:00

ATLANTIC CITY – Arturo Gatti’s ring gallantry will be recalled as long as man celebrates boxing, but on what could have been his last trip to center stage, the proud warrior wasn’t particularly proud, nor did he look much like a warrior.

“I don’t know (about retirement), but after this performance it’s certainly something I’ll have to consider,” said Gatti after being battered by Carlos Baldomir in Saturday night’s WBC welterweight title fight at Boardwalk Hall.

Historically it has been unwise to allow Gatti to turn a boxing match into a back-alley brawl, but in the case of the 35-year-old Argentinean champion it was like throwing Brier Rabbit into the briar patch. Baldomir is a natural 147-pounder (Gatti is not), and from the outset he was more than willing to trade punches, confident that he would get the better of the exchanges.

Although Gatti himself declined to use it as an excuse, he was virtually a one-handed fighter for the last four rounds. Moments into the sixth, he tried to block a Baldomir body shot with his right glove, and took the shot off the wrist.

Arturo winced and clearly shook the hand, but said later that he didn’t think it was broken. (He ought to know; he’s broken it enough times before.)

“I don’t know what happened,” said Gatti after the fight. “It just locked on me.”

Although it may have hastened the inevitable, Baldomir had the fight well in hand even before the injury. From the first round on, the champion was able to reach Gatti with right-hand leads, with the result that Baldomir essentially disdained the jab.

As always, Gatti was willing, and probably threw more leather in Baldomir’s direction in the first round alone than had Zab Judah in twelve back in January when Baldomir won his title, but Gatti was unable to exact much damage even when he did connect, and spent much of the evening in uncharacteristic retreat.

Although Baldomir was warned twice for punches that strayed below the beltline, he was never seriously imperiled. By the third he had opened a cut below Gatti’s right eye that bled throughout the balance of this methodical destruction.

By the fifth, the overwhelmingly pro-Gatti crowd had lapsed into an eerie silence. Given the direction the bout had taken, it was plain that Gatti was going to need a miracle to pull this one out, on this night Arturo didn’t have one in him.

Gatti periodically switched to a southpaw stance, but not necessarily as a concession to the injury, since he was dabbling in the tactic even before he hurt his hand. If it was meant to confuse, it appeared that it probably confused Gatti as much as it did Baldomir, and Arturo

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quickly switched back each time he tried it.

Over the last few rounds, Gatti even took to deliberately sitting on the second strand of the ring ropes. He claimed later that he was “trying to use my experience,” but it appeared to be more a case of availing himself of the referee’s inexperience, since Wayne Hedgepeth allowed the illegal tactic to go on unimpeded.

Gatti was actually down twice in the eighth, though Hedgepeth ruled both to have been slips. The first one clearly was, but the second appeared to have been aided by a fusillade of punches unleashed by Baldomir. The referee presumably declined to call a knockdown only because he couldn’t tell which punch had put Gatti down.

It was clear, in any case, that this wasn’t going to go on much longer, and it didn’t. In the ninth Baldomir pinned Gatti to the ropes, where he nailed him with a right uppercut and then unloaded a left hook that sent Gatti face-first to the canvas.

Arturo got up from that one, but when he tried to escape, he ran out of room. Baldomir isn’t a knockout puncher, but he’s a much better finisher than previously suspected, and once he trapped his quarry on the ropes after the first knockdown, he waded in to unload another uppercut, a right hand, and then crashed a left off Gatti’s jaw that sent him down for good.

Whether Gatti could have made the count is a moot point, because there wasn’t one. Hedgepeth unhesitatingly waved it off the instant he hit the floor.

“I tried to box him,” said a rueful Gatti before leaving the ring. “But he’s very strong, and he was getting stronger as the fight went on – and he had my style down.”

Baldomir, a 2-1 betting underdog going in, didn’t seem surprised by the ease of his victory.

“The punches Gatti threw didn’t hurt me at all,” said the champion through an interpreter. “He had his left hand down (low) so I knew I could hit him with the right.”

