

## Oleg Maskaev Triumphs Over Hasim Rahman

Written by David A. Avila  
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LAS VEGAS – America, be glad the Cold War is over.

Oleg Maskaev knocked out Hasim Rahman in the final round at the Thomas and Mack Center to grab the WBC heavyweight title and become the fourth boxer from the former Soviet Union to hold a heavyweight world title.

Somewhere Nikita Kruschev is smiling.

Maskaev repeated his feat of seven years ago by stopping Rahman when faced with the prospect of losing by a decision.

“I knew I had to win all three last rounds,” said Maskaev (33-5, 26 KOs). “He had a good jab.”

The former Russian soldier, who is now an American citizen living in Staten Island, appeared physically drained by the seventh round. But he rallied with a surge of energy that stunned the 8,842 in attendance and most especially Rahman.

“I never thought he would taking the world title from me in Las Vegas,” said Rahman (41-6-2, 33 KOs). “I’m very disappointed.”

According to the scorecards, two of three judges had Rahman ahead by the end of the 11th round. Rahman landed 250 total punches to Maskaev’s 184. But he couldn’t hang on.

Maskaev joins three other former Soviet fighters with world titles including WBO titleholder Sergei Liakhovich, WBA titleholder Nicolay Valuev, and IBF titleholder Wladimir Klitschko.

Where is Joe Louis when you need him?

“Maybe we’re spoiled,” said Rahman when asked what is happening to American fighters.

Maskaev found his opening in the 12th round when Rahman dropped his right hand guard. A swift left hook wobbled Rahman and a couple of more punches sent him down in the corner.

“I got caught with a shot,” Rahman said. “I put my hands down and he caught me.”

Though Rahman rose before the count of 10, his legs wobbled and it was apparent the end could come soon. Once the fight resumed, Maskaev dropped him again with a fusillade of punches. Referee Jay Nady let the fight resume, but Maskaev stunned Rahman immediately and the referee stopped the fight at 2:17 of the 12th round. Maskaev became the fourth former Soviet fighter to have a world heavyweight title.

“I am proud where I come from but I am Russian-American,” Maskaev said. “European fighters

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are tough...I am going back to Staten Island.”

### **Other bouts**

Humberto Soto nailed his claim as the number one contender in the WBC junior lightweight division with a right uppercut that had opponent Ivan Valles (24-8-1, 20 KOs) sprawled on his back in the fourth round.

“I knew he could punch, but I knew he had a weak chin,” said Soto (40-5-2, 24 KOs), who is poised to fight the winner between Marco Antonio Barrera and Rocky Juarez for the WBC title.

The contest featured two hardened veterans from Los Mochis, Mexico, an area famous for his hard-drinking and hard-fighting boxers. Few expected the boxing match to end with both standing up.

“He hit me hard in the first round,” Soto said. “But I trained very hard for this fight and I knew I was going to win.”

In a lightweight match for the NABF title, challenger David Diaz (32-1-1, 17 KOs) proved in emphatic fashion that a boxing match is never over until the last punch is thrown, Chicago’s Diaz overcame nine rounds of battering from Jose Armando Santa Cruz (23-2, 13 KOs) and knocked out his taller California opponent.

Santa Cruz had captured six rounds in a row according to the judges, but a single left uppercut undid all of the Californian’s work and down he went like a surprised child. Diaz jumped on Santa Cruz immediately and down he went once more. Though he survived the second knockdown, a final flurry of punches proved too much as referee Richard Steele ended the bout with a wave.

Armenian-American Vanes Martirosyan blasted away at Georgia’s Marcus Brooks (6-2) and may have broken his right hand for his eagerness in a junior middleweight bout.

“I hurt it in the first or second round,” said Martirosyan (10-0, 6 KOs) who won by unanimous decision. “I was trying to please all of my fans and it was my first time on national television.”

It was the former US Olympian’s toughest fight to date.

Heavyweight Travis Kauffman (6-0, 4 KOs) needed only 1:48 to find the chink in James McCloskey’s (2-3-2) guard and win by knockout. A right hand found its mark.

In a battle between New Yorkers, John Vargas took a unanimous decision over Aneudi Santos in a fight that was closer than it appeared on one scorecard. Two judges scored it 77-75 for Vargas, but a third saw it 79-73 that seemed a stretch. It was an ebb and flow fight with Vargas left hook giving him a lead, and Santos adjusting with lead rights.

Miguel Garcia, the younger brother of former IBF junior lightweight world titleholder Robert Garcia, battled another fighter with boxing pedigree in Chad Ganigan. Garcia fired a short right

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hand that ended the fight in the first round. It was Garcia's pro debut and Ganigan's second loss with no wins.