

Pugilistic Pride Of P.R. Cotto Downs Zab

Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 08 June 2007 19:00

He is the current pugilistic pride of Puerto Rico, and Miguel Cotto lived up to, and built on his reputation with an eleventh round TKO victory over Brooklyn's Zab Judah on Saturday evening at Madison Square Garden.

There were low blows, and blood flowed, and there were knockdowns, and headbutts, and nobody in the arena or at home who paid to see the scrap could be anything but satisfied. The official time when referee Arthur Mercante Jr. stepped in between the fighters to save the Brownsville, Brooklyn was 49 seconds of the second to last scheduled round.

The possibility of a rematch between Cotto and Judah, who earned loads of respect for resisting any temptation to answer Cotto's low blows with his own illegal response, is strong. Judah will be able to make a case for a re-do, if he truly wants another dance with the bullish Cotto, by arguing that low blows diminished his energy reserves.

When emcee Michael Buffer boomed "...from Brooklyn New York" only a faint response answered him, and it was quite clear that Brooklyn was not in da house, a house record 20,600.

But Judah will emerge from this vicious tussle with his reputation, if not his facial features, vastly improved.

In the first, the southpaw Judah sized up the Puerto Rican, who immediately kicked into an offensive mode. Judah landed a counter left uppercut that scored cleanly, however, and the crowd perked up, sensing that the 2-to-1 fave Cotto would be an early KO victim.

Cotto then landed a low blow that put Judah, writhing dramatically, to the canvas. Mercante offered a stern warning to Cotto. There was no payback, thankfully, and order was maintained.

In the second, Judah slipped adroitly, as Cotto looked to work the body, a more sure bet. Cotto's tendency to lean over, offering his head on a platter, looked to be more dangerous now, with Judah's uppercut fresh in mind. Judah landed a straight left counter that drew ewwws and ahhhs.

The third round saw Judah take a low blow again, and hit the deck. Again, it was clearly a south of the border hit, and Mercante took a point from Cotto. Judah lay on the floor and rolled around after the right landed square on his round ones, playing the foul for all it was worth. He commenced action within a minute, and again, restrained himself from immediately fouling the original transgressor. Some blood dribbled from Cotto's mouth at the end of the round. The slice looked to be on his lip, or through, his lip.

On to the fourth round. A cut opened over Judah's right eye, as the two clashed noggins, and the 29-year-old Brooklyn native looked to be losing some verve. Cotto turned lefty at the end of

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an effective round, and the crowd picked it up.

In the fifth frame, Cotto, the grinder, bore forward, and put together combos. He looked supremely confident, on top of his game, and the crowd wondered if Judah would waver in the heat of the constant assault.

Cotto and Judah knocked heads to start the sixth, and a gash opened over Cotto's right eye. Cotto pawed at the drippy hole. The crimson woke up Judah a bit, and the round was evenly matched.

Cotto began the round with a sharp jab, an underrated weapon in his arsenal. He doesn't have the longest arms so it isn't a flashy, lengthy offering, but it bothered Judah time and again. But Judah had a flare up of effectiveness with a minute to go, landing a left upper, and then a right hook that jolted Cotto.

The eighth round was a catch-our-breath special for the first two thirds but the warriors stepped it up in the last measure. Judah took a pounding late and pounded his heart, barking at Cotto, proclaiming that he'd be there til the last bell. Judah's energy looked to slip a degree.

In the ninth, the cut over Judah's right eye bothered him. Zab took a knee and an eight count, looking like he wanted to call it a night. You couldn't blame him. Zab landed a right in the waning seconds and he announced that he wasn't going to go just yet.

Judah used his legs more in the tenth, smartly, and Cotto lessened his output, catching a breather. But he dialed it up in the last 30 seconds, landing lefts that Judah didn't see, with his swollen eye.

Cotto knocked down Judah to start the eleventh round with a short right and a left follow. Cotto looked to close the show, and leapt on the Brooklyner. But referee Mercante didn't let him risk further punishment, and slid in between the two. Judah, at that moment, was almost running to escape the hard rain of blows. No one, however, would accuse him of being one whose resolve shrank when the going gets tough, not anymore.