WBC junior featherweight world champion Israel Vazquez’s smashing come-from-behind victory left boxing fans with a euphoric feeling despite the letdown of the more publicized main event.

Fans walking around the MGM Grand couldn’t talk enough about Vazquez withstanding two vicious knockdowns from Jhonny Gonzalez, a tall skinny knockout artist from Mexico City. It was the cherry on top of the cake for boxing fans.

The afternoon of the fight, thousands of people arrived in the casino eagerly anticipating the loaded fight card that featured three world title bouts. The more publicized match featured Marco Antonio Barrera in a rematch against Rocky Juarez. That bout didn’t meet expectations.

Another bout saw Argentina’s Jorge Barrios lose his WBO junior lightweight world title to Joan Guzman. It was an exciting match that saw the speedy Dominican become the first fighter from his country to win world titles in two separate divisions.

But without a doubt, the collision between Mexico City’s two reigning warriors Vazquez and Gonzalez met its explosive expectations.

Gonzalez, who’s no stranger to Southern California with appearances in Temecula, San Jacinto and Hollywood, had risen to enormous heights since he first fought in California back in 2001 as a skinny teen anxious to make good in the U.S. Slowly he emerged from dingy boxing clubs in Mexico to more prestigious venues.

Finally, in 2004, he was matched against Chino’s Roger “Speedy” Gonzalez at the Grand Olympic Auditorium. Though he wasn’t expected to win, he blew out Speedy Gonzalez with a blistering two-fisted attack and never looked back. He signed with Golden Boy Promotions and worked his way up the bantamweight rankings.

Last year, in Tucson, Gonzalez traded blasts with Thailand’s Ratanachai Sor Vorapin in a battle of attrition that saw the younger Mexican ultimately win by seventh round knockout. The WBO bantamweight world title was finally his and Mexico City boxing fans adopted him as a favorite son.

Vazquez noticed, but the quiet-spoken Mexico City native, who moved to Southern California more than five years ago, never expressed disappointment.

“They favor him,” Vazquez said succinctly.

Though Vazquez was named Fighter of the Year in 2005 by several publications, in Mexico City he was forgotten.

During the ring announcements on Saturday, Gonzalez received the louder cheers. Vazquez

raised his right glove to his fans but the decibel level for his cheers weren’t at the same level as his opponent’s.

The two Mexico City combatants entered the first round with the same deliberate and tactical precision. Few blows were exchanged but the few that were fired crackled with intensity not seen in the other fights that night. But fans booed. They wanted reckless abandon not tactical brilliance. Meanwhile Gonzalez and Vazquez probed each other’s fighting style looking for loopholes.

In the fourth round a wide swinging left hook caught Vazquez high on the temple and down he went. He looked more upset than dazed from the blow and tried to rally but was unable to penetrate Gonzalez’s long-armed defense.

Once again a wide left hook knocked down Vazquez in the sixth round, but this time the WBC junior featherweight world champion looked dazed and worried. He was behind on all three judges’ scorecards even at the end of the fight. The crowd sensed the beginning of the end for the fighter known as “El Magnifico.”

As many anticipated a knockout win for Gonzalez, the smaller Vazquez suddenly entered the seventh round with a reckless abandon for defense and during a furious exchange he connected with a booming right hand that dropped Gonzalez on the seat of his boxing trunks.

From there on Vazquez controlled the distance and pace with laser-like precision. In the 10th round a series of left hand blows snapped Gonzalez’s head back and he crumbled to the canvas. As the referee counted, Gonzalez’s trainer yelled out to halt the fight. Now, Vazquez is once again the hero of Mexico City and to boxing fans everywhere.

“The plan was to go to the body and break him down. It didn’t go that way,” said Freddie Roach, Vazquez’s trainer. “Israel started real slow and sluggish. In the end he came on strong and took over.”

Boxing experts concurred that Vazquez’s come-from behind victory was special.

“That could be the Fight of the Year,” said Doug Fisher of Maxboxing.com.

Others agreed.

Frank Espinoza, who manages Vazquez and Martin Castillo, said the team is searching for the suitable opponent after the big win.

“He wants to explore the 126-pound division,” said Espinoza. “He deserves to fight for the big money.”

A number of options are available for Vazquez including a meeting with IBF bantamweight titleholder Rafael Marquez, or moving up and meeting fighters such as WBA titleholder Chris John, IBF titleholder Robert Guerrero, WBC titleholder Rudy Lopez of Mexico or WBO interim

champ Juan Manuel Marquez.

“Right now he’s really at his peak,” Espinoza said.

Fights on television

Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Raul Marquez (37-3) vs. Elco Garcia (18-5).

Fri. Telemundo, 11:30 p.m., Carlos Tamara (12-0) vs. Gerardo Verde (14-3).

Sat. HBO, 10 p.m., Jorge Arce (44-3-1) vs. Masibulele Makepula (28-3); replay of Marco Antonio Barrera (63-4) vs. Rocky Juarez (25-3).