

Rampage Stuns Liddell, MGM Crowd With KO

Written by David A. Avila
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LAS VEGAS-Lightning struck a second time in the form of human lightning bolt Quinton "Rampage" Jackson who floored Ultimate Fighting Champion Chuck "The Iceman" Liddell and pummeled him for a knockout victory on Saturday at the MGM Grand.

"It felt good, hell," said Jackson (27-6), who beat Liddell for the second time.

In a night of upsets, Jackson pulled off the biggest stunner with a first round knockout over UFC's longest reigning champion Liddell before a sold out crowd numbering more than 14, 500 rabid fans. That's two victories over the Iceman for Jackson.

Jackson had defeated Liddell during a middleweight tournament in Japan in 2003. That was considered a major upset because few knew about the brawling and powerful fighter who goes by the name of Rampage.

But in Las Vegas, though Jackson already owned a victory over the knockout punching Liddell, the Memphis born African-American MMA star was still the underdog.

Liddell entered the arena the clear fan favorite; as his music played the fans cheered as if welcoming the king of Las Vegas and all its neon splendor. Jackson entered to boos usually reserved for villains.

During the introductions and referee instructions there were no friendly exchanges, just grimaces and stares. And when the fight began it was clear that Liddell respected Jackson's power as he circled around his foe. He definitely did not want a repeat of his first loss that occurred in Tokyo.

Midway through the round Jackson motioned to Liddell to do something and the taller fighter obliged with a right uppercut that came close to landing. Jackson responded with a left-right combination that did not pierce Liddell's guard.

They circled again. As Jackson closed the distance Liddell fired a combination and attempted to move away but was caught by a counter right hand on the jaw that snapped his head to the side. Down he went with Jackson quickly aware that he had hurt his opponent. Right after right hand landed on Liddell as he lay on the floor almost unconscious but attempting to guard himself, to no avail. Referee John McCarthy pushed Jackson away at 1:53 of the first round for a knockout stoppage.

"What can I say? I made a mistake. I got caught," said Liddell who had defeated two other fighters (Randy Couture and Jeremey Horn) who held wins over him, but not Jackson.

Most of the arena roared in shock as Jackson ran around the octagon ecstatic in victory. Meanwhile Liddell shakily protested the stoppage and seemed to ask his corner if he was

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unable to defend himself. They nodded their heads.

“I trained hard,” said Jackson, who smiled despite the overwhelming boos by the crowd who were clearly there to see Liddell win. “Fans can boo me...I’ll be here for a while.”

Jackson, who was fighting in only his second fight for UFC since leaving Pride FC of Japan, now holds the light heavyweight title and looks to be facing Pride FC middleweight and welterweight champion Dan Henderson of Temecula, California.

“We’re friends but we can make some paper (money) fighting friends,” Jackson said.

Other bouts

Welterweight elite fighters Karo “The Heat” Parisyan and Salt Lakes City’s Josh Burkman (19-4) put on a clinic on MMA fighting in the semi-main event. But it was the North Hollywood fighter Parisyan’s quickness that allowed him to beat Burkman to the punch and avoid a ground war with the Utah fighter.

“I’ve been working on my stand up (punching) for a while,” said Parisyan (25-4) who was given a unanimous decision 30-27 twice and 29-28.

A continuous stiff left jab by Parisyan kept Burkman from charging in. When Burkman managed to grab a hold of his opponent the Armenian fighter slipped out or manipulated judo throws to get out of trouble.

“I won a dominant win over Matt Serra and now he’s the champion,” said Parisyan, who lost a title shot opportunity against then champion Matt Hughes because of injury. “I want a title shot.”

In a middleweight bout Terry Martin (19-2) continues to dominate the lighter weight class and proved comfortable in beating Seattle’s Ivan Salaverry (12-5-1) with a first round technical knockout at 2:04. Martin picked up Salaverry and dropped him on his head. It was all over from there as Martin jumped on the unconscious Salaverry and forced referee Marcos Rosales to stop the fight.

“When the DJ plays my music I have to dance to it baby,” said Martin who beat his second consecutive middleweight after dropping down from the heavyweight division. “My grandfather said I wouldn’t be beat at the middleweight division.”

Nebraska’s Houston Alexander (7-1) uppercut his way to victory over heavy 5-1 favorite Keith “The Dean of Mean” Jardine (12-4) in a light heavyweight bout.

It was supposed to be a tune up fight for New Mexico’s Jardine who was poised to fight for the UFC light heavyweight title. But a right hand over Jardine’s left hand punch stunned the New Mexico fighter who hung on tightly to no avail. Right uppercut after right uppercut snapped Jardine’s head back as he took heavy punishment. A final right uppercut sent Jardine’s red mouthpiece flying out of his mouth as he slumped unconscious to the floor at 48 seconds of the

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first round.

“That’s real punching power out there,” said Alexander who was making his first appearance on a UFC card. “This man is a great fighter, one of the best in UFC.”

Canada’s Kalib Starnes (20-1) upset 3-1 favorite Chris Leben (16-4) of Seattle with counters and more aggressive punching in a middleweight bout. A right hand hurt Leben in the second round but he rallied to win the round. But in the third and final round Starnes turned things around on the ground to win on all three judges cards 29-28 twice and 30-27.

“Nothing but respect for Chris (Leben). I would have given him the nod,” said the humble Starnes who fights out of Canada.

Brazil’s Thiago Silva (10-0) seemed to be evenly matched against Huntington Beach’s James Irvin (12-4). At the opening bell Irvin fired a volley of punches that seemed to overwhelm the Californian. But the Brazilian pinned Irvin against the cage then picked him up and dropped him to the floor. During the drop Irvin damaged his left knee and tapped out at 1:06 of the first round.

Din Thomas (23-7) of Delaware proved experience is gold when he forced Jeremy Stephens, 21, to surrender from an arm bar at 2:44 of the second round of a lightweight contest. From the start Thomas forced Iowa’s Stephens (13-2) to fight on the ground. After the referee stopped the fight Stephens protested that he did not submit.

“They said he didn’t tap out but I was going to take his arm home with me,” Thomas said.

Last-minute replacement Alan Belcher (10-3) of Mississippi had the last say with a win by submission over Ohio’s Sean Salmon (9-3) in 53 seconds of a light heavyweight bout. Salmon attempted to take Belcher down but was open for a guillotine chokehold and tapped out.

“Everybody thinks I’m just a striker but I’ve got submissions too,” said Belcher.