

ShoBox In Phoenix: Is Lopez The Next Great Puerto Rican?

Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 19 January 2007 19:00

They toss around names like Gomez, Benitez and Trinidad when they size up 23-year-old Puerto Rican junior featherweight prospect Juan Manuel Lopez, who took on Mexican Cuauhtemoc Vargas, age 22, in a scheduled tenner on a disappointing ShoBox broadcast presented from the Dodge Theater in Phoenix, Arizona.

Not so fast, folks.

Lopez (15-0, 12 KOs) and Vargas (15-2-1, 10 KOs) worked out for six rounds, and Lopez looked perfectly acceptable, if not especially enticing. Vargas, though, quit on stool after the sixth, electing to bag out after meting out a middling level of effort to that point, so it remains to be seen if Lopez could've kicked into a higher gear down the stretch, and showed a fire in the second half of the fight that wasn't in evidence in the first.

In the opening stanza, Lopez, the highly regarded southpaw, showed he meant business with his left. Vargas pressed forward, as Lopez moved smartly and looked for angles. He opened up the throttle a tad in the last minute of the round, but was mostly content to build up a sweat, as he scouted his foe.

In the second, Lopez got busier from the get go, as Vargas continued to plod forward, with a scant output. Vargas began to back up, as he ate some stiff shots, but scored with a counter left that reminded Lopez that he wasn't booked in an absolute gimme.

The third round kicked off with Lopez emerging with a busy jab, as his effective movement and angles search continued to pay dividends. Vargas still showed no clear strategy for victory, as he showed a willingness to move forward, but refused to let loose his hands often enough to show the crowd or the judges that he was in it to win it.

Vargas perked up for a spell in the fourth round, after getting an earful in his corner. But Lopez quickly re-took control, and as before, maintained a distance most beneficial to him. To his credit, Vargas did show an ability to pick off shots with his gloves, but that wasn't going to demand respect from the judges.

The fifth round saw the lefty prospect get tagged with a Vargas left hook but that blow didn't command a great deal of respect.

In the sixth round, it was more of the same. Lopez served up swings and Vargas ate 'em.

The bell rang to complete the sixth round and both fighters, who each weighed in at 123 pounds, walked to their respective corners. Vargas sat down on his stool and told his trainer that he didn't want to go on. "I'm giving up, I'm not coming out," he said. The local commission may have a case if they elect to subtract a portion of his purse, if it's determined that he had no obvious injury that caused him to quit early.

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In the opener, 19-year-old lefty Victor Ortiz, a National Junior Olympic champion residing in California, met Marvin Cordova of Colorado in a scheduled eight round welterweight scrap. Stupidly, both fighters came out wearing white trunks with red piping, red gloves and identical buzz cuts.

Ortiz showed from the start that he likes to throw with bad intentions, but Cordova, taking a large step up in class, didn't look overmatched. Ortiz found a home with uppercuts in the last third of the round, and would have gone to his corner totally upbeat save for a cut that opened up on his crown at the end of the first. The gash was of the gaping variety and the ringside doctor halted the proceedings after the first ended. Cordova was tossing a left, missed, and followed thru. His elbow caught Ortiz' head, and a slice ensued.

Ortiz 16-1-1 (11 KOs) and Cordova 12-0-0 (8 KOs) were dealt a technical draw.

To fill some time, Nick Charles and analyst Steve Farhood teased the Feb. 3 Showtime card that pits WBC light heavy champ Tomasz Adamek against Chad Dawson. Adamek, Farhood said, could have a tough time with the young gun Dawson. The Julio Diaz/Jesus Chavez beef for the IBF lightweight strap will kick off that evening.