Pre-fight concern that the all-New Jersey slate of officials might come into play was apparently misplaced. Over the first eight rounds, Gatti had won just one, two, and three rounds on the judges’ slates. (The Sweet Science had it 78-74, Baldomir going into the ninth.)

If you were an Arturo Gatti fan, this wasn’t the way you wanted to see him go out: CompuBox punch stats revealed that Baldomir outlanded Gatti by a 267-161 margin, and while the two each connected on 51 percent of their power shots, Baldomir landed 110 more of them than Gatti did.

The posses were still milling around in the ring when Baldomir was summoned, and led, still shirtless and in his trunks, to a position on press row, where he donned a headset and was interviewed on Argentinean television.

(In the absence of an interpreter, we only caught one word of the interview: “Mayweather.”)

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It had been the 20th HBO appearance for the crowd-pleasing Gatti, and just before he took his leave of the ring, possibly for the last time, he huddled in an embrace with manager Pat Lynch. We couldn't hear that whispered conversation, either, so we can only hope Lynch was saying what we hope he said: "It's been a great run, Arturo. Now go enjoy the rest of your life."

That Gatti had attracted a sellout crowd of 12,763 (an Atlantic City record for non-heavyweight fights) to Boardwalk Hall only meant that there were more people on hand to boo Malik Scott than ever before. Scott has never lost as a pro, nor did he lose a round on a single scorecard in his fight against Marcus McGee Saturday night, but it's hard to imagine a more tedious 25-0 heavyweight.

Although the Philadelphian handled McGee (15-11) with ease, the audience vented its displeasure throughout, applauding only derisively at the announcement of the 'eighth and final round.'

Irish middleweight James Moore extended his perfect pro slate to 8-0 with a unanimous decision over previously unbeaten Jorge Gonzalez (4-1) of Chicago. Judges Lynn Carter, Shafeeq Rashada, and Paul Venti all scored it a shutout for Moore at 60-54.

Giovanni Lorenzo, the Dominican-born New York middleweight, registered his 21st win in as many pro fights with a sixth-round TKO over Canadian Bryon Mackie (27-13). Lorenzo had punished Mackie throughout, and referee Alan Huggins halted the bout at 51 seconds of the sixth when the Canadian's corner ran up the white flag.

Polish middleweight Mariusz Cendrowski eked out a majority decision over Nebraska journeyman Patrick Thompson (10-7-1) to remain unbeaten at 15-0. Carter and Venti each scored it 77-75 for Cendrowski, while Rashada had the bout even at 76-all.

A pair of New Jersey welterweights remained unbeaten in earlier undercard action: Henry Crawford (11-0-1) of Paterson scored another lopsided shutout (60-54, three times) over Mexican Roberto Valenzuela (17-25-2), while Newark's Alex Perez (6-0) stopped his Denver opponent David Hernandez (3-4-2) at 2:45 of the fourth.

AT BOARDWALK HALL
ATLANTIC CITY
JULY 22, 2006

WELTERWEIGHTS: Carlos Baldomir, 147, Santa Fe, Argentina TKO'd Arturo Gatti, 147, Montreal, Que. (9) (Retains WBC title)

Alex Perez, 148, Newark, NJ TKO'd David Hernandez, 145, Denver, Colo. (3)

Henry Crawford, 148, Paterson, NJ dec. Roberto Valenzuela, 148, Agua Preita, Mexico (6)

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Malik Scott, 255, Philadelphia dec. Marcus McGee, 229, Tuscaloosa, Ala. (8)

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MIDDLEWEIGHTS: James Moore, 155, Arklow, Ireland dec. Jorge Gonzalez, 156, Chicago (6)

Maritusz Cendrowski, 156, Wroclaw, Poland dec. Patrick Thompson, 156, Lincoln, Neb. (8)

Giovanni Lorenzo, 160, Santo Domingo, D.R. TKO'd Byron Mackie, 158, Toronto, Ont. (6)