

## Mashaba shines in second defense

Written by Deon Potgieter  
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Thomas Mashaba continued to bring some credibility to the IBO with a scintillating battle in defense of his featherweight world title on Friday night in Carltonville in the North West Province of South Africa. He faced a determined Juan Gerardo Cabrera, the current South American featherweight champion. Although only a year older than the champion, Cabrera had loads more experience going into this fight with a record of 50-12 -1 (35 KO's) in a career spanning 12 years. In 1997 he was stopped in two by Naseem Hamed in an IBF/WBO title challenge. He claimed the WBC International title in 2002 and lost a 12 round points decision to Michael Brodie in 2003 for the selfsame IBO featherweight crown. A year later he also went 12 rounds against Cassius Baloyi in a failed bid to claim the IBO junior lightweight title. He's scored four wins and a draw in his last five fights and certainly came to fight when receiving the call up to face Mashaba.

In contrast, Mashaba's record going into this bout was 17-2-4 (10 KO's) spanning 8 years. He won his last 7 fights on a trot, claiming the South African super bantamweight title in 2003 with a sixth round TKO over Jeffrey Mathebula, the current WBC international champion. He won the IBO super bantamweight world title a year later with an 8th round TKO over Zolani Morali and outpointed Vuyani Bungu the following year to win the IBO featherweight crown. In March of this year he put up an impressive performance to outpoint the highly rated veteran Yober Ortega in his first defense and is fast developing a reputation of somebody to watch. Mashaba, who works as a security guard at a mine in the region, was well supported by his home crowd, who broke out in song throughout the exciting fight.

There was little to choose from in the first round as both boxers got straight to business throwing good hooks and jabs with intent. Mashaba edged it slightly by getting a few more clean shots through. The ferocity increased in second round as Cabrera went after his man with a mission of claiming the crown. Mashaba planted solid left jabs to his face and followed up with powerful right hooks to his head and body. Mashaba landed his right hook almost at will in this round and Cabrera flinched every time the punch landed. Surprisingly the champion refrained from repeating this assault in future rounds even though the challenger appeared to have a weakness in his defense in this regard. Cabrera suffered a cut above the right eye.

Neither boxer let up in the third and both landed solid blows to the other in a fight which was growing in excitement as it progressed. Mashaba looked the stronger of the two, but Cabrera kept up the pace and delivered some well placed hooks to the jaw of the champion. By the end of the round Cabrera was cut around both his eyes. The three thousand strong crowd was singing and chanting in the fourth round as the men maintained the fast pace they had set in the previous nine minutes. With some swelling appearing around the champion's eyes this fight was fast becoming a pressure cooker. This was no longer a boxing match; it was a fight of increasing ferocity and the question was who would stand the heat the longest.

Like two raging bulls fighting for the right to lead the herd Mashaba and Cabrera continued to meet each other head-on, throwing hooks to each other's heads and bodies throughout. Both

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were taking the pressure and giving as good as they got. Both continued to press forward and they remained at close quarters throughout. At this stage the fight still looked as though it could still go either way, with both men strong in the mix of things.

In the sixth round, the champion changed strategy and started fighting from the outside with Cabrera moving forward. Mashaba tried to keep his man at bay with left jabs, but the challenger kept moving forward and took the round from a champion that seemed to be taking a breather in this one. Realizing that he could not continue on the same line Mashaba started coming back midway in the seventh round with solid jabs and right hooks. Cabrera was relentless however and stayed in the champion's face throughout. Both men continued to attack both the body and head to good effect.

In the eighth round the men reverted to the pressure cooker situation. Although Cabrera kept soldiering forward, Mashaba landed a few more cleaner blows and delivered them with more authority than the game challenger. The next round Mashaba worked the body more with solid left and right combinations as opposed to single shots. Whenever Mashaba threw an uppercut it worked its way straight through Cabrera's defense, but again the champion seldom used this punch.

In the eleventh round a left jab looked to momentarily stagger the champion. He did not look hurt however but did take note. At the tail end of the round Mashaba brought the right hook back into play and pounded his man relentlessly up until the bell. The challenger looked shaken going back to his corner, but came out full steam in the last round. Mashaba remained in control and while the challenger never gave up it was the finer finesses in boxing style which carried the champion to victory. The judges scored the bout 11 -112, 115 -113, 117-115 all in favor of Mashaba.

With two succesful defenses of his IBO crown under his belt Mashaba will now be setting his sites on the WBA title. He certainly has potential and a good arsenal of punches, although I'd put a question mark next to ring strategy as well as defense. Mashaba is no run of the mill fighter however and it certainly is refreshing having him on the scene.

In other news newly crowned IBF junior lightweight world champion Cassius Baloyi will make the first defense of his title on July 29 against Australian Gairy St. Clair at Emperors Palace in Kempton Park and Gabula "The Tiger" Vabaza will face Steve Molitor of Canada for the vacant IBF Super bantamweight world title on September 1 at the Nasrec indoor arena in Johannesburg